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ABSTRACT

Administrators are looking at decentralization as a solution to issues troubling schools, teachers, and students. The notion of decentralization is accompanied by two assumptions. First, decentralization will produce an improvement in education because classroom decision making will be more responsive to the specific needs of a school. Second, in order for any improvement to occur, fundamental changes in the educational structure are imperative. Decentralization is occurring throughout the United States in response to five primary pressures: (1) demands from powerful constituencies (parents, community groups, legislators, etc.) for more input into and control over the school process and tougher accountability measure; (2) strong agreement among these constituencies that the current educational structure is not working; (3) the inability of massive bureaucracies to respond effectively to the needs of local schools and communities; (4) rapidly changing nature of work and the workplace and the perception that schools are not keeping pace with the demands of society; (5) and growing competition for public school dollars. dollars. Schools that are attempting to decentralization generally do so in one of three ways: (1) site-based management; (2) downsizing central administration; and (3) curriculum innovation. Numerous results can be expected from decentralization, for example, increased parent involvement. Before attempting the decentralization process, school districts should address seven areas of interest, such as what decision-making parameters will be. Representatives from 13 large urban districts were interviewed and asked to outline the structural changes in their districts. The representatives each identified support programs, obstacles they encountered, and recommendations for those attempting to make structural changes. (KDP)

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Special
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Report

Decentralization: Why, How, and Toward What Ends?

Introduction

By Lynn J. Stinnette, *Director of Urban Education, NCREL*

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Decentralization has become one of the cornerstones of the urban education reform movement. During the 1980s, following the first wave of reports on the crisis in American education, as many as 60 percent of the nation's school districts with 50,000 or more students decentralized (Ornstein, 1989). Faced with pressures as never before—low achievement, pervasive teacher and student disengagement from teaching and learning, inefficient bureaucracies, collapsing facilities, declining parent involvement, and fiscal cutbacks—many large urban school system superintendents and school boards turned to the business management practices of decentralization of authority and participatory decision-making for solutions.

Decentralization rests upon two major assumptions. The first is that by moving decision-making and accountability closer to the child and classroom, education will improve (Smith & Purkey, 1985). Shifting decision-making responsibility to local schools means redistributing power among various groups—principals, teachers, and parents—who have a legitimate stake in the content and quality of education. Proponents of decentralization believe that reallocation of power and authority to these key stakeholders will make schooling more responsive to the unique needs of local communities and will capitalize on the knowledge, creativity, and energy of people at the school and community level (Murphy, 1990).

The second major assumption underlying decentralization is that the most persistent problems in education can be attributed to the structure of schooling. The deeply ingrained ways of organizing and delivering educational services, often bolstered by long-standing statutes and regulations, must change fundamentally if schooling is to improve. Reformers who see the structure of schools at the root of education's problems have proposed essential revisions in the ways in which school systems are governed and structured, the roles adults play in schools, the content of the educational programs, and the processes used to educate children.

> *"The highest impediment to progress is the nature of the system itself." Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986*

Yet, operating against the national trend toward decentralization is a tendency to recentralize. In 1988, a survey of large districts revealed that the percentage of urban districts that were decentralized had dropped from 60 to 31 percent (Ornstein, 1989). Is decentralization a waning fad? Has the road to decentralization proved to be so rocky that districts are abandoning it as a viable strategy for systemic improvement? Can we learn any lessons from districts that have successfully decentralized? This special issue of *Policy Briefs* will examine these questions and describe the practice and progress of decentralization in 13 urban districts in the north central region of the United States.

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Why Districts Are Decentralizing

Decentralization has occurred across the nation in response to five primary pressures:

- Demands from powerful constituencies—in particular parents, community groups, legislators, business, and, in some instances, teachers' unions—for (a) more input into and control over the schooling process and (b) tougher accountability measures
- Strong agreement among these constituencies that the current educational structure is not working well for increasing numbers of students
- The inability of massive bureaucracies—with their characteristic centralized policies, common work rules, and top-down decision-making structures—to respond effectively to the widely varying needs of local schools and communities
- The rapidly changing nature of work and the workplace, and the concomitant perception that schools are not keeping pace with the current demands of society
- Growing competition for public school dollars and students from the advocates for school choice, vouchers, and privatization

These pressures create a climate of crisis that demands substantive changes in the ways schools structure the learning environment, deliver educational services, govern themselves, and are held accountable.

How Districts Are Decentralizing

The extent to which urban districts decentralize and the kinds of functions that they decentralize vary considerably. The following trends in decentralization have emerged in recent years:

- Many decentralizing districts adopt **site-based management** (SBM) as the major vehicle for redistributing decision-making and accountability.
- As a corollary, central offices are **downsized** and flattened and attempts are made to transform central administration from a distant command post into an accountable service center.
- Some districts adopt **curriculum innovation** as the major thrust of their decentralization effort. Local schools are encouraged to customize their educational programs (e.g., mathematics-science focus, new approaches to reading, Afrocentric schools, Comer schools, et al.), making them more responsive to identified community needs.

A brief discussion of each of these trends follows.

Site-based management has been adopted by many school systems to increase school autonomy and to share decision-making with teachers and sometimes parents, students, and community members. Spurred by a growing body of research from the private sector on the benefits of participatory decision-making, school leaders believe that SBM is a promising strategy for improving the quality of educational decision-making because it engages those closest to the action (Cohen, 1989). Site-based management typically involves the formation of a school-based committee or council that, through legislative or board action, is empowered to make decisions. These decisions usually fall within three areas: budget, personnel and staffing, and curriculum/programs (Clune & White, 1988).

The scope of local empowerment varies greatly across school districts. For example, in Chicago, all schools are governed by Local School Councils (LSCs), each comprising two teachers, four parents, two community representatives, and a principal. The LSCs have broad authority over budgeting, principal selection, and curriculum and program selection. Detroit's Empowered Schools employ School Empowerment Councils/Teams. In these schools, students, parents, administrators, and staff control the use of allocated funds, exercise initiative and independence in determining and executing instructional improvements, expand student selection, define the types of support services needed, and choose the providers of those services. In Des Moines, school-based management through shared decision-making is evolving through a plan that establishes school-based councils empowered to develop a school improvement plan and make decisions about curriculum, scheduling, and staff development.

Under site-based management, teachers are asked to assume leadership roles in staff development, mentoring, and

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Nancy Fulford

Nancy Fulford, Editor
Policy Briefs

curriculum development, and become key partners in school and staff supervision and evaluation. Such programs are designed to elevate the professionalism of teachers, increase morale, add prestige and recognition, and provide ongoing opportunities for professional development. Teacher collaboration is a major theme in the implementation of site-based management.

One characteristic that sharply distinguishes one district's implementation of site-based management from that of another is the extent to which parents and community are involved as true partners in school decision-making. In Rochester, NY, school-based planning committees give teachers a dominant voice in decision-making. By contrast, in Chicago, decentralization aims to engage parents and community members, along with teachers and principals, as major decision-makers in school change. Building on school restructuring models pioneered in Dade County, FL, and Hammond, IN, school reform in Chicago is the most comprehensive version of community involvement in critical school-based decision-making.

Downsizing central administration seeks to eliminate unnecessary layers of bureaucracy, untangle chains of command, and link greater percentages of fiscal and human resources directly with children at the school-site level. In Cincinnati, the superintendent, with recommendations from the business community, has reduced the number of central administrators from 127 to 62 (Shanker, 1992). Teachers' union officials hope that some of the money saved will go to school programs designed to address discipline problems, such as in-school suspension centers. However, for a scaled-down central administration to become an accountable service center, it must redefine its roles and align its functions with the needs of local schools and communities. Too often, districts adopt the "service center" rhetoric without building the capacities and creating the structures needed to transform the central administration into a responsive team that provides timely, appropriate support to local schools and communities.

Curriculum innovation responds to the diversity and complexity of urban areas and gives local schools the flexibility to customize their educational programs to meet the unique needs of their students. The ultimate goal of curriculum innovation is to promote quality and equality for *all* students through curriculum, instruction, and assessment initiatives that are based on research and proven practice. Several examples of curriculum innovation include mathematics/science academies, Comer schools, foreign language academies, Afrocentric schools, Paideia schools, dual-language programs, and schools that emphasize home-school partnerships and integrated services.

In some districts, the emergence of curriculum innovation is linked to magnet schools as part of a districtwide desegregation and equity plan. In other districts, curriculum innovation is linked to a choice plan wherein schools are encouraged to develop a specialized focus and compete for students in an open market system. For example, in Indianapolis, the superintendent has launched the Select Schools Plan. Under this controlled choice plan, each school develops a particular focus; parents then are able to shop around the district and enroll their children in the school most suited to their needs. It is believed that the Select Schools Plan will reconnect the community and the schools and give parents a say in what programs are provided for their children. Yet another version of curriculum innovation, Charter Schools,[1] is emerging in several cities and states (e.g., Philadelphia, Minnesota, and California) as an outgrowth of school choice.

Incentives and Support

Successful decentralization—especially of large, complex districts with entrenched bureaucracies—does not occur without strong incentives and sustained support. The kinds of incentives and support that have been provided are as diverse as the settings in which decentralization is taking place. For example, in the state of Washington, the Legislature adopted a bill that allows selected schools to restructure. The legislation covers such matters as the focus for restructuring, collaboration, evaluation, and procedures for seeking waivers from state regulations. In Maine, grants were awarded to schools to support their restructuring efforts. The Indiana 2000 program, authorized by the 1991 General Assembly, allows schools to develop a proposal which shows their commitment to and vision of restructuring along with a plan to bring life to this vision. Teachers, administrators, parents, and community members create the vision. At the district level, Dade County, FL, offered pilot schools the opportunity to form school-site committees empowered to develop plans for change. In New York City, the chancellor allows schools to restructure if the principal and 75 percent of the teachers decide to do so; schools that do choose restructuring receive flexible Chapter 1 dollars. In Des Moines, extensive professional development activities for district administrators—including three-day workshops on "Tools for Leadership" and "Effective Schools"—support decentralization. Des Moines teachers also have professional development opportunities through which they can earn credit. Indianapolis' business community and the mayor are actively involved in a massive strategic planning process supporting site-based decision-making. As these examples illustrate, states and districts encourage restructuring through incentives that provide both stimuli and boundaries within which individual schools can chart a meaningful course for change.

