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ABSTRACT

In 1989, New Zealand implemented a decentralized education system centered on school-based management. Outcomes of decentralization include higher workloads at the school level, more structural opportunities for parental voice, and resource discrepancies between schools in low- and high-income areas. This paper describes and analyzes the changes that have occurred in New Zealand education since decentralization in the four following areas--curriculum and instruction, regulations and accountability, funding, and governance. Data were obtained from surveys of board members and elementary-school principals and teachers conducted in late 1989, 1990, 1991, and 1993. The New Zealand experience offers the following lessons: (1) from the beginning, designers of school-site management must identify and counter potential problems related to funding formulae, structures, roles, and processes of governance; (2) school-site management alone will not solve problems of unequal educational provision, improve the overali quality of education, or enable the central agency to abandon a planning function; (3) accountability structures and sanctions alone are insufficient means for achieving desired goals; (4) decentralization is likely to make education more politicized, especially if some of the inherent tensions are not addressed in the design and unrealistic results are promised; and (5) school-site management in a positive context is rewarding, and is probably as useful a vehicle for educational administration as any other strategy yet attempted. Contains approximately 14 references. (LMI)

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comments welcome

SCHOOL-SITE MANAGEMENT -

SOME LESSONS FROM NEW ZEALAND

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INTRODUCTION

One of the dominant refrains of contemporary education policy and the education reform literature in many Western countries is a belief in the value of local decisionmaking. The principle that those most affected by a decision should be involved in its making is uttered in policies and policy suggestions which are otherwise polar opposites in their diagnosis of the faults in the existing system, and the relevant cure (or, sometimes, cures). So the specific nature of local decisionmaking changes according to the context in which it is introduced - and likewise its value.

Offering 'some lessons from New Zealand' may therefore seem presumptuous. But there are several reasons why the New Zealand experience of school-site management is particularly relevant to researchers, policymakers, and policy informers from other countries.

(1) New Zealand has now had the longest experience of an what one might call a baldly decentralized system revolving around school-site management. There are no intervening layers of support, accountability, or control between individual schools and central government funding, review, and policy agencies. This provides some means of gauging what kind of support schools in fact need, and what effects are experienced both within schools and without as a result of this degree of freedom from central or bureaucratic control. Indeed, it enables us to explore what kind of freedom schools have under decentralization. Do regulations disappear, or do they take new form? Which regulations really matter?

(2) However, in any decentralized education system, one price of individual institutional freedom is accountability. The New Zealand experience raises some substantial questions about the reality of what may seem on paper to provide clear incentives and sanctions.

(3) The other price in New Zealand, as elsewhere, has been higher workloads at the school level, and often the priority of administrative and building maintenance demands in those workloads at the expense of the kind of attention to curriculum and pedagogy that many expected.

(4) New Zealand has given parents both school choice (within the state system), and a central voice in school-site administration by giving them majority power on the school boards which are the legal entities responsible for schools.
Parental voice at school level does not necessarily lead to more parental choice.

(5) Despite an overall reform goal of improving the education results of minority groups and those from poor homes, and the operationalization of this goal in funding pools and school charters,(the joint framework for school development and accountability to government), provision for such groups has not been substantially improved since decentralization began in 1989. Existing resource discrepancies between schools serving students in low socio-economic areas, or low proportions of

the majority population (the two overlap) have only widened. The kinds of funding formulae and accountability mechanisms which have accompanied New Zealand decentralization have not been able to either close this gap, or address it adequately.

(6) Finally, it is unlikely that we will be able to externally evaluate the effects of New Zealand decentralization on student performance: no system wide standardised measurements are available, and those that were in common use have since been updated; new assessments are in the wing. This is often the case with other decentralizing systems: comparable before and after data on student outcomes is the exception rather than the rule. Hannaway (1995) concludes from the available research literature that school-based management alone has little improving effect on student achievement.

One can also add the corolllary: nor does the evidence show that it has a negative effect on student achievement. As an 'intervention' to boost student outcomes, it may be neutral in its effects, or show minor gains which may or may not emerge clearly in external measurements. New Zealand teachers were beginning to report some minor improvements by the fourth year of decentralization. Their perception of gains in the quality of the children's learning in their classroom was associated with their making major changes in their own teaching - changes that varied widely from increasing computer use or Maori language use to putting more emphasis on basic skills (Wylie 1994, p 128).

The lack of clear evidence that decentralization improves children's learning means that its rationale for adoption needs to rest on other grounds, and that it should not be relied on as the single panacea for perceived problems of inadequate standards or inequality of provision. On its own, and left alone, decentralization or school-based management will yield no great change or rewards. A cost-benefit analysis comparing it to other interventions would probably find it one of the more expensive forms of educational intervention, though shifting time and financial costs from government (whether local or national) to school level. What makes school-based management more or less productive is the context in which it is placed, including its adequate resourcing, and its linkage with other structures of support and stimulus. The New Zealand context in which school-site management came into being and its actual realization give some insight into what is possible with school-site autonomy/responsibility, as well as what should not be expected of a bald decentralization that offers little external stimulus and support.

