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ABSTRACT

Korean educational decentralization has been a subject that has continually resurfaced whenever education reform is seriously discussed. Although previous regimes eagerly tackled the issue of educational decentralization in their information and implementation of education reform policies, there is little evidence to show that educational decentralization has been accomplished to a satisfactory extent in Korea. Educational decentralization is not confined to the realm of education in Korea, but is entangled with interests of local governing bodies in a complex way, and possible alternatives to the current practice touch on sensitive political issues. This paper gives a brief overview as to how educational decentralization evolved to the current situation. An analysis highlights external and domestic factors and demands unique to the Korean case. It points out that although the educational challenges faced by countries around the world are often similar in nature, largely due to the impact of globalization, each region's unique background and circumstances can lead to variations in the actual strategies used to tackle those issues. Any attempt to examine the factors and demands unique to Korea must consider the Korean context for educational decentralization. The paper concludes by examining current controversies, focusing on the most urgent problems related to educational decentralization in Korea. Includes two notes. Contains 13 references. (BT)

Educational Decentralization in Korea: Major Issues and Controversies.

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Introduction

In Korea, educational decentralization has been one of the subjects that has continually resurfaced whenever education reform is seriously discussed. Although previous regimes eagerly tackled the issue of educational decentralization in their formulation and implementation of education reform policies, there is little evidence showing that educational decentralization has been accomplished to a satisfactory extent in Korea. Educational decentralization is not merely confined to the realm of education in Korea; it is entangled with interests of local governing bodies in a complex way, and possible alternatives to the current practice touch on sensitive political issues. Hence, it is indeed a complicated issue that cannot be approached purely based on educational point of view.

Before discussing educational decentralization itself, it should be noted that the meaning, content, and scope of the term, educational decentralization, are subjects of many different interpretations. The discussion is further complicated by the reality that educational decentralization does not just imply autonomous administration of local educational authorities; the process also requires the distribution of powers and responsibilities among local governing bodies of differing levels, and consequently encompasses the issue of autonomous administration at the level of individual schools. Literature on this subject describes a variety of phenomena that are all considered examples of decentralization. Decentralization might be perceived as a mere process of adding a number of deconcentrated bodies to the existing political and administrative structure. It sometimes is understood as "delegation," which includes transferring some of the central government's decision-making powers to bodies outside the government bureaucracy. "Devolution" refers to such cases in which specified powers are transferred to sub-national units through appropriate legal

reform processes (Govinda, 1997).

In Korea's case, educational decentralization has proceeded beyond the level of either establishing local sub-organs or merely delegating the controlling authority to the local governing bodies. Current discussions primarily center on issues of how the existing system should be improved so that local educational administrations can meet demands that arise in each respective region. However, it is undeniable that a wide gap separates such discussions and reality. Up to the present, substantial authority has been officially transferred to local governing bodies. Yet in Korea, which has a long history of central authority, local governing bodies have experienced great difficulty in acting autonomously, particularly in such core areas as finance, personnel management, and organizational supervision. Weak systemic support has exacerbated these problems. Therefore, educational decentralization can be regarded as one of the most difficult tasks that must be dealt with to assist educational administrators in coping with the various changes presented by changes taking place both inside and beyond the nation's borders.

In this chapter, I begin with a brief overview as to what educational decentralization means in the Korean setting and how educational decentralization has historically developed to produce the current situation. Next, I provide an analysis that highlights external and domestic factors and demands unique to the Korean case. Although the educational challenges faced by countries around the world are often similar in nature largely due to the impact of globalization, each region's unique background and circumstances can lead to variations in the actual strategies used to tackle those issues. Thus, any attempt to examine the factors and demands unique to Korea must consider the Korean context for educational decentralization. Finally, I examine current controversies, focusing on the most urgent problems related to educational decentralization in Korea.

Concept of Educational Decentralization: Local Education Self-Governing System

Discussion of educational decentralization in Korea has been carried out in general under the title of "Local Education Self-Governing System" (LESGS). Decentralizing authority over the system, a matter of nation-wide attention, implies not only that central and local administrators share power but also that local offices commit to self-governance and accountability measures. It therefore seems natural that the discussion of educational decentralization in Korea has narrowed to the notion of self-governance. The concept of LESGS is a combination of the phrases "local autonomy," which refers to the separation of local educational management from central administrative control, and "educational autonomy," which means separation of educational administration from the general

administration (Chung-il Yun et al, 1992). The two concepts of self-governance entail distinct issues and problems since they are based upon different principles. But they coincide in their shared focus on the issue of what method of allocating authority and responsibility between central and local educational administrations is more likely to guarantee autonomy, professionalism, and political neutrality.