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[1] *For a discussion of Charter Schools, see the upcoming Policy Briefs on Charter Schools available from NCREL in 1993.*

Anticipated Outcomes

Advocates for decentralization argue that it will have positive effects on the quality and outcomes of schooling. Specifically, proponents argue that decentralization will result in:

- Improved decision-making about curriculum, instructional practice, specialized programs, and resource utilization
- Strong ownership of the school's mission, greater commitment of staff, and higher morale
- Increased accountability for outcomes
- Greater engagement of parents and neighborhood citizens in the processes of schooling
- Sustained integration of the school with community resources and agencies
- Realignment of the school with the neighborhood or community
- Improved student achievement, attendance, and motivation

If decentralization recreates urban schools into autonomous, accountable units where quality education and high performance are the norm, citizens of the nation's large urban areas will be encouraged to believe more strongly in their public schools as necessary, vital institutions and, as a consequence, will be more willing to support them both financially and through active participation.

To date, however, surprisingly little empirical research is available on the effects of decentralization on school improvement, organizational change, and, most importantly, student outcomes. Thus far, investigations have focused primarily on teachers' perceptions of empowerment, professionalism, morale, and school climate. Researchers must examine the complex relationship between structural changes (e.g., decentralization of governance, budgeting, curriculum/program decisions) and (a) the quality of the educational offerings and (b) the contribution of these structural changes to improvements in student achievement. Only then will practitioners (e.g., superintendents, principals, school board members, state policymakers, et al.) get the empirically sound information necessary to guide their decisions about whether to decentralize, what functions to decentralize, and how to support decentralization so that children are better served.

Nonetheless, there are some findings from the research on decentralization that are useful to note. For example, researchers have found that SBM results in increased job satisfaction for teachers as well as stronger feelings of professionalism. Yet, studies also have documented that, if site-based management is to be successful, staff need time to develop new skills and knowledge (David, 1989). A few studies give evidence of more positive perceptions of school-community relationships as a result of decentralization, especially when parent involvement is at the core of the initiative (Crowson & Boyd, 1991). In a similar vein, several recent studies stress that parents express little satisfaction with decentralization *unless* they share a substantive role in decision-making (Malen & Ogawa, 1990; Goldring & Shapira, 1991). In contrast, other studies show no solid evidence of school organizational renewal as a result of decentralization (Malen & Ogawa, 1988; Wehlage, Smith, & Lipman, 1992).

Common Pitfalls and Useful Lessons

As school superintendents; board members; legislators; and communities of teachers, principals, and parents examine decentralization as a fundamental strategy for systemic school restructuring and improvement, the experiences of districts across the nation suggest that the following seven areas should receive consideration:

■ Decision-Making Parameters

As governance functions are decentralized, districts must establish clear decision-making parameters for local schools and central offices. Schools also must receive provisions for waivers from regulations. Otherwise, well-meaning and dedicated teachers, principals, and parents will become engaged in the task of restructuring, only to find that they have little authority to institute substantive change.

■ Real Redistribution of Authority Versus Rhetoric

Decentralization implies fundamental changes in the way decisions are made and resources allocated. In true decentralization, funds are distributed directly to local schools or, at the very least, schools exercise authority over key resources. It means little to adopt site-based management, for example, without simultaneously releasing authority over the resources (material and human) needed to actualize school-initiated improvements. Too many school districts have embraced the rhetoric of decentralization without doing the tough work of (a) redistributing authority over the budgeting process and over decisions about professional development, curriculum innovation, special programs, and other activities, and (b) building the leadership and decision-making capacities for the new roles that decentralization implies.

■ Accountability

Decentralization results in new roles and responsibilities at both the local and central level. As roles are redefined, accountability systems and evaluation procedures also must change to reflect new performance expectations. Rewards and incentives should be linked to student performance at the building level (National Governors' Association, 1989). Additionally, as individual schools become more autonomous, states and districts should establish appropriate measures to assess outcomes and link rewards and sanctions to results.

Professional Development for New Roles

Since site-based management and downsizing of central administration entail redefined roles for local and central staff, extensive professional development and time for planning must be an integral part of a successful decentralization initiative. Otherwise, teachers, principals, and central staff will experience frustration and anxiety as they take on new duties for which they have little capacity or experience. Rather than increasing morale and effort, decentralization—badly managed—can result in frustration and dissatisfaction (David, 1989).

In particular, decentralization has far-reaching implications for the leadership and management capacities of principals. In decentralized districts, schools become mini-school districts. In order to be successful, principals need to be strong instructional leaders, astute community organizers, sharp managers, skillful facilitators, and visionary shapers of positive school cultures. Few districts have instituted professional development systems to support principals in these new roles.

Appropriate Roles for Central Administration

By design, *centralization* is meant to ensure equity and uniform standards as well as coordinated delivery of educational services and programs across all schools within a district. Researchers are finding that when districts *decentralize*, individual schools become more compatible with neighborhood traditions, needs, and values (Cibulka, 1991). A related phenomenon is that decentralization increases the fragmentation and complexity of city schooling, which paradoxically expands administrative burdens, bringing pressure to recentralize (Wong, 1990). Moreover, in decentralized districts, individual schools tend to become isolated fiefdoms that compete intensely with one another for resources and recognition (Leibenstein, 1987). Building principals feel as if they are on their own, lacking traditional hierarchical protections (Crowson & Morris, 1990). Recent experiences and findings also show that as districts decentralize, local schools become increasingly autonomous, yet at the same time, fiscal and political pressures may cause superintendents to make unilateral decisions to close schools, cut budgets, and eliminate programs. This pronounced dissonance between local autonomy and centralized, crisis-driven decision-making is one of the unresolved issues surrounding the decentralization of large urban school systems.

What then is the appropriate role of the central administration in districts that are decentralizing? What is the appropriate role of central administration in assisting the grassroots levels to carry out effective school redesign *while at the same time* responding to fiscal pressures that have broad implications for locally initiated school improvements? More attention needs to be given to the *effective adaptation* of the central administration to decentralization.

Equity

Decentralization is designed to bring decision-making closer to the student and the learning environment of the classroom. However, decentralization brings with it the possibility of extreme inequalities—the possibility that local communities, including parents and educators, may not have the knowledge and resources to adequately protect the quality of education provided to their children. Just as centralization has failed as a full guarantee of the rights of all, so may decentralization prove inadequate to the same task. How do we keep local empowerment from becoming, in a worst case scenario, abandonment? How do we ask society to accept educational responsibility for all children and, at the same time, empower those closest to the child to ensure access, quality, and equity? How do we make sure that those closest to the child have the knowledge and resources to be accountable for outcomes? These are tough, unresolved equity questions of an era of decentralization.

Impact on Teaching and Learning

In some cases, decentralization has become a battle for power or an empty transfer of power from one person or group to another. Even worse, decentralization may allow norms of mediocrity to replace high standards as disgruntled teachers "take over" the school, or it may allow working conditions issues to dominate decisions about resource allocation (Daniels, 1990). Decentralization should be used as a tool for improving the *quality and equality* of schooling—a tool for redesigning the core activities of teaching and learning and a tool for restructuring the school/community environment so that children succeed. If decentralization fails to improve the quality and equality of schooling, and hence fails to significantly increase the educational attainment of urban children, then it will become just another fad—a fad that broke with promise onto the educational scene but did not produce accountable schools in which children of all backgrounds are provided (a) the opportunities to acquire the knowledge and skills needed for full participation in contemporary society, and (b) the protective, supportive learning environment needed to ensure success.

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Lynn J. Stinnette is the Director of Urban Education for NCREL. She has been an urban elementary school principal and has provided technical assistance to urban school districts in the process of restructuring.

Regional Urban Profiles

Editor's Note: For this issue of Policy Briefs, *representatives from the 13 largest urban districts in the NCREL region were interviewed about changes in their district's governance structure and the extent to which the districts are decentralized and implementing site-based management. The rationale, process, obstacles, and recommendations for policies that would support these efforts were queried and comments were written into the somewhat informal text that follows. Those interviewed are members of the NCREL Urban Education Network (UEN) or their designated peers. Because of the widely publicized nature of school reform in Chicago, we also have chosen to include some background information on the Chicago School Reform Act from a publication by G. Alfred Hess.*

We hope that you will find the comments that follow both informative and interesting, if, at times, controversial. We applaud the UEN members for their contributions to this discussion on urban school decentralization.

Chicago, IL

Interview with Robert Sampieri[2]

In 1988, the Illinois State Legislature passed the Chicago School Reform Act (P.A. 85-1418), which radically changed the governance structure of all 601 Chicago Public Schools by creating Local School Councils (LSCs). The LSCs consist of two teachers, six parents, two community representatives, a principal, and, in high schools, a student who may not vote on personnel matters. LSC members are popularly elected to two-year terms and have the authority to select and evaluate the principal, approve a three-year school improvement plan, and develop and approve the school budget. Foundations and community organizations in Chicago have been instrumental in providing training, services, and monetary support to Local School Councils.