This paper will describe and analyse changes in four main aspects which come into any major educational policy: curriculum and instruction; regulations and accountability; funding; and governance. The main source of material on the changes is the author's iterative postal surveys of a 10.5% national sample of elementary schools carried out in late 1989 (5 months after the school boards were elected), 1990, 1991 and 1993. At each of these schools the principal and randomly selected teachers and trustees (board members) were included, and a 1 in 4 random sample of parents was surveyed at a representative sub-sample of 26 of the 239 schools. Material from other New Zealand research studies is also used.

BEFORE DECENTRALIZATION

Curriculum and Instruction

Schools in New Zealand enjoyed considerable latitude over curriculum and instructional approaches and their choice of curriculum resources. The national curriulum gave guidance, but without any specifications at elementary level, and with a choice of topic areas at secondary level. Assessment was internal and mainly diagnostic or formative within elementary schools; the national examinations at secondary school level were curriculum-linked rather than the kind of standardised tests so prevalent in the United States. While the government-supported NZ Council for Educational Research developed standardised tests in some curriculum and skills areas which were widely used, there were no private companies with a major role in assessment.

The state supplied free curriculum resources for elementary reading and mathematics programmes, using frameworks developed by the department of education working with teacher advisors. These programmes, *Ready to read*, and *Beginning School Mathematics* won wide acceptance during extensive trialling in schools. Such trials can also be seen as a form of staff development. These programmes have won New Zealand a reputation abroad as a source of activity-based, child-centred curricular and instructional approaches.

Regulations and Accountability

Government regulations were not as detailed or prolific as those commonly found in the Unitd States. For example, while the length of the school year was set, the length of the school day, and its structure, was not. Extra resourcing for schools serving low-income communities was in the form of staff: how they were used was up to the schools. This applied even in the case of the 1:20 staff ratio policy which put additional staff into such schools and did specify that they were not to be used to create new classes: many schools did exactly that, and kept the staff (McDonald et al 1990).

Possibly the most irksome regulations were not regulations as such, but decisions made outside the school relating to staffing and property entitlements. Staffing increased in steps (though the introduction of part-time appointments gave some flexibility). The domain of capital works, repairs and equipment provided the most vexing narratives of equipment supplied which was not that needed, or supplied too late for it to be used; repairs that came when the structure was beyond repair, and buildings which came too late, but came anyway.

Schools were legally obliged to take all children living near them. Children could be taken at other schools if they had space. Secondary schools were zoned, with those

living within the zones having attendance rights. Parental choice of existing state schools therefore existed for those who wanted to attend a school whose roll was not full, and who could provide transport.

Regular inspections were made of schools, and principals could be reminded of areas needing improvement. Otherwise there was no clear mechanisms for accountability as far as meeting standards or regulatory requirements was concerned.

Funding

School funding came from national government money. School fees - or 'donations' - had voluntary legal status. They were usually nominal - often around NZ$20 a child. Fundraising to provide additional curricular resources or providing halls and swimming-pools occurred through events organized by Parent-Teacher associations at each school, and drew on the support of local communities. Voluntary labour was frequently given by parents and other local community members. However, local community property rates (or taxes) were not used to fund schools.

School funding was based on historical cost, roll size and nationally set staff:student ratios which were more generous for small rural schools than larger schools, and more generous for secondary than elementary schools. Money for capital works and repairs was allocated for elementary schools by the local Education Board, and for secondary schools by the Department of Education.

There were no separate funding streams for at-risk children (such as the US Chapter 1 or Headstart). Some 70 schools in low income areas received additional staffing, which they could use as they pleased. Children with special needs were usually in special schools, though their integration into mainstream classes had begun, supported by resources in the form of teacher aides - again, in the form of staffing rather than money, but staffing which could be used with some latitude.

One major difference from the US is that few philanthropic organizations exist in New Zealand, and the private sector has not been a major source of funds for innovation.

Governance

Before the reforms, each of the 2361 primary and intermediate schools had a school committee of 5 to 9 people, depending on the size of its roll. School committees were elected from and by those local householders and parents of pupils who showed up at the school's annual general meeting. These committees were mainly concerned with property maintenance, including the appointment of cleaners, and fundraising. The 315 secondary schools had boards of governors with a minimum of nine and a maximum of twelve members, most elected by parents of children attending the school, but with designated representatives from the local city or borough council, local feeder schools, and the local Education Board. There were ten Education Boards, consisting of elected members (usually former school committee members)

and representatives from local government, and their professional staff. The boards were responsible for making primary school appointments, inspecting schools (a dual function which also provided people in schools with informal support and external stimulus, and was used in some boards to foster instructional change on a board-wide basis by providing teacher development, and resources, including regular newsletters carrying examples, suggestions, and summaries of relevant research), grading teachers, providing materials, and carrying out maintenance and repairs. Regional levels of the Department of Education provided a parallel but more limited service for secondary schools.