Educational decentralization alone cannot adequately address all of the issues surrounding historical development of local educational self-governance in Korea. Comprehending the Korean situation requires examining not only the issue of decentralization of the government's power over educational matters but also various other issues, such as resident control, separation of educational administration from general administration, and professional management of education. Therefore, in this paper I will use the acronym LESGS, which covers wide-reaching principles as well as systemic elements, rather than "educational decentralization," as the main conceptual base for discussing the authority structure of the Korean education system.

The LESGS is grounded in the Constitution and laws of Korea. According to the Constitution, education should include the following three dimensions: 1) it is a highly intellectual activity depending essentially upon creativity and diversity; 2) a professional activity that requires cooperative performance of mature professionals; and 3) a public activity that should serve the interests of the whole society. In order to realize this conception of education, the Constitution (Item 4, Article 31) asserts that "autonomy, professionalism, and political neutrality of education . . . are guaranteed by law." In addition, the Law for Local Educational Self-Governance specifies that the local education self-governing system should be implemented to promote autonomy and professionalism of education, and to encourage localized control of schools. In sum, the local education self-governing system defined by the Constitution and laws of Korea aims to increase local residents' participation in the management of pubic education, thereby securing the educational autonomy, professionalism, and political neutrality called for in the Constitution.

Principles of Local Education Self-Governing System

Although opinions of Korean scholars of educational administration vary slightly, it is generally accepted that there are four principles of the LESGS: decentralization, resident control, independence of educational administration, and professional management. These principles are sometimes used as the criteria to evaluate education self-governing systems in operation (Shin-Bok Kim, 2001). What follows is a more detailed account of these principles.

The principle of *decentralization* professes that the central government's uniform command and control be avoided in planning, managing, and evaluating educational activities. Instead, education policies that address the unique conditions in different regions should be implemented. By promoting regional uniqueness and avoiding national-level uniformity, local residents can raise their capacity for autonomy and self-governance.

The principle of *resident control* means that the local residents should determine local educational policies through their representatives, and coincides ultimately with the principle of representative democracy. Opposed to unilateral bureaucratic control, resident control is an essential element of local self-governance. This concept is premised on the idea that educational policies should reflect broad public desires regarding the provision of schooling. To this end, there should be a systemic mechanism that allows local residents of diverse backgrounds to participate in the process of reviewing, determining, and implementing education policy.

Often referred to as the principle of educational self-governance, *independence of educational administration* requires that educational administration be autonomous and separate from general administration. The rationale grounding this notion stresses that educational administration must be politically neutral and have independent authority if educational excellence is to be achieved. The importance of separating educational administration from general administration is also premised on the idea that education should not be provided uniformly; education is viewed as an activity that touches upon human personality and ethics over long periods of time. At the same time, supervision of schools by general administration is not considered desirable because such an arrangement can impede politically neutral management of education.

The principle of *professional management* calls for educational administration that seriously considers both the essence and uniqueness of education. Teachers, a driving force in education, are regarded as professionals trained in their field. Administrators should also value students and pay close attention to their continuous growth and development. At the same time, educational administrations possess their own unique attributes that set them apart from general governmental administration. Therefore, schools should be managed by individuals with professional knowledge of both the essence and uniqueness of education.

Historical Development

In Korea, the LESGS is currently being practiced in limited fashion. Because of the strong tendency toward centralized authority in both educational and general administration, efforts at

transferring power to local governing bodies have been largely unsuccessful ever since the Korean government was established in 1948. Despite a relatively long history of promoting decentralization, the central government has continued to exert great power. Such an arrangement has been defended on the grounds that tight central control was necessary to ensure that public services were delivered as efficiently as possible. The Korean education system followed this pattern so as to achieve educational development in a very short period. One cannot deny, however, that this top-down approach is one of the primary causes of the various drawbacks and problems that plague Korean education. Thus, a careful examination of how the LESGS developed and shaped