The creation of the LSCs has not been without its difficulties, however. "A large percentage of faculty were trained and introduced to education when centralized authority was standard. Many educators in the system have difficulty sharing power with parents and community representatives, some of whom have little training in educational administration. Historically, teachers have had little supervision. Now, Local School Council members have begun to ask questions about curriculum and instruction methods. This is uncomfortable for many teachers."

Each LSC selects a representative (usually the president) to serve on a sub-district school council. The council representative must be a parent or community member. The goals of the 11 sub-district school councils are to:

- Promote and coordinate communication among LSCs
- Disseminate research on effective educational techniques
- Coordinate training of LSCs
- Provide a forum for voluntary dispute resolution among LSCs
- Recommend candidates for and evaluate the performance of the district superintendent (Hess, 1990)

The School Reform Act also created 11 sub-district service centers. These centers are administered by sub-district superintendents who are responsible for facilitating and monitoring the operational effectiveness of local schools. The centers also assist schools in obtaining needed goods and services, including equipment, supplies, personnel, transportation, special programming, and staff development.

Support Programs

The Central Service Center, which is in the process of reorganization, facilitates, monitors, and supports the operation of schools and is responsible for ensuring districtwide compliance with local, state, and federal regulations governing such areas as special education, desegregation, and building codes.

In addition, the district has offered and revised a number of services to schools in the transition to site-based management, including a range of professional development services on lump-sum budgeting, school improvement planning, group decision-making, consensus building, and effective instructional practice. Schools use lump-sum budgeting procedures to build and approve the budget at the school site. The district loads budgets from school sites to a central computer in order to develop districtwide budgets.

Other centralized services that are available to schools include the Personnel Automated Position Control System, which was installed to ensure that the costs for personnel hired by schools do not exceed budget allocations, and CPSnet, an online computer networking system that allows school-to-school communication and school-to-central- and district-office communication. Project INFORM has automated school library files so that local school libraries can access all volumes in the city's system. Each school can purchase this service from the district. Currently, 18 schools are availing themselves of this service.

Finally, lifetime principal tenure has been abolished. Principals now receive four-year performance contracts, similar to those of school superintendents. The special principal's exam also has been abolished; principals need only hold state certification. Moreover, principals have increased authority to select and supervise staff. The Reform Act also established a Professional Personnel Advisory Committee in each school. These committees consist of five to ten certified teachers who advise the principal on curriculum and instructional issues and set school policy.

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[2] *At the time of this interview, Robert Sampieri was Chief Operating Officer of the Chicago Public Schools.*

Obstacles

Funding "During the 1950s and 60s, categorical funds were prevalent and earmarked for specific purposes. The rigidity in funding rules and regulations runs counter to developing a comprehensive delivery system. Funding restrictions make it difficult to coordinate and leverage funds for multiple purposes. For example, we used to think pull-out programs were appropriate, and now there is a shift toward mainstreaming. Funding regulations have not kept up with changes in educational philosophy and programming."

Collective Bargaining "Restrictions governing the transfer of personnel, job responsibilities, and negotiated personnel formulas have been obstacles to reform negotiations and reform implementation. The collective bargaining agreements are designed to protect teachers systemwide, which may not provide the best arrangement for individual schools with specific needs for their individual school improvement plan."

Recommendations

Waivers "The current cycle of legislative change takes anywhere from 2 to 3 years. A 60–90 day waiver process should be set up, that keeps the process out of the political arena. For example, the state has a computerized listing of children who qualify for Medicaid that is protected by confidentiality. The Chicago Public Schools has the highest number of students on Medicaid in the state. Due to confidentiality restrictions, the Chicago Public Schools must ask 410,000 parents if they are on Medicaid, which consumes a great deal of resources—in personnel time especially. A waiver from the state for this information would be a tremendous savings."

Rationale and History of Chicago School Reform

The primary theoretical basis of the Chicago School Reform Act lies in the research from the "effective schools" literature, which traces its roots to Ron Edmonds' (1979) characteristics of effective schools. Chief among these characteristics is the school faculty's conviction that all students can learn. Another important characteristic is the principal's leadership and ability to establish a philosophical consensus about the school's educational program. Effective schools also administer frequent student assessments and provide educational programs designed to meet student needs.

The Chicago School Reform Act was designed to foster the development of these characteristics in every city school. Reformers believed that principals would be empowered to exercise the leadership necessary to improve student outcomes if bureaucratic sanctions were removed and the locus of accountability transferred to parents and community. If principals could shape the composition of their faculty over time and had the flexibility to allocate resources for school improvement planning, reformers felt they could raise expectation levels and achievement for students.

Theories of participatory management in the business community also supported development of the Reform Act. In business, the movement toward decentralization and site-based management is rooted in the belief that employees are more productive when they participate in decisions that affect them. In public education, that theory is embedded in the notion of school-based management or decision-making.

The impetus for school reform in Chicago began with the fiscal crisis in 1979-1980, when the system failed to meet its payroll and required a financial bailout. As a result, many of its financial decisions are now subject to the review and approval of an oversight board, the Chicago School Finance Authority.

In 1985, Designs for Change and Chicago Panel research reports fueled an effort to adopt statewide school reform in response to *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission, 1983). Both reports indicated a desperate state of public education in Chicago. They showed that fewer than three in five ninth graders would graduate from high school and that only one of those students would read at the national average.

Early school reform legislation—built on proposals from a legislative commission, the governor's office, the Illinois State Board of Education, a citizen-business alliance, and the Chicago Teachers' Union—contained programmatic initiatives in only three arenas: early childhood education, dropout alternatives, and enhanced elementary reading programs. An amendment established Local School Improvement Councils at each Chicago school with the power to disapprove discretionary spending at the school and conduct hearings on yearly budgets. If the local council objected to the budget, the school system was supposed to alter the budget to meet those objections, as far as possible.

In 1986, an effort was mounted through Mayor Harold Washington's office to compel the school system and its employees to adopt a set of agreements patterned after the Boston Compact. In October of that year, Mayor Washington convened an educational summit that focused on what he called the "Earn-Learn Connection." Approximately 40 representatives from the business community, school system, teachers' union, area universities, and civic groups participated.

In the second year of the summit, after a disastrous 19-day school strike, disgruntled administrators and union representatives refused to participate in agreements, leaving the reform effort to parents, community members, and business representatives. When Mayor Washington died later that year, he was replaced by an acting mayor who did little to adopt significant educational reform. In the context of this history, it became apparent that mandating legislation would be required to implement any major restructuring effort for school improvement.

In March 1988, the summit adopted a tentative agreement to expand early childhood programs, establish school-based management councils at every school, and pursue ways to enhance teacher professionalism. A month later, amendments were adopted to strengthen the powers of local councils, reduce the size of bureaucracy, and reallocate funds to schools with the heaviest concentrations of disadvantaged students. All of these amendments passed over the objections of the administration and principals' association. Meanwhile, separate pieces of legislation were introduced by three civic groups. In the Senate Education Committee, the three bills were merged into one, which eventually passed the Senate—on a partisan division—by one vote. In the House, political stalling prolonged passage until a final 123-page bill was crafted and submitted to the Governor, who solicited input from reform activists, the teachers' union, and the Board of Education and used his amendatory veto to correct technical problems. A compromise resulted in the passage of a slightly rewritten bill with nearly unanimous, bi-partisan support on December 2, 1988. In October 1989, 313,000 people voted to elect 5,420 members of Local School Councils to begin school-based management at 542 Chicago public schools. ■

Excerpted and summarized with permission from "Chicago School Reform: What It Is and How It Came to Be," by G. Alfred Hess, Jr., Executive Director, Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance, and published November 1990.

Indianapolis, IN

Interview with William Douglas, Assistant Superintendent, Supplemental and Auxiliary Services, Indianapolis Public Schools

Five years ago, the Indianapolis Public Schools began talking with the teachers' association about implementing school-based decision-making (SBDM) in the district. This effort was one of several to create a district in which all groups have opportunities for meaningful participation and in which the central office is viewed as a team of service-oriented leaders rather than "command headquarters."

Since the discussion began, the principles of SBDM have found their way into may educational programs and initiatives. For example, during the past few years, the district sponsored workshops and training sessions for teams of teachers, administrators, and school board members. These professional development sessions on school-based decision-making, total quality management, and the "effective schools" literature began to pave the way for the creation of a new paradigm, which would eventually be defined and supported by policies and rules.

Districtwide program directors now encourage more broad-based input into the use of resources than in the past. Chapter 1 reorganization, for example, allows more flexibility to schools. "Teachers and principals see this flexibility as a real assistance to those schools that have it. They are not as hamstrung as they were in the past." Chapter 2 funds and Eisenhower grants are used to enhance programs designed by teachers and principals at the building level and give building-level staff a greater voice in decisions concerning resources.

Outside of the district, the Indiana State Teachers Association trained teachers in leadership skills and school-based decision-making. Within the district, the school board approved a plan to "right-size" the central administration, which put human resources closer to students rather than in the central office. This year, the central administration eliminated almost 30 positions in an effort to move services closer to the building level. Subject-area supervisors and instructional program facilitators, whose job was to provide assistance to teachers, were reassigned to other positions. Principals and their faculties now provide assistance to each other. During the 1993-94 school year, the superintendent plans to eliminate another 30 central office positions.

In addition, the central administration is in the midst of a massive strategic planning process that involves both the business community and the community at large. Many of their efforts are focused on decentralization and total quality management—outcomes consistent with the direction the superintendent and board are taking. In fact, members of the planning teams equate their definition of decentralization with school-based decision-making.