The Education Boards were the last remaining tie with the provincial school system of the nineteenth century. One of the main reasons for removing education from provincial control in New Zealand had been the disparity of provision evident in different provinces. This concern that children should have equal opportunities for education has been a marked refrain in New Zealand educational policy, albeit subject to very different understandings and interpretations in different historical periods (Renwick 1986).

Rumbles of dissatisfaction were periodically made about the boards and the regional offices. Many secondary schools bypassed the latter and used Department of Education national office contacts. Calls to give school committees some real say and less of a 'rubber stamp' role, and open schools more to their communities had been heard since the Education Development Conference of 1975 which involved thousands of New Zealanders in discussion groups. That conference also called for more community involvement in national educational policymaking.

The Department of Education provided funding, curriculum development, ran the national secondary examinations, planned teacher workforce needs and thus places at colleges of education, and plotted the need for new schools in relation to population trends. It also provided professional support, and policymaking. Teacher unions and other professional groups were usually consulted during policymaking, and often drawn into joint working parties: a gradual and inclusive approach to policymaking which usually, but not always, ensured a consensus by its completion. When people talked about 'the educational family', it was this interweaving of 'chalkface' with bureaucrats, often themselves ex-teachers, and this sense of a common mission they referred to. While there were certainly areas of contention, (such as the norm-referencing of the important School Certificate examination, and its placement at the end of the third year of secondary school, when four or five years of secondary school was becoming the norm for white New Zealanders), the doors opened both ways between schools and their local inspectors, between schools and bureaucrats responsible for policymaking, curriculum development and assessment, and between the bureaucrats in these different areas.

Treasury bureaucrats published a volume of critique of the New Zealand educational system, using educational research material on its shortcomings in addressing the needs of at-risk groups, as a rationale for arguing for school choice, decentralization, vouchers, and increased private contributions to education.[1] Te inclusive approach to the development of educational policy as well as curriculum was diagnosed as 'capture' of central government by educators (NZ Treasury 1987).

However, the New Zealand public showed more concern about the level of educational resourcing, not its content. The four main problems identified in a November 1987 public opinion poll were: shortage of funds, too few teachers, inadequate buildings, and inadequate equipment (Heylen 1987).

Another national opinion poll conducted for the Department of Education just before the inception of decentralization found 15% of elementary school parents and 26% of secondary school parents, dissatisfied with the current level of involvement parents could have with their child's school (Heylen 1989). By overseas standards, parental contact with schools was already high before decentralization. Half the teachers in the baseline 1989 national survey of the effects of the reform had some parent help in their classrooms; and a 75% or better parent attendance rate at parent-teacher evenings to discuss children's progress was normal. Around 80% of the parents surveyed were satisfied with their contact with their child's teacher.

THE DECENTRALIZATION CHANGES

At the Centre

The New Zealand decentralization simultaneously changed school governance and split the Department of Education into 5 new central government agencies.[2] The new Ministry of Education, which came into being on 1 October 1989, became the funding agency, and provider of policy advice to the Minister of Education and the two newly created Associate Ministers. Thus both the bureaucratic orientation as well as functions were changed. The change in orientation reflected wider changes which were made to the public sector as a whole, cutting public sector involvement in a number of areas (creating 'state-owned enterprises' that were later privatized), and emphasizing a contractual relationship between bureaucrats and the Ministers which became the main organ of their public accountability.

The Education Review Office was set up to monitor schools' performance, initially against the terms of their individual charters rather than any predetermined national or age related attainments, and in a two-three year cycle of visits by multi-disciplinary teams, including principals of other schools, and community representatives.

The National Education Qualifications Authority was created to take charge of the national examinations framework at secondary and post-secondary levels. Psychologists and others working with special needs children were reformed into the Special Education Service. This was initially fully centrally funded, with the intention to move it to at least 50% funding through purchase of its services by schools (if they chose) from their individual grants. The Advisory service, which provided support and in-service training, was shifted to colleges of education, with a similar goal of 'contestibility' in view.

A small Parent Advocacy Council was set up to provide parents who were unhappy about board decisions at their child's school with a mediation service. The Council could also represent parental concerns voiced to it about national policy.

The network of Community Education Forums to provide a common ground for

different sectors and schools within the same geographic area, and to promote understanding of key educational issues amongst the public did not eventuate, though several one-off forums were funded by government where the actions of one school were opposed by others in the area.

The proposed Education Advisory group to the Minister, whose role was to provide independent analysis of policy and which was to be made up of people with substantial community, business, and educational expertise, did not eventuate.

In schools

At school level, decentralization meant that committees and boards of governors were replaced with boards of trustees, consisting of five parents elected by other parents, the principal, a staff representative elected by all staff, and in secondary schools, a student representative. Up to four others could be co-opted by the board to provide additional expertise, or - reflecting the value placed on social equality[3] - to provide gender, ethnic or class 'balance'. Their powers, and, responsibilities, were more wide ranging than the bodies they replaced. They were responsible for allocating and managing the school's budget, consisting of its operational grant and any locally raised funds, for appointments and dismissals, including the principal, and for the general performance of the school, and maintenance of its buildings and grounds. Boards were to supply an annual audited account to the Ministry of Education to ensure their ongoing funding.

School charters were also to be central to school funding, and their ability to be held to account. They provided a record of the school's particular character, described the school community, and set out its mission statement and operational goals in different areas. There were some mandatory sections, mainly on curriculum, Treaty of Waitangi[4] recognition, and meeting the needs of pupils from previously disadvantaged groups. School charters were to be drawn up by each school's board of trustees, after extensive consultation with their school community. They were to be vetted by the Ministry of Education to ensure they covered the manadatory sections, and had nothing contrary to regulations, curriculum frameworks and reform goals in other sections. Continued funding was to depend on whether the charter met the necessary standards, though these were not specified in detail. Schools were also to regularly update their charters and supply evidence of how they had met their own goals.

The charters were to be a three-way document - reflecting both the school's sense of accountability to its community, and providing a rather tighter contract between the school and the Ministry of Education. In return, the government would provide adequate government resourcing for the school-originated outcomes which were approved by the Ministry of Education. Government retreated from this radical underwriting role in early 1990. This unilateral change to the charter, not long after the first operational grants to schools had had to be redone because the original estimates were below many schools' budgets for their first year as self-managing units, had an unintended 'consciousness-raising' effect on school trustees' perception of their role, and their relations with government. It made them wary of government power,

and careful in their phrasing of any school documents. Property occupancy documents, for example, were not signed by most schools until they had secured agreement that major capital works and outstanding maintenance repairs (of which there was a great deal) were not their responsibility.

After the first estimates based on averaged costs were greeted with outcry - which received much media attention - individual school funding was based on historical costs, as they could be estimated between school and Ministry analyses of costs for each budget area. Staffing remained as before, though elementary schools with teaching principals were given extra funding for some part-time teaching hours to allow them to hire replacements while they dealt with the new administrative work. While the policy model indicated that teacher salaries would go into school's budgets, the working party[5] dealing with this advised against doing so until further research had been done to model its likely effects on schools of different size, location, and proportions of experienced staff. This advice was accepted.

An extensive (and expensive) media campaign was run before the first trustees' election in May 1989, and most schools had a good selection of candidates. Introductory training was provided by seminars, often at a general level. The Government also provided some money to fund the setting up of a new national body for school trustees, the NZ School Trustees Association (NZSTA) and contracted with it to provide further training for the pioneer trustees.

Media interest in decentralization was high, and has remained high.

VISIBLE EFFECTS AND POLICY CHANGES BY THE SIXTH YEAR OF THE REFORMS

Curriculum and Instruction

Decentralization in New Zealand occurred on the grounds of an already established national curriculum. By law, boards must continue to operate within the curriculum framework. A general curriculum framework (drawing on a wide-ranging curriculum review in the mid 1980s which involved extensive community consultation) has been drawn up, and revisions to specific curriculum areas are in process, starting with mathematics and science. These revisions have been designed by short-term working parties of subject experts chosen by the Minister of Education. Schools are invited to tender to work on particular aspects as a form of teacher development and an encouragement of innovation which could then be disseminated to others as an example of good practice. The number of schools involved is quite small, and no overall evaluation of the effectiveness of this approach has yet been done.

Support for the new Curriculum Framework was generally high amongst principals, teachers and trustees surveyed in 1993, and was one of the two main reasons given by the 92% of teachers who said their curriculum had changed in the past year. Meeting children's needs was the other (both 64% of the teachers responding to the survey[6]).In contrast, charters spurred change for only 32% of the teachers, and

meeting parental interest, 13%. However, charters generally reflected existing practice at the time of the reforms rather than setting new goals. Dissatisfaction with curriculum was not widespread amongst the general public. Parental satisfaction with the quality of their child's education has stayed around 80% for every round of the survey, and the main reasons for dissatisfaction are large class sizes and poor standard of the child's work, not curriculum content (Wylie 1995, p 92-93).

By 1993 74% of the teachers responding to the survey reported an increase in their use of assessment. There was little change in the tools they used, with two interesting exceptions: an increase in the use of profiles, a previous national policy initiative circulating in many schools in draft form at the time of the reforms, and an increase in (parentally popular) spelling tests between the ages of 6 - 8 years.

One reason for lack of school-initiated change in assessment is likely to be work in train at the national level to develop item resource banks at transition points within the elementary school, and to develop standard authentic assessment tasks for periodic national monitoring of achievement levels within a sample of schools (Irving 1994).

These all indicate that external policy remains critical to curriculum and assessment change in decentralised classrooms, where there has been a history of curriculum formation or promotion at the government level to which schools are accountable.

Although the NZ curriculum framework is broad, and one of the reasons for the reforms was to encourage innovation, there has been little evidence of such innovation unless it has received external funding additional to the normal school funds.

The one exception to this in New Zealand is the development of Maori immersion schools, *kura kaupapa maori*. There the initial willingness to develop curriculum and appropriate resource materials is rapidly burning out, and those involved are putting what pressure they can on government to provide adequate resourcing to provide the same kind of materials and development which are taken for granted for the mainstream curriculum.