The board's most recent contract with teachers and administrators set out a plan for implementing SBDM in the district by 1994-95. The plan stipulates that eight schools will participate in the first year. Schools wishing to take part must first vote to participate in the effort, then they will be chosen by criteria set up by a 16-member SBDM committee. (The committee includes eight teachers and eight administrators.) The same process will be used to add eight more schools in 1995-96 and another eight in 1996-97. At the end of this three-year period, a careful analysis will be made by objective educators and a determination will be made to either continue the experiment or to stop. If it is decided that the process should continue, the remaining 61 schools will be added. The contract also acknowledged the need for waivers at the state or board policy level or at the union contract level. The SBDM committee will make all decision regarding waivers by consensus.

"Indianapolis didn't just begin the move toward decentralization and site-based management. We have been working toward broader-based participation and collaboration at every grade level (beginning with the effective schools process) for over five years. We had begun to train people in making decisions at the building level. Now, people have more decision-making authority at the building level."

Support Programs

The SBDM initiative has a ground swell of support from the business community, and the mayor has become actively involved in the school system. "The foundation has been laid and the time is good for the implementation of SBDM." Through the district's Select School (Controlled Choice) Plan and implementation of the middle school concept, parents and students as well as school staff will have far greater input and responsibility for decisions that lead to the best possible outcomes for the 48,000 urban students who are Indianapolis' "greatest asset."

Obstacles

Collective Bargaining "The collective bargaining process has created an adversarial relationship among teachers, administrators, and the board, which, in turn, has slowed reform efforts. For example, during the strategic planning process, the Action Team' assigned to make recommendations regarding SBDM could not meet because no contract agreement had been reached. Now that the contract negotiations have ended, the district's SBDM committee will proceed, as spelled out in the new contract, to describe the parameters and define SBDM for the district."

Recommendations

Professional Development "We certainly need to do a lot more for administrators and teachers. Their roles are all changing drastically and rapidly. When a district is involved in a major change effort, it creates anxiety and fear for everybody involved. People need to make paradigm shifts, but they are reluctant to make that shift or give up a perceived power; that is why training and staff development are so crucial."

Des Moines, IA

Interview with Morris Wilson, Director of Information Management; Dave Wilkinson, Phase III Coordinator; and Mary Lynne Jones, Director of Intercultural Programs, Des Moines Public Schools

Although the district's governance structure has not changed—the board of directors, through the superintendent, maintains ultimate responsibility for the district—the central office has reorganized and some central office positions have been eliminated. For example, several administrative responsibilities have been decentralized as part of the "school-based management through shared decision-making" (SBM/SDM) initiative, making the central office "flatter" and more responsive.

SBM/SDM is both a process and a discipline for empowering school-site stakeholders to participate in school improvement planning and implementation activities. The discipline includes both the district's and schools' mission statements, a list of priorities, and definitions of actions to be taken. The process is the collaborative effort from which direction, priorities, and actions are derived. SBM/SDM employs a combination of "top-down" and "bottom-up" management structures and is based on the premise that significant educational change must occur at the school for each student to be successful.

"Although the main impetus for this initiative came from the superintendent, it has received support from many other groups. A committee of the Business/Education Alliance has been exploring restructuring, the State of Iowa has encouraged waivers, and the state Phase III Educational Excellence Program allows funds to be used for comprehensive school transformation."

Through SBM/SDM, schools are encouraged to raise their expectations and focus on quality programs in which all students learn. In turn, the schools have created school-based councils consisting of staff, parent, and community representatives. The council members receive training sessions on team building, consensus building, the change process, creating a vision, and council guidelines. They are provided an extensive data base for their building that presents a broad array of information on students, staff, facilities, achievement, and how their building data compares with previous years and other schools. Through these councils, schools are able to:

- Review district and building mission statements
- Review previous objectives and action plan results
- Identify student and school needs
- Review proposed objectives and action plans
- Develop school improvement plans

The SBM/SDM initiative has both districtwide and pilot components. In September 1991, five schools were selected to participate in an intensive SBM/SDM demonstration project supported by Phase III funds. The project provided 27 additional hours of school improvement facilitator training to the principal and two staff members from each school. These facilitators, in turn, trained the school improvement group at their own school.

The role of the school improvement groups is to provide leadership to their school in developing a comprehensive school improvement plan. Each group meets annually with an accountability team to review their plans and actions. Additional Phase III funds are provided to the schools to implement their plans. These schools, plus three others that have been added for 1992-93, will undergo additional training and a more rigorous school improvement process and will participate in some experimental accountability activities.

> *"The purpose of these efforts is very simple—all of our students will learn and be more successful. All of us working together, focusing on the mission of the district, will continue to make a difference in the lives of our students and our community."*

The SBM/SDM initiative is appealing for three reasons:

- *SBM is tied to school improvement research and development.* The school or individual building is designated as the focal point for districtwide improvement and schooling effectiveness efforts.
- *SBM enhances educational accountability.* School-based accountability is achieved when districtwide trends in student academic and social growth occur from month to month and year to year.
- *SBM gives stakeholders more ownership and autonomy.* Responsible autonomy exists when stakeholders are given the authority to plan and implement instructional delivery systems to meet the needs of the unique group of students attending the school.

Support Programs

The district has developed many programs and services to support decentralization. For example, the staff development department provides professional development activities for district administrators, including three-day workshops on "Tools for Leadership" and "Effective Schools." Activities for teachers include 15-hour, one-credit staff development classes on such topics as "Effective Schools." The department has also asked schools to identify future training needs.

A School-Based Management Coordinating Council was formed to coordinate activities and communications regarding SBM/SDM throughout the district. The council consists of central office administrators, teacher representatives, building principals, and parent representatives.

A process for granting waivers to district policies and procedures that inhibit school improvement has been developed, adopted by the board of directors, and implemented. This process provides a window for the "bottom-up" to communicate with the "top-down."

Finally, schools have been given additional flexibility and responsibility concerning such things as staffing allocation; budgets for materials, printing, and more; use of Phase III funds at the building level, including the number and type of leadership positions for staff; carrying over Phase III funds and a portion of decentralized funds from year to year; use of staff development funds; and professional leave.

Obstacles

New Rules "There has been an over-reaction to change. When one moves into the SBM/SDM environment, one has to learn to play the game with a different set of rules. All of a sudden the buildings are trying to test their wings. They wonder whether they have the right to change time schedules around as well as the bus schedules. There's a lot to be learned about this [new environment] both at the central office and at the buildings."

There are several other major obstacles to decentralization:

- Finding the time necessary for staff and other stakeholders to work and learn together
- Developing a common vision of the role of SBM/SDM and a common language for its implementation
- Understanding the relationship of this initiative to other district programs and activities
- Coping with the logistics and size in a large urban district

Recommendations

Funding "Specific funding for organizational development and staff development activities for both staff and key community stakeholders would be very helpful. The Iowa Educational Excellence Program, through its Phase III component, provides some funding that can be used with and by the teaching staff."

Other recommendations include:

- Developing formal procedures at state and federal agencies to allow waivers of regulations that may impede school and district improvement processes
- Reviewing state and federal statutes and regulations to remove any items that no longer serve a necessary purpose and may stand in the way of local school improvement efforts

Detroit, MI

Interview with Allen Zondlak, Director of Planning, Detroit Public Schools

Fifteen of Detroit's 256 schools participate in a site-based management pilot and are considered Empowered Schools. The pilot, which began in 1990-91 with nine schools, will expand to other schools in the district throughout the next several years. A target of 46 Empowered Schools has been established for 1992-93. Empowered Schools are guided by four principles:

- Students and parents are the school's first priority.
- School staff should be given the freedom to create diverse educational programs.
- Parents should be given a true choice of the "best" educational programs to meet their children's needs.
- The central administration should function as a support enterprise, providing improved services to Empowered Schools.

Under this Empowerment Plan, teachers and school staff are viewed as professionals who are in control of their own destinies. Parents, teachers, and students are encouraged to take the initiative to implement ideas that impact the school environment and to take an active role in school management. In Empowered Schools, students, parents, and staff have the freedom to:

- Control the use of allocated funds
- Define their school's path to improvement
- Identify and implement instructional improvements
- Provide diverse learning programs for students
- Define the types of services and support they need and select the providers of those services

A school is eligible to apply for empowerment if its administration, 75 percent of its teachers, and 55 percent of its parents, support staff, and students (middle and high school student councils) vote for empowerment at their school.

Detroit has been considering empowerment since 1987. Several initiatives and reports provided the groundwork for the current Empowerment Plan. A "Memorandum of Understanding" negotiated by the general superintendent, Detroit Board of Education president, Detroit Federation of Teachers, and Organization of School Administrators and Supervisors provides the basic framework for governance and selection of Empowered Schools. With the help of Arthur Andersen Consulting and Larry Wilderson and Associates, the board attempted to combine all of these reports into one "empowerment plan." The plan, which was approved by the board in March 1992, is based on several key principles:

- School-site decision-making enhances leadership, ownership, commitment, and accountability at all levels.
- Empowerment promotes and encourages diversity and creativity in problem solving.
- Empowerment gives schools greater authority and flexibility to determine their own needs; select powerful solutions; purchase the goods and services they require; and enhance accountability for the mission, goals, and objectives of the district.

Support Programs

The current Empowerment Plan calls for schools to establish School Empowerment Councils to oversee local empowerment initiatives. Each school determines the number of Council members, selects a decision-making process, and sets the Council's agenda. Representatives to the Council must include administrators, teachers, support staff, parents, and students (at middle and high schools).

The general superintendent, board of education president, Detroit Federation of Teachers' president, and Organization of School Administrators and Supervisors' president comprise the Intervention Team, which reviews applications for and grants waivers to the School Empowerment Councils. The general superintendent also meets regularly with the principals of Empowered Schools.

Empowered Schools receive special transition attention through a School Management Support Organization that is designed to provide business management support for the schools and assistance in such areas as service brokering and skill development. Schools will have the freedom to determine the composition and structure of this support. Three options are available for support:

- Internal service units
- External service units
- School development service units

Obstacles

Key obstacles include:

- Teachers' and administrators' apprehension that empowerment will weaken their collective bargaining positions
- Fear of change, new roles, and new responsibilities
- A need to assist central and area administrators in providing support services to Empowered Schools while recognizing the increased decision-making capacities of these schools
- A need to assist principals and other school constituencies to more effectively share in school decision-making

Recommendations

Funding "To support decentralization, there should be greater flexibility in funding at the state and federal level. At the local level, it is important that all school constituencies be involved in developing the Empowerment Plan every step of the way."

Minneapolis, MN

Interview with Jan Witthuhn, Associate Superintendent, Research and Development, Minneapolis Public Schools

The ultimate goal of restructuring and site-based management in the Minneapolis Public Schools is to improve student performance. Research shows that having strong family involvement correlates with increased student performance. Research also points out that if more people are involved in decision-making and planning programs, the more effective these efforts will be.

In August 1988, when Robert Ferrara became superintendent, there was a focus on analyzing student performance data in new ways. This focus contributed to the movement toward site-based management. In 1988-89, many teachers and principals in primary grades wanted more developmentally appropriate assessment and wanted the freedom to make decisions about instruction and assessment. Their requests also added to the impetus for site-based management.

In September 1990, the Panasonic Foundation facilitated a meeting between the superintendent and the board of education that resulted in the school district's commitment to use site-based management to improve student outcomes. In July 1991, the board approved a "Statement of Direction and Goals for Comprehensive Restructuring" that solidified that commitment. In February 1992, the board accepted the district's current site-based management policy. The Minneapolis Federation of Teachers was a positive force for site-based management and pushed for joint discussions with the district and the administrator's union.

By October 1992, 14 of Minneapolis' 73 schools had been designated as "site-based management schools," and 36 requests for site-based management status were pending. The remaining public schools are expected to restructure and become site-based managed schools by the end of the 1993-94 school year.

Schools ready to assume the responsibilities of site-based management must submit a governance plan and written request to the superintendent. The superintendent's council reviews the plans and makes major recommendations to the board of education. In addition to the superintendent, there are two principals, two teachers, 13 parents and community representatives, two students, and an associate superintendent on the council.

An external facilitator assists schools in developing their governance plans, and schools approved for site-based management can receive grants from the McKnight Foundation to support school restructuring. Guidelines for governance plans recommend that each plan include:

- The process of selecting members to its leadership team or governance group
- A comparison of the make-up of the team with the racial/ethnic and socio-economic diversity of the student body
- The numbers of students, parents, teachers, staff, and community and business representatives on the team (25 percent should be non-staff the first year, 50 percent by the end of second year)
- The length of time members may serve on the team
- How members solicit ideas from constituencies and how team decisions are communicated to constituencies
- How the school ensures that the rights of individuals are respected and due process is followed
- Evidence of substantial parent, staff, and student support for designation as a site-based managed school

Schools that meet the governance guidelines and operate within the management parameters may select instructional strategies and materials, as long as districtwide learner outcomes are met and district guidelines are followed. Site-based managed schools also may select and evaluate personnel within the guidelines of the law, negotiated contracts, and district policies. Finally, these schools may exercise complete discretion over the use of salary and nonsalary allocations, within the guidelines of the law, negotiated contracts, and district policies.

"We are not doing it because it's trendy or because it's good for adults, we are doing site-based management to improve student performance."

Support Programs

In the transition to site-based management, district management and the organization of data have changed. All schools can now access their own attendance, student achievement, registration, budget, and demographic data. Schools also can designate subsets—such as all students scoring in the lowest quartile or all African-American students—to learn more about specific groups.

In addition, schools now have the ability to purchase goods and services from outside vendors, as well as from the district. While these policies have changed for all schools, only site-based managed schools can receive variances from administrative regulations and policies. The superintendent also advocates variances for site-based managed schools from board, state, and federal policies.

The district provides training to site-based managed schools in collaborative leadership and instructional improvement, federal and state laws, Minnesota Department of Education rules, board of education policies and regulations, employee negotiated contracts, and the process for securing variances from each of the above.

Obstacles

Roles and Responsibilities

"The movement toward site-based management has been frustrating for a lot of people in schools because there is no one recipe. We have a very clear direction for site-based management, but a vague understanding of what the parameters are for new roles and responsibilities that accompany change."

Coping with Change "While time constraints and limited budgets are obstacles, there are more important hurdles to overcome. These obstacles include:

- The high degree of change required to implement site-based management, and having so many things to change at once
- The high level of ambiguity in the change process
- Finding ways to have constructive arguments and discussion with all the new players
- Principals' uncertainty that the district and the board of education will be supportive when things do not go well"

Recommendations

Waivers "To support site-based management, federal and state policies should hold the district accountable for student outcomes, but not control the means to meet those outcomes. There needs to be a streamlined process for waivers from state and federal regulations."

Federal Support "It would also be helpful if rhetoric at the federal level supported public education. There is a movement toward abandoning public education, because some people believe that public schools have not worked and will not work for children. This does not help us make the changes needed to improve urban public education. People in our schools and communities want hope that, with change, they will be successful."

St. Paul

Interview with Thomas K. Gale, SBSDM coordinator/teacher on special assignment, St. Paul Public Schools

St. Paul began its discussion about site-based management in 1979, when district task forces were established to research the issue. In the mid-1980s, the St. Paul Federation of Teachers advocated for site-based management and the current superintendent, Curman Gaines, strongly promoted the concept. In 1989, a Professional Issues Committee (PIC) developed St. Paul's "School-Based Shared Decision-Making" (SBSDM) pilot. The committee included the superintendent; five district administrators (including the district's manager of negotiations/labor relations); and a six-person team of teachers, education assistants, and business agents, headed by the teachers' union president.

SBSDM began with eight schools and, after three years, 13 of its 66 schools are active in the program. Today, several new sites are developing proposals to participate in the program. The SBSDM program is based on two key concepts:

- *School-based management* defines the individual school as the critical unit for educational change.
- *Shared decision-making* assumes that stakeholder participation improves school actions.

To receive district approval to participate in the SBSDM program, a school's intent to write a proposal must be endorsed by the principal and 75 percent of the school staff present at the voting meeting. A second vote to approve the proposal must be taken before submitting the application to PIC. In the application, the school must describe its:

- Design for school-based shared decision-making
- Process of preparing the proposal
- Method of selecting its SBSDM council
- Timeline of key activities for SBSDM
- Proposed plan for reaching decisions
- Evaluation plan for determining the success of SBSDM
- Stakeholder support for SBSDM
- Proposed start-up budget

All schools interested in applying for SBSDM status receive an orientation and information on school-based shared decision-making from the district's Employee Training office. The initial eight schools in the pilot received $6,000 grants to support SBSDM (i.e., for training, team building, conflict resolution, site visits, etc.). Schools starting after the original pilot year receive $3,000 start-up grants.

Each school selects an SBSDM council that is empowered to make decisions regarding school goals and philosophy, key staffing, curriculum, budgeting, school climate, scheduling, plant planning, multicultural programming, special education, and gender equity. Two council seats are designated for the building principal and the steward of the teachers' union.

Support Programs

"The school board is very supportive of site-based management and meets yearly with the SBSDM councils. Moreover, the board has offered to provide variances to schools as needed to support SBSDM." As of yet, no school has requested a formal variance for approval from the board.

In addition, a number of procedural changes implemented at the district support school-based, shared decision-making:

- SBSDM schools can carry over funds from year to year for items such as equipment, supplies, and employee training. Other schools must turn over unspent dollars to the district by April 15.
- The district is developing new hiring timelines for SBSDM schools because it is difficult to gather teachers, parents, *and* community members to make personnel decisions in the summer.
- New forms for building maintenance and equitable distribution of goods and services have been developed. Alterations to food and beverage

services and improvements to prioritizing building requests also have been made.

A "teacher on special assignment" position was created to coordinate the site-based management effort. "For the first three years, the position was 50 percent site-based management and 50 percent employee training. Now, the position is 80 percent site-based management and 20 percent training."

Obstacles

Bureaucracy and Centralization "The history of bureaucracy and centralization has a built-in reluctance toward change. The learning process is wonderful for everyone involved—parents, principals, teachers, staff, district administrators, and community members, but it takes time to change."

Training Another obstacle is the lack of appropriate training on school-based shared decision-making both for individuals at the participating sites and district administrators. "It is difficult for many people to get used to team planning and the time and labor intensive nature of group decision-making."

Recommendations

Waivers "At the state and federal levels, it would support school-based decision-making to provide fewer restrictions on funding for a variety of programs (e.g., transportation, Chapter 1, special education, and so forth). States should provide a streamlined waiver process for schools requesting variances from mandated regulations."

Textbooks "Textbook suppliers should provide more options to schools in purchasing textbooks without escalating the cost. Current policies provide discounts for districtwide textbook adoption. But, with site-based management, schools may choose not to buy into districtwide purchase of textbooks. There should be more flexible and creative purchasing options for districts and schools."

Parents and the Community "In the initial pilot for SBSDM schools, there was no requirement that parents and community members be involved in planning or in the voting process. This policy is being revised by the district. The superintendent supports having parents and community members involved from the beginning."

Akron, OH

Interview with Alvin Heatley,
Executive Assistant, School Improvement,
Akron Public Schools

In the past year and a half, the Akron Public Schools have begun a process of decentralization. While the call for decentralization came from the superintendent and the school board, business leaders also sanctioned the efforts. The process began in April 1991 with the hiring of a new superintendent who reorganized the central office staff to decrease its size by some 21 positions. A contractual agreement to establish Building Leadership Teams at schools resulted in further decentralization.