Funding

School operational grants in 1993 were generally somewhat lower than they were in 1990, the first year for school-based budget management. Some new areas of responsibility had been added for schools to cover from their existing grants, most notably the payment for substitute teachers employed for less than 8 days. When the uneven impact of this on schools was evident, creating budget difficulties for some, the Ministry response was to stop several substitute pool schemes in low income areas which had historically had great difficulty attracting suitable substitutes - and continue to do so - and redistribute this small amount across all schools' operational grants.

The grants were not inflation-indexed, and school costs rose rather more than the low inflation rate which is the driver of New Zealand's economic policy. Just over 30% of principals in the 1993 survey thought their school's government funding was adequate. No new money went to schools until the 1994 Budget, when the rising feeling at school level that the grants were becoming unrealistic for many (and producing research results and media stories) resulted in the announcement of a 4%

increase. Most of this is linked to the new curriculum framework, providing teacher development. Since school budgets include teacher development, this may enable some reallocation of funds to meet other operating needs.

Eighty-four percent of the principals responding to the 1993 survey applied for Ministry funding additional to their school grant; 70% received some. In 1993, separate funding pools covered special needs students (for which 60% of the survey sample schools applied), learning assistance allowance (56%), equity grants (36%), financial assistance scheme for capital works, requiring the school to match Ministry funding (32%), and the English as a Second language support scheme (17%). Schools serving low income communities were the most likely to apply for special needs and learning assistance allowance - a useful indicator of difference in student populations. But althought the equity grants were designed for such schools, 20% of those sample schools which would have been eligible did not apply for them.

To make applications to these different funding pools took time, and skill. School administrative workloads were high, and remained high - more media stories. The results did not always seem fair in terms of comparative school need. The Ministry of Education used census mesh-block data to calculate individual school socio-economic status, and divided all schools into deciles. This ranking was then used to target the existing equity funding only to those schools which fell into the lowest 3 deciles. When this was announced in late 1994 (when most schools would have drawn up their 1995 budgets), it caused an outcry from the many schools who would no longer have access to this funding (Alliance 1995). While some questioned the appropriateness of using 1991 census data in 1994, given high population mobility, and some questioned particular items used (such as house crowding, ethnic group; income level and proportion in the mesh-blocks covered by the school's families of single parents and those receiving unemployment benefit), others have questioned the narrowness of this targeted approach, and many have pointed out that while social inequality has increased dramatically in the last decade of economic, government, and social reform, and gaps between schools serving low income communities and others have widened with a growing dependence on school fundraising and fees (Gordon 1994, Wylie 1994), the level of equity funding has not. In strict terms, this is no longer true. The equity fund will increase in 1996 - but only by withdrawing the staffing support formerly given to schools in low income areas and pouring it into the contestable pool. Equally, support for Maori education has come through reallocation and more tightly targeting of existing pools. There has been no change to the basic funding formula. One can speculate as to likely reasons. Government spending in New Zealand has been progressively cut over the last decade, and spending on social services either capped or shaved (except for social security benefits, whose numbers continue to rise in reflection of now systemic unemployment). Thus a substantial increase in government funding of education is extremely unlikely. Yet the level of school funding is widely seen as inadequate already, and to really make a difference to the funding of schools serving low-income children, those most at-risk, and those with the lowest levels of educational achievement, would mean cutting money from many other schools. This would cause a howl of protest and political pressure: and there are more middle class electorates than there are low-income.

Decentralization and even the use of technical formulae such as the one to be used for equity funding do not prevent the 'squeaky wheel' greater access to resources which was given as a rationale for the reforms. Nor do they resolve long standing inequities - even where school funding is not dependent on local property taxes or school fees. Unless there is a political will, and the policy design at the start of any systemic school-based management is based on the use of funding to bridge inequality (albeit caused by factors beyond education), then it becomes increasingly difficult to tackle inequalities in educational provision by changing the formulae and level of school grants.

Private sector funding has increased, but it is not targeted to schools in poor areas. A few corporations provide substantial sponsorship to a few individual schools, or support initial investment in technology. One of the largest schemes is the Telecom payment of 5% of domestic phone bill amounts of those individuals who nominate a particular school. Most of these schools, and the larger phone bills, are not in low income areas. The other large schemes are run by computer companies, swapping supermarket dockets for computers if the dockets reach a certain total. Again, this tends not to favour the low income schools. There has been no growth in philanthropic organizations, and no development of philanthropic project money to support or sustain innovation.

Some schools are now adding to their income by taking fee-paying foreign students, mainly from Asia. Again, these schools tend not to be those in low income areas.

The growth in private support of education comes from parents' pockets, and local fundraising efforts. The average parental estimate of their spending on their child's education rose from $187 in 1991 to $304 in 1993, an increase of 61%. Over half the survey schools raised their school fees between 1990 and 1993; half the remaining were small schools which had no school fees (mainly because their per student funding has been higher, though this is about the change). School fees remain legally voluntary, though several schools have tried to turn them into a fee for materials costs. Although the amount raised by schools increased between 1989 and 1991, 1993 figures were much the same as 1991, indicating a possible plateau or limit on school ability to raise funds - even though 37% of the principals said they had increased their fundraising effort.

Regulations and Accountability

The laws and regulations which cover schools still fill a chunky volume when they are collected together, as NZSTA has done for schools. Some of these are specific to education, such as the obligation on boards to adhere to the National Instructional Guidelines, and the National Education Guidelines (colloquially known as the NIGs and NAGs). Some arise from general legislation, such as environmental and employment law. Certainly decentralization has not reduced the overall density of the regulatory framework within which schools operate: in some cases, it has increased it - for example, in the case of employment law, or the obligations under the Public Finance Act 1989 to provide evidence of performance to the Education Review Office

and in annual reports to parents. And a trial of statements of service performance which would cast such reports in the public service format of achieved goals and expenditure per goal is underway. Such a format is not popular with principals.

Note that these requirements to meet external standards of board activity and reporting do not specify classroom processes. The latitide which existed before decentralization remains. What is therefore important about the New Zealand situation is that a comparatively lightly regulated system by international standards does not float free with school-based management.[7]

But one cannot deduce the weight of regulations from their number. In the 1994 school sector performance report made by the Minister of Education to Parliament as part of his Ministry's accountability requirements under the 1989 Public Finance Act, the Education Review Office reports collated data from its audits that indicates, for example, that nearly half the schools audited in the last quarter of 1993 did not provide 'satisfactory health education in terms of the syllabus'(Ministry of Education 1994, p 48); that a third of schools audited in the first half of 1993 'had not determined how well they had achieved [the National Education Guidelines], and had not reported regularly to the community' (ibid, p 49), that 66% of boards audited in 1993 had 'still not met all of their asset management requirements' (ibid, p. 52), and that 84% of boards audited in 1993 'had not met at least one of their specific responsibilities as employers' (ibid, p. 51).

Only 12 of the 213 schools included in the Education Review Office's summary of its assurance audits confirmed 1/10/1993 to 31/12/1993 were identified as giving such cause for concern that ERO would undertake additional reviews ('discretionary assurance audits'). Only 3 of these 213 schools 'satisfied the Office that all contractual obligations and undertakings had been met.' (ERO 1994: 2.) One gathers from this that although data is gathered on compliance, lack of 100% compliance (or even less) carries no sanctions.

What are the sanctions that can be applied by government in a baldly decentralized system? The Education Review Office has insisted on making public its reports on state schools, and in some areas these are published in full in local newspapers. Other newspapers use excerpts. While this fits with a market accountability model based on the assumption of parental choice of school (rather than school choice of student, as is more often the case), it does not fit with the motivational and school improvement literature (a literature which is extremely vexing to those who expect change to be more linear and more easily accomplished in schools). No study has yet been done in New Zealand on the effect of such publication on parental impressions of schools, or links with changes in school policies, practices, and rolls.

Three other sanctions are available: cutting funding, dismissing school boards, or closing schools. In New Zealand, the first sanction has been used in the form of a warning to those few schools which had not provided audited 1991 accounts by 1993 that their next quarter's funding would be held back until those accounts were received. This brought the accounts in; the funding flow did not cease. There has been no mention of decreasing funding because schools are not meeting their requirements as audited by the Education Review Office. This would be seen as counterproductive; those that would miss out are the students. This raises questions about the

applicability of private sector models in education.

There have been fewer than 10 cases where the Minister of Education has dismissed boards and appointed commissioners, usually because of seemingly insolvable conflict among board members, between board and staff, or between board and community.

School closure has only been threatened once, at the end of 1994, in the very same low income school serving Maori and Pacific Island students that was one of the main inspirations for decentralization for the former Minister of Education because he felt powerless to resolve its problems. The Education Review Office judged that the board's creation of a Maori immersion school-within-a-school had led to unsatisfactory teaching standards, and a siphoning of (limited) resources to this goal, at the expense of other students. It took over half a year before any action was taken on the report. A commissioner has been appointed to the school to encourage solutions, but also to assess the school's capacity for improvement. The Education Review Office itself is not responsible for taking action; that is the domain of the Ministry of Education, informed by Education Review Office reports. Some questions have been raised about the value of this segmentation,[8] but little is known publically about what effect, if any, it has had on schools experiencing difficulties.

The Ministry of Education has recently annouced the closure of some small rural schools, after some years of encouragement of amalgamations yielded only a handful of volunteers. But these closures have been inspired by fiscal pressures on the education budget rather than school failure to meet performance standards.

The real weight of the sanctions available to government for schools which do not meet government and legal requirements is thus rather less than it might initially appear.

People in schools are not unaware of this. Elementary principals were asked in the 1993 survey what their attitude was to Ministry of Education or Education Review Office deadlines for the receipt of information, including funding applications. Only 34% of the principals responding said they always met such deadlines. Another 34% said they met most of them. Twenty-seven percent said the central deadlines were met if the school thought it was important, and 17% met them if they had time.

The 'deregulation' of enrolment requirements has become problematic with the inability of parents in inncer-city middle class areas not only to choose their child's school, but to have access to their nearest school. A member of the (conservative) Government has now taken a bill to Parliament calling for the return of school zoning to ensure that the right of children to attend their nearest school is returned.

While in some areas the overcrowding of schools may be the result of insufficient planning on the part of central government (raising questions about the operations of the Ministry's property section), in other areas school enrolment policies are more clearly implicated. Families changing location during the school year also face problems. The private member's bill had wide public and political support.

The enrolment policies of schools often reflect both their perceived level of competition with other schools (where rolls are not full), and the local history. Some areas have deliberately co-operated on the design of their catchment zones, though this has not prevented the loss of higher-income students from schools in poor areas (Thrupp and Waslander, forthcoming). After decentralization 1990 was the only year

when class differentials between secondary schools did not widen, lessening the 'school mix' which has been identified as a critical factor in school success. This was the sole time that random balloting was mandatory for any places not taken by students in the catchment areas. The incoming government abolished this requirement.

Governance

The assigning of greater responsibilities to a joint parent-staff board, and thus to the school principal and staff has not caused the conflict or parochialism that some predicted. At any one time, around 15% of schools do experience problems in relations between the board and principal. Around the same number would be experiencing some difficulty in their relation with government agencies. But interyear analysis of the survey data shows that it is not always the same schools which experience problems relating to governance. Two conclusions can be drawn from this: such problems are probably to be expected in such relationships - and such problems are usually resolvable. Outside support has come from teacher unions, often working with the NZ School Trustees' Association field officers. Government funding for the latter was stopped for the 1995 year, and the service was been withdrawn. A feasibility analysis of its continuation relying on financial contributions from schools concluded that it would not be viable.

In the run-up to the first elections, efforts were made by government to counter any tendency to parochialism and the adoption of confrontational attitudes. 'Partnership' was the ruling theme, repeated constantly; and one reason for the extensive media campaign was to encourage as many different people to stand for election as possible. There are anecdotal reports of schools where boards have very narrow approaches to their work, and it is clear from a number of legal cases taken by principals that some boards adopt a very confrontational and authoritarian attitude to their role as employer of school staff. But these are the exception rather than the rule.

On the whole, trustees appear to regard themselves as members of a team which includes staff; and to be there to support staff in their professional work of teaching children (their own included). Children supply the purpose for their work, rather than the exercise of power; and this purpose is one that is shared by school staff.

Trustees generally trust school staff, and accept the role of oversight rather than 'hands-on' classroom involvement. Their main activities are financial management, property maintenance, and day to day management: a set of pre-occupations much the same as those of the school committees they replaced, though they take place in a more informed environment, and with the awareness of other areas of school life which trustees are responsible for. The competition between responsibilies for the scarce resource of time is the main barrier to the kind of school development and planning which the architects of decentralization envisaged. Bear in mind that the quality of most schools was not an issue for parents, and those who represent them on boards. Preservation of perceived quality has been a prime concern for many trustees, rather than change.

The problematic areas of school-based governance are school leadership, lack of

external support, and relations with central government.

Principals have high and sometimes conflicting workloads. In the 1993 survey, there were several indications that this is distancing them from their staff, and the work of the school: principals were no longer a major source of teachers' professional advice, a fifth of the responding teachers reported deterioration in their relation to the principal which they attributed to the reforms, and it was the relationship between teachers and principals that showed the highest incidence of problems - as reported by teachers; principals tend to be much more sanguine. Nonetheless, they were growing tired of their continuing high workloads. Principal turnover has been about 40% since 1989; there is now some evidence emerging that it is becoming harder to fill principalships, and that senior teaching staff are losing interest in promotion.

Schools can be isolated workplaces. Most staff training since the reforms has taken place within schools. Around 15% shared ideas and information with staff in other local schools - the preferred opton for just over half the teachers responding to the 1993 survey. While trustees are confident that they can resolve the issues which emerge in their work (other than finance), they too would like more training and support.

These aspects of school governance show signs of stretch, and fray. But they have been eclipsed in the public eye by the ongoing controversy of whether teacher salaries should be included in schools' operating grants, or not. The majority of school trustees, teachers and principals oppose the inclusion sought by government, and have not been persuaded by government arguments, regulation, or a recent pilot study. Government disinclination to give weight to school-site views is ironic in view of the very principle underpinning school-site management that those who should take responsibility for decisionmaking are those with site knowledge, those who will be most affected. Yet decentralization has also made it difficult for the government to move directly to impose what is known as 'bulk funding'. While it did include principal and senior staff salaries in the school grant in 1993, it did so at their actual level, rather than the average level proposed.

Why do trustees and teachers oppose bulk funding? Why do they resist what seems to many reform advocates the final piece in the jigsaw, the extension of their decisonmaking autonomy over 100% of the government resources going into a school, instead of the 20% or so which covers operational spending? After all, school-site management is now taken for granted, and those in schools do enjoy the tangible autonomy they have been granted.

The calculations for the pilot scheme of bulk funding beginning in 1992 showed most schools that they would be losers under the average funding formula (74 schools, all but 4 'winners' volunteered). The current English experience of average-based salary funding has shown rising class sizes, teacher redundancy, and loss of experienced teachers; these effects are known in New Zealand. Many New Zealand schools already face constant juggling of their government grant between competing priorities. Extending their decisionmaking powers does not seem to them to provide an improvement: merely to extend the hard choices they must make.

In addition, school trustees conceive of themselves as volunteers, not public servants, or bureaucrats. Their relationship with the government is not cast in the same

contractual mode as that between the ministers and government agencies, or as it has been for part of NZ School Trustees' Association activities (to the concern of many trustees, who saw the national office of NZSTA taking a more obedient stance to goverment than to its members on issues such as bulk funding; see Ballantyne 1994). This lack of contractual obligation gives them their freedom: not the proportion of school budget under their control.

The growing distance between government and those in schools entrusted with their operation also arises from the kind of territorial sense of role and autonomy which accompanies a contractual mode of public service delivery. Those who make policy do it with other policymakers, from other government departments; they no longer draw in or draw on the experience of those at the chalkface. The doors no longer open both ways. Increased openness at the local level, within the school community, has not been matched at the centre.

Those mechanisms and processes envisaged in the original decentralization policy outlines were either realized in truncated form, and then disbanded (Parents' Advocacy Council, community education forums) or never emerged (a Ministerial advisory committee on education). While the problems of such isolated policymaking did cause the setting up of a consultative committee in 1993 composed of officials and education group representatives, under the chairship of the CEO of a leading bank, this group was disbanded by its chair in late 1994, when the group's majority recommendations on resolving the bulk funding controversy proved unacceptable to government. The Education Minister has since formed a new group to provide him with a policy forum.

CONCLUSION

There are several 'lessons' the New Zealand experience can offer those in other educational systems contemplating decentralization, and school-site management.

(1) The design of school-site management on a systemic scale needs to take into account the kinds of tensions relating to which have been identified here, and to counter likely negative effects **right from the start** in funding formulae, structures, roles, and processes of governance - at both ends of the centre-school dynamic.

(2) School-site management alone will not solve problems of unequal educational provision, improve the overall quality of education, or enable the central agency to abandon a planning function.

(3) The reality of accountability structures and sanctions indicates that too much weight should not be placed on these as ways to bring about desired goals. While they have their place, other kinds of support, interest and steering may well prove more effective, and less disenchanting for those responsible for schools. The tools which provide both reassurance to the centre and useful material for those in schools have

yet to be devised (and may not be feasible).

(4) Decentralization is likely to make education more politicised, especially if some of the inherent tensions are not addressed in its design, and results are promised which are unrealistic.

(5) School-site management in a positive context is rewarding, and is probably as useful a vehicle for educational administration as any other we have yet tried.

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NOTES

1. This entrepreneurial initiative is possibly a useful correction to the often held assumption that a bureaucrat is necessarily someone who dwells on rules, within defined boundaries.

2. This simultaneous change of both ends of the educational system (and the abandonment of the middle) was later regretted by the Minister of Education who oversaw it. It was seen as one of the reasons for the initial confusion in which the fledgling school boards had to find themselves, as institutional knowledge was lost in the government agencies, and policy and deadlines were created and recreated on the wing.

3. There were, of course, different interpretations of what this meant for education, and how best to achieve it; some felt only lip-service was paid, and others that the reforms offered a real and new opportunity, albeit imperfect (Wylie 1995).

4. This is the treaty signed in 1840 between Maori chiefs and the representative of Queen Victoria, providing the ground for a partnership between the two peoples, Maori and Pakeha (European migrants) which has never been fully realized. In 1986 this treaty received a legal recognition which led to it being incorporated as part of the overall framework for social policy and public sector reform.

5. There were more than 10 working parties set up to transform the initial policy outline into workable form. Although they were initially to consist only of officials, teacher union and parental reaction to their exclusion was sufficiently strong and logical in view of the new responsibilities to be given to teachers and parents, and the need to ensure parental interest in standing for the first board elections, that they were included as full members. This gave teachers and parents some 'ownership' of the outcome, and probably helped ensure support of the reforms (if not always enthusiasm, at least a willingness to make them work), and also ensured that the implementation details were well informed.

6. Response rates for the survey in 1993 were 79% for principals, and 62% each for teachers, trustees, and parents. Responses have been generally representative of the respective groups.

7. Private schools in New Zealand (about 2% of all schools after the integration of Catholic schools in the 1970s to prevent their financial failure) are also bound by national laws, and must provide material on their activities. They receive some government funding. They are reviewed by the Educational Review Office also, but the results of these reviews do not have to be made public, unlike those of state schools).

8. This segmentation is in line with the public sector reform contractual framework which separates policy from operations, and policy from evaluation, on the grounds that the three roles are distinct, that responsibilities are not clear if the roles occur within the same organization, and that evaluation of one's own work will necessarily be biased. At the same time, this framework also requires public sector organizations to set goals and evaluate their own performance against those goals: an interesting departure from some of the logic behind organizational segmentation.