The primary responsibility of the Building Leadership Teams is decision-making at the building level. Workshops are planned to develop their decision-making capabilities. Eventually, each team will write the school improvement plan for its building.

In November 1992, voters were asked to pass a levy that included $12 million for school improvement. Of this amount, Building Leadership Teams would receive $2 million to improve their schools.

Obstacles

Funding and Support "There are several major obstacles to decentralization, for example, a lack of funding at the state and local levels. Another is the lack of union support in the restructuring efforts. The last is the resistance to change, which we will hopefully overcome via training and community support."

Recommendations

Waivers "Often, state regulations are delivered to the local level without funding for implementation. To restructure, they [schools] need the freedom to break away from state regulations and requirements, while still maintaining accountability. For example, we have applied to the state for 45 waivers from state regulations and have received approval for none."

Cincinnati, OH

Interview with Zulfi Ahmad,
Director, Grants, Research and Development, Cincinnati Public Schools

The governing structure of the Cincinnati Public Schools has undergone radical change during the last two years. Many central office positions have been eliminated and the number of staff has been reduced by more than 50 percent in the past year alone. Only those middle management positions that are indispensable or result in cost savings have been retained.

Local school governance also has been restructured. Previously, the district was divided into three area superintendentships, but these positions were eliminated. Today, the schools are organized into nine mini-districts. In place of a full-time administrator, a principal from each mini-district is designated as the "lead principal" in that mini-district. The lead principals serve in the superintendent's cabinet and advise the superintendent on such issues as policy, procedures, and education initiatives.

Local school councils are also being established. The councils include representatives from the community, parents, teachers, and administrators. While the role of the councils has not been firmly decided, their responsibilities will likely include making recommendations about local school budgets and staffing.

The next step in Cincinnati's reform process is to examine how students' lives are affected by restructuring. While current efforts have focused primarily on district reorganization, many schools have begun to utilize new materials and technologies to restructure their curricula. For example, the principles and processes of "total quality management" form the basis of a major staff development effort aimed at school staff. The effort is driven by two TQM concepts: customer satisfaction and management by facts.

Another major initiative of the Cincinnati Public Schools is the creation of a semi-autonomous, pilot mini-district to serve as a leader in research and development related to school reform. The Cincinnati business community provides material and technical assistance to this mini-district so that its staff may experiment with new technologies and powerful support systems. For example, business representatives support a voice mail system that allows parents to learn what's going on in the schools and keep track of their children's homework assignments.

Cincinnati's rationale for decentralizing is based on two beliefs. First, many stakeholders believe that authority should be as close to the actual work as possible—that is, at the local school level. Second, these stakeholders believe that bureaucracy was slowing reform efforts. Conversely, they hope that decentralization and restructuring will expedite school reform.

To gauge the success of their reform efforts, schools must ask themselves the following questions:

- Does the school use money in the most cost-effective way?
- Are important decisions being made at the appropriate level (e.g., at the school level)?
- Has restructuring resulted in decentralization?
- What are the end products of restructuring? Are more students going to college? Are more high schools graduates winning "career ladder" jobs?

Support Programs

One influence on current reform efforts is the Cincinnati Business Committee. Comprising 30 CEOs from the city's largest corporations, this committee appointed a Commission that examined school restructuring for one year. In September 1991, they completed a report that accused the district of inefficiency. The report received significant attention because the district was requesting a tax levy in November 1991 to reduce a $50 million deficit. In order to mobilize public support for the new tax, the Commission recommended reducing costs through decentralization. Although the tax levy passed, the school system still faces a $170 million debt that must be cleared in ten years. In addition, the Cincinnati Business Committee helped the school administration obtain waivers from state regulations.

To help schools make the transition to decentralized governance, the business community has offered the school district, free of charge, the services of financial, management, and education consultants. The business community also is helping the school district to establish a world class leadership academy for teachers and administrators.

Obstacles

Resistance to Change "Restructuring was a painful but much needed job. When it began it was like a big tidal wave, sweeping the old structure away in its path. Now, our biggest challenge is to make the new structure powerful and productive. Staff are accustomed to the old structure and will require major staff development. Staff development and the necessary attitude changes are going to take longer than decentralization and restructuring."

Recommendations

Diverse Leadership "The most important requirement for major restructuring is diverse leadership—particularly leadership from the outside and leadership that is not one-sided. Leadership should include women, minorities, and other stakeholder. ."

Cleveland, OH

Interview with James M. Coleman, Area Superintendent, Lakeside Administrative Center

The Cleveland Public Schools began decentralizing in 1980, and by 1992, all functions had been decentralized to the school level. For example, the position of director of local school budgeting was eliminated after principals gained sufficient budgeting experience.

In turn, schools created Local School Councils (LSCs) to oversee decentralized functions, such as building management, determining curriculum and instruction, monitoring the desegregation process, setting school regulations and rules, coordinating support services, and leveraging community resources. Parents must make up the majority of an LSC's membership, which also includes the school principal and teachers. The racial and ethnic composition of the LSCs is determined by the document *School Attendance Report—by School, Cluster, and the District.*

All LSCs elect a non-staff member to represent their group in one of six "cluster councils." These clusters consist of elementary, junior high, and high schools. Students typically remain within the same cluster throughout their school years. Six area superintendents, each of whom are responsible for one cluster, report directly to the deputy superintendent. Each cluster council elects one representative to the six-member "district community cluster council." This district council addresses local concerns through a clusterwide approach.

The rationale behind Cleveland's decentralization effort was to increase decision-making authority at the local school level in order to improve student outcomes. The effort was supported by a combination of community pressure, court-ordered decentralization, and widespread recognition that the current system could no longer be managed centrally. Nor were Cleveland educators adverse to change. After serving under eight superintendents in 12 years, it had become commonplace to them.

During the first years of decentralization, the Cleveland Public Schools hired consultants to assist with the effort. Since that time, many of the system's key stakeholders have received training. For example, many principals have received training in decision-making in a decentralized environment, sharing power, distinguishing leadership from authority, and delegating responsibility. LSC members have been trained to work effectively in their councils and to be sensitive to the dynamics of the governance structure.

Obstacles

Cooperation and Funding "The major obstacle to decentralization has been a lack of willingness among principals to share in decision-making. Also, there has been a lack of information among staff and the community concerning the decentralization process, as well as a lack of funding for the training and consultative work required."

Recommendations

Training "Locally, teacher preparation schools need to train new teachers to work within a decentralized system, where they will share in decision-making. The district needs to ensure that administrators are given the proper training to work within its decentralized structure (e.g., understanding the dynamics of shared decision-making). Parents need training to become more involved with their schools and share in decision-making. The system needs to be open to change."

Columbus, OH

Interview with Gene Harris, Assistant Superintendent, Division of Curriculum and Instruction, Columbus Public Schools

Over the past five years, the Columbus school system has seen three different superintendents and many changes. The last two superintendents included some form of decentralization in their visions for the schools. A modified version of decentralization began when five high schools were given increased responsibilities, but not control of their budgets. Later, a total of eight elementary and middle schools were given limited increases in their local powers. However, no school sites are fully decentralized. Budgeting, personnel decisions, and curriculum development are all handled centrally, although curriculum is developed using curriculum committees that consist of teachers and administrators.

The creation of Instructional Support Teams at each school represents another move toward decentralization. The administration saw these teams as a good way to incorporate parents into the decision-making process of every school. The primary goal of the teams—which include parents, teachers, and administrators—is to generate ideas to improve school performance. Team members have received some training, but, because this move toward decentralization has been modest, there has been only a limited need for it.

The Instructional Support Teams' ideas are submitted to a systemwide Reform Panel, co-chaired by the superintendent and the teachers' union president. The 20-member panel includes two co-chairs, six parents (three selected by the union, three by the administration), six administrators, and six teachers. The panel reviews proposals and decides which ideas to fund. So far, 90 to 95 percent of the ideas they have reviewed were authorized for funding.

> ***The Instructional Support Team concept was initiated because schools know what their problems are and need greater input into the decision-making process.***

Obstacles

Lack of Training and More "Fear, lack of knowledge, and lack of training are big problems. Teachers lack time for training because their key priority is preparing students to pass a graduation competency test in June 1994."

Rapid Change "Naturally, the turnover of superintendents has created an unstable environment that makes significant reform difficult to achieve."

Recommendations

Funding "States need to make it easier for urban systems to direct the categorical funding they receive for disadvantaged students. Ideally, we'd like to give each school a chunk of money and allow the school to determine how it should be used. Schools would be held accountable for student outcomes."

Training "Locally, there needs to be a huge education effort directed at the board of education and the administration to help stimulate a new mindset on their part. They need to be educated concerning the goals and intent of decentralization and made comfortable with the idea of schools making more decisions on their own account."

Dayton, OH

Interview with Bickley Lucas, Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Dayton Public Schools

In 1988, the Dayton Public Schools developed a strategic plan that provided the foundation for the district's philosophy on participative management. In the fall of 1989, then Superintendent

Franklin Smith commissioned the Dayton Area Higher Education Consortium to develop a participative management process manual that would serve as a guide to implementing site-based management. During work sessions in the 1989-90 school year, a 40-member planning group conceptualized the process. The group included school board members, the superintendent and his cabinet, central office administrators, principals, teachers, union heads, parents, and citizens.

Today, 11 of Dayton's 49 schools participate in a site-based/participative management pilot. The participants were selected through an RFP process that required 100 percent of a school's building staff to "sign off" on the application. However, the pilot has not expanded pending refinement of the RFP process and other decisions related to decentralization.

During the first year, the pilot schools each received $10,000 planning grants. These schools have increased responsibility for decisions involving curriculum development, instructional delivery, staff development, budgeting, personnel, school climate, student life, and parental and community involvement.

Because of some ongoing concerns over decentralization, the district has elected to make site-based management a gradual and natural process, without using site-based management as a defining term. The district's current focus is on facilitating a "school improvement process with greater building level decision-making."

In 1992-93, district policies will offer individual schools the ability to determine and budget their own staff development plans and replacement textbooks. While individual schools will develop their own plans, funds will be allocated through the lead principal in each school cluster. (There are three school clusters in the district, each with a lead principal who is appointed by the superintendent.)

Schools that have not been selected for the site-based/participative management pilot are encouraged to draw on the input of faculty, parents, and community to create programs that support student learning. After working through issues and problems with parents and the community, two non-pilot schools submitted proposals to the superintendent and board to become year-round schools. The proposals were accepted. "This is probably the best example of site-based management, even though the schools don't have an official designation."

Six factors guided decisions to decentralize in Dayton:

- To improve student achievement
- To achieve greater accountability
- To bring decision-making closer to the point of teaching and learning
- To create ownership among school communities for improved instructional programming
- To increase community involvement
- To create a system for more efficient use of resources

Support Programs

Dayton principals have been offered training on management styles and the role of an instructional leader. Also, policies for textbook purchasing and allocation of staff development funds are being adapted to promote greater decision-making at the building level. Finally, schools can use money saved on energy costs as discretionary funds.

Obstacles

Many factors have impeded Dayton's decentralization efforts, including:

- Union contract regulations
- Reluctance to change among district administrators and building principals
- Weak levels of trust between administrators and their faculty
- Principals' fear of giving up authority
- Lack of focused, relevant training to prepare administrators for new roles
- Many teachers who do not want to share the responsibility of decision-making
- Traditional philosophy of teachers' union leadership

Recommendations

Training "Local districts need to move slowly in decentralizing and provide focused, ongoing training for administrators and faculties as they move towards new sets of roles and responsibilities."

Standards and Accountability "Policies at the state level regarding curriculum, instruction, and assessment should be further decentralized to the local level. State departments should set standards for achievement and hold each district accountable. State proficiency tests set a standard that really mandates a statewide curriculum, without providing adequate preparation and support at the local district level."

Toledo, OH

Interview with Craig Cotner, Director of Planning, Development, and Compensatory Programs, Toledo Public Schools

Over the past two years, Toledo has made an effort to reduce the number of people in its central administration. The administrative staff has been reduced by 15 people, or about 15 percent. Some of the money saved by these personnel cuts has been funneled into the schools. However, many of the cuts were for budgetary rather than decentralization reasons.

In 1992, three elementary schools joined a site-based management pilot in which they have responsibility for budget, personnel, curriculum modifications, and modifications to the school day and school year (with state authorization). An oversight board monitors the activities of these three pilot schools. No other schools have taken a site-based approach.

Each pilot site developed its own proposal, including the resources needed. For example, two pilot schools wanted to revise their primary math curriculum to be more "hands-on." As a result, training has been offered to kindergarten and first-grade teachers in this area.

Another pilot school wanted to improve primary arts education. The school has enlisted the help of a person from the local art museum for training and assistance. The district, via outside grants, is funding staff training for all three schools.

The pilot program was implemented for two reasons:

- The best decisions are made closer to the students.
- The people responsible for instruction should have the greatest influence over decisions made in their buildings.

The spark for this effort came from the business community. Four years ago, citizens reviewed the performance of the Toledo school district. Out of this review emerged a cadre of business people—the Citizens' Committee for Effective Education—who have taken the lead in pushing for site-based management in the city's schools. School district personnel have been working with the committee and the relevant unions to implement the pilot.

Obstacles

The following were major obstacles to decentralization:

- *Finding schools that wanted to participate.* All 43 elementary schools were asked to submit proposals to participate in the site-based management pilot. While funding was available for five schools, only three submitted proposals. "This lack of interest probably was due to the large amount of work that the principal must take on, with questionable short-term benefits. Most principals took a 'wait and see' attitude."
- *Reaching agreement with unions on contractual language that would allow the pilot schools to take shape.* "Who would make the instructional decisions in a school—teachers or the principal? How would union contracts have to be altered to accommodate changes in the status quo?"

Recommendations

Waivers "At the state level, there should be more flexibility in regard to local experimentation. It's hard to get state authorization in writing concerning local waivers to state policy, such as a local school trying to use a different amount of school days (rather than the state requirement) to fulfill the instruction hour requirements for its student body."

Cooperation "At the local level, it must be understood that cooperation is imperative among all the key players if change is to occur."

Milwaukee, WI

Interview with Robert Jasna, Deputy Superintendent, Milwaukee Public Schools

Five years ago, when Robert Peterkin became the superintendent of schools for Milwaukee, he was charged with implementing fundamental changes in the structure of the Milwaukee Public Schools. People felt that the school system was too big and unmanageable and that many schools were not meeting the needs of students and the community. The State Legislature and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction vowed that, if change did not occur, they would reorganize the Milwaukee Public Schools system. In response, Peterkin created several task forces to examine the system. These task forces reported to a centralized body that developed a plan for the superintendent. The plan subsequently was approved by the Board of School Directors.

It took Peterkin's group about one year to develop and implement the plan. One highlight of the plan was the division of the schools into six Service Delivery Areas, each with its own community superintendent who was responsible for high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools. This structure existed for two years.

Also during Peterkin's time as superintendent, the K-12 Teaching and Learning Initiative was developed. The initiative included the identification of goals and performance indicators for grades K-12. Assessment of progress would occur at the primary, intermediate, middle school, and high school levels.

When Peterkin resigned and Howard Fuller was hired, the community superintendent system was eliminated. "The Service Delivery Area system, it was felt, was not working successfully; so we reverted to a system that would encourage the development of a 'system of schools' in which individual schools retain local control but are under the governance of a single superintendent." Under this system, principals have control over their budgets, including personnel decisions. The central office equitably allots money to each principal, who determines the budget line items according to his/her school's needs. The rationale for this new structure holds that schools can make decisions necessary for student success, while remaining part of a larger school system. The primary goals of the system, now in its second year, are to empower *each* school and to ensure accountability for increased student achievement.

The same goals drove the implementation of school choice and the creation of the Chapter 220 Plan. This inter-district transfer plan provides yet another avenue of school choice. Milwaukee participates in the Chapter 220 Integration Settlement Agreement with 23 suburban school districts.

Support Programs

"While waivers of certain Board policies, additional funding, and inservice training are part of a comprehensive program to decentralize services, it is not until you permit principals, staffs, and the community actually to control their budget that true empowerment, and in turn, decentralization occur. This process needs the total involvement of all of the stakeholders to ensure initial and continuous success."

Obstacles

Bureaucracy "The existing bureaucracy often is cited as an obstacle to changing the governance of a school district. People are resistant to change. And how do you change bureaucracy? We were never good at getting information past the first several layers of central office staff down to the teachers. By flattening the organization and including principals at the cabinet level, we are reducing the 'bureaucracy' obstacle."

Attitudes "There are serious consequences if nothing new is done, but there's also a lack of support for change because there's always someone who feels you are not going in the right direction. Remember, change is unsettling. We are trying to overcome this obstacle by emphasizing the 'support' aspect of the central office. We are gradually changing people's attitudes about the central office as a source of mandates to a central office that is a source for service."

Recommendations

Support "My greatest recommendation for changing local, state, or federal policies in order to enable and strengthen decentralization efforts in a school district is to provide support. You have to support people who are risk takers. Let them try. Even if they fail, we all learn from it. Too often, we pass judgment before we see results."

Patience "Policymakers need to have patience with school districts that are trying to change. When you're talking about major change, you are talking about four to five years. Too often, we want everything done immediately, and if we don't see results, we consider the effort a failure." ∎

Contributors

Zulfi Ahmad, Director
Grant Administration
Cincinnati Public Schools
230 East Ninth Street
Cincinnati, OH 45202
513/369-4090
Fax. 513/369-4894

James Coleman, District Superintendent
Lakeside Administrative Center
1440 Lakeside Avenue
Cleveland, OH 44114
216/523-5839
Fax: 216/523-5889

Craig Cotner, Director of Planning, Development and Compensatory Programs
Toledo Public Schools
Manhattan and Elm Streets
Toledo, OH 43608
419/729-8422
Fax: 419/729-8425

William Douglas, Assistant Superintendent
Supplemental and Auxiliary Services
Indianapolis Public Schools
120 East Walnut Street, Room 602J
Indianapolis, IN 46204
317/226-4540
Fax: 317/226-4509

Thomas Gale, SBSDM Coordinator/
Teacher on Special Assignment
360 Colborne Street
St. Paul, MN 55102
612/293-5164
Fax: 612/293-5411

Gene T. Harris, Assistant Superintendent
Division of Curriculum and Instruction
Columbus Public Schools
270 East State Street
Columbus, OH 43215
614/365-5777
Fax: 614/365-6725

Alvin Heatley, Executive Assistant,
School Improvement
Akron Public Schools
70 North Broadway
Akron, OH 44308
216/434-1661
Fax: 216/434-1201/1309

Robert Jasna, Deputy Superintendent
Milwaukee Public Schools
5225 West Vliet Street
Milwaukee, WI 53208
414/475-8393
Fax: 414/475-8585

Mary Lynne Jones, Director,
Intercultural Programs
Des Moines Public Schools
1800 Grant Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50307
515/242-7781
Fax: 515/242-7702

Bickley Lucas, Director, Curriculum and Instruction
Dayton Public Schools
2013 West Third Street
Dayton, OH 45417
513/262-5320
Fax: 513/262-2957

Robert Sampieri, Chief Operating Officer
Chicago Public Schools
1819 West Pershing Road
Chicago, IL 60609
312/535-3700
Fax: 312/535-8461

David Wilkinson, Phase II Coordinator
Des Moines Public Schools
1800 Grant Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50307
515/242-7688
Fax: 515/242-7702

Morris Wilson, Director of Information Management
Des Moines Public Schools
1800 Grant Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50307
515/242-7688
Fax: 515/242-7702

Jan Witthuhn, Director, Research and Development
Minneapolis Public Schools
807 Northeast Broadway
Minneapolis, MN 55413
612/627-2165
Fax: 612/627-2164

Allen Zondlak, Director of Planning
Detroit Public Schools
5057 Woodward
612 Schools Center
Detroit, MI 48202
313/494-2945
Fax: 313/494-2269

Decentralization: Lessons From the Detroit Public Schools

By Deborah M. McGriff, Ph.D., General Superintendent, Detroit Public Schools

Decentralization is a concept that elicits a broad range of reactions from Detroiters. It invokes enthusiasm and support in some and hostility and opposition in others. This article explores how decentralization is evolving in the Detroit Public Schools and why it continues to be controversial. In it, we review the past and examine the lessons we've learned.

The History

On January 1, 1971, the Michigan Legislature mandated that the Detroit Public Schools become decentralized. Detroit was divided into eight administrative areas, each with its own school board. The major power of each of these regional boards was the authority to hire and fire its regional superintendent.

This decentralization effort was designed to:

- Increase citizen participation and autonomy in educational decision-making
- Enhance school-level curriculum development
- Stimulate interest and confidence in education
- Restore faith in school boards
- Improve communications

In 1973, New Detroit, Inc., a civic organization, issued an assessment of the Detroit Public Schools' decentralization effort. Concluding that there was a need for improvement, New Detroit offered the following recommendations:

- Establish short- and long-range policies to reduce the "excessive cost" of operating regional boards and offices.
- Distribute more power from the Detroit Board of Education to the regions and their communities (i.e., empowerment).
- Design and implement a communications network to inform the public about school issues.
- Make parent involvement a priority of both the Detroit Board of Education and the regional boards.
- Enhance interpersonal relations through team building and professional development.
- Enhance multicultural sensitivity and respect.

Despite efforts to implement these recommendations, on September 15, 1981, Detroiters voted to eliminate decentralization by more than a two-to-one margin. As a result, the state superintendent of schools eliminated all existing regional school boards and replaced them with an 11-member central board of education with the power to hire or fire area (formerly regional) superintendents.

Seven years after the governance of the school district was recentralized, then General Superintendent Arthur Jefferson introduced two new decentralization efforts: participatory management in education (PME) and school-based management. PME was a joint effort between the school system and the unions, nine of which signed an agreement to sponsor the project. PME's goals were to improve the quality of work life for employees and the quality of learning for students. The school-based management project was grounded on the assumptions that educational reform efforts must focus on student achievement and that these efforts are most effective and long-lasting when carried out by people who are affected by decisions and who feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for the decision-making process.

While the Detroit Public Schools were carefully fine-tuning their two decentralization initiatives, other Detroiters were focusing their attention on a staggering $160 million deficit. In November 1988, a team of four new board members were elected who promised fiscal reform and continued expansion of decentralization/empowerment efforts. A blue-ribbon Citizens Education Committee to Enhance Public Education in Detroit endorsed the board's reform strategies in October 1989, saying:

In an empowered school, the staff will:

- Have effective control over the allocation of the school's budget, personnel, and other resources
- Have considerable discretion over curriculum, instruction, and other school activities
- Be required to use their own creativity and talent to design their school's program in a way they believe will be effective
- Be held accountable for the results of the school's program—the most important result being student learning

On June 5, 1990, Interim General Superintendent John W. Porter and the Detroit Board of Education received the endorsement of the administrators' and teachers' unions through a "Memorandum of Understanding: Empowerment and Schools of Choice." This memorandum outlined voting procedures for becoming an "Empowered School" and called for the establishment of districtwide and local school governance structures.

The following month, July 1990, the board approved a "Proposed Policy on

Empowerment and Schools of Choice." In this document, empowerment and choice were restricted to schools that were rated as "excellent" or "satisfactory" by the interim general superintendent. This policy was a significant departure from the previous belief that empowerment and school-based management offered great potential for *all* schools. Instead, they were offered as rewards only for schools that were already successful.

The newly proposed policy also specified benefits and sanctions. Benefits were associated with school ratings. "Excellent" schools received more freedoms than did "satisfactory" schools. However, following three years of empowerment, schools that failed to meet established standards could be reorganized, designated for intensive support, or closed. For the first time, the element of punishment was introduced. One year later, as a result, only eight schools voted to participate in the empowerment initiative.

In full concert with the board, the new general superintendent, Deborah M. McGriff, moved to learn from Detroit's past and to open dialogue, mend fences, create harmony, and share the decentralization experiences she gained in New York City, Cambridge, and Milwaukee.

First, empowerment, diversity, and choice objectives were included in the district's strategic plan, Design for Excellence. Next, the board made all schools eligible for empowerment and advocated one accountability system for schools. Meetings were held with union members and a study by Arthur Andersen was initiated to consolidate and refine the board's empowerment policies. Finally, the superintendent appointed a liaison for empowerment.

Despite these efforts and the "Memorandum of Understanding," the Detroit Federation of Teachers' and the Organization of School Administrators and Supervisors' presidents issued an embargo on empowerment. This action virtually blocks all progress.

Before the end of the 1991-92 school year, nearly all Detroit Public Schools' unions went on record against this new definition of empowerment. One of these unions, the Organization of School Administrators and Supervisors, indicated in its newsletters that administrators and supervisors were deeply concerned about the lack of clarity regarding the:

- Definition and merit of empowerment
- Procedure for removing a school from empowerment status
- Equity in handling requisitions and maintenance requests for all schools
- Possibility of accountability linked to pay for performance
- "Out-sourcing" or privatization of members' and colleagues' work
- Transfers of staff into and out of empowered schools
- Loss of jobs for union members

Moreover, despite more than 20 years of decentralization efforts, some parents still were skeptical of the benefits that this new version of decentralization might bring. At public and private meetings with the general superintendent, parents and community members objected to empowerment because they had not received enough information to make an informed decision. Community members also assumed that empowered schools were "elitist" and had access to more resources than traditional neighborhood schools.

Near the end of the school year, the Coalition of Unions of Detroit Public Schools, in conjunction with the Metropolitan Detroit AFL-CIO, produced a document called "Educational Empowerment...Which Choice is Best for our Kids?...Flawed Empowerment." The Coalition claimed that, through the empowerment program:

- Employees were treated more like the enemy than as partners
- The board had abdicated its statutory responsibility to govern the schools and serve as the exclusive negotiator with unions
- The per-pupil allocation ignored fixed-cost disparities and had the potential to result in violations of reduced revenue—especially designated state and federal funds
- Current school employees would be displaced through out-sourcing
- Schools that were not performing well would be closed rather than targeted for positive intervention strategies

As a result of this history and the desire to make decentralization work, the general superintendent created an Office of Empowerment, Diversity, and Choice, which is led by an interim assistant superintendent.

Unfortunately, the 1992-93 school year began with a four-week strike—from August 27 through September 28, 1992—by the 10,500 members of the Detroit Federation of Teachers. However, the resulting contract gave Empowered Schools the power to waive specific provisions of the contract if 75 percent of the teachers in a school agreed. The contract also reaffirmed the original "Memorandum of Understanding: Empowerment and Schools of Choice" and the district's objective to increase the number of empowered schools to 45.

Lessons Learned

Decentralization in Detroit has been a rocky road, cluttered with short-lived pilot projects. If the power and benefits of decentralization are to contribute to systemic change in the school district, many changes must occur. Advocates of decentralization must avoid:

- Threats of punishment, legislation, and mandates as facilitators of decentralization by modeling the cooperation, coordination, and collaboration needed to develop the ownership of all key stakeholders

- The perception of elitism by ensuring that all schools are able to participate on an equal basis and by providing an equitable distribution of human and financial resources for all change initiatives
- Expecting changes in school governance and structure to transform schools by insisting that these changes be simultaneously combined with curriculum innovations, public school choice, other school improvement initiatives, rewards, incentives, and accountability
- Delegating inappropriate authority to local schools by placing decision-making authority at the appropriate level of the organization
- Promoting decentralization as a panacea and quick fix for the problems of urban education by realizing that there is no one best system and that change requires a three- to five-year time perspective
- The expectation that decentralization will be readily accepted by adopting change management strategies that overcome resistance and promote ownership
- Implementing local school decision-making without simultaneously transforming central and area offices into service units

Formulating these lessons is easier than generating the political will necessary to ensure that decentralization has the opportunity to contribute to the systemic transformation of the Detroit Public Schools. I believe that the community, parents, and educators of Detroit will accept and meet this challenge. We will become the first large urban school district to successfully educate all of its students.

■

Deborah McGriff is the first female superintendent in the history of the Detroit Public Schools. She has been a participant observer in decentralization efforts since 1970. Before coming to Detroit, she was a teacher in New York City, the first female assistant superintendent in Cambridge, MA, and the first female deputy superintendent in Milwaukee, WI. Her entire career has been dedicated to the pursuit of excellence and equity in urban education.

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Regional Educational Laboratory
1900 Spring Road, Suite 300
Oak Brook, IL 60521-1480
Telephone: (708) 571-4700
FAX: (708) 571-4716
GTE: ncrel.lab

Jeri Nowakowski, *Executive Director*
Deanna H. Durrett, *Regional Policy Information Center (RPIC) Director*
Nancy Fulford, *Editor*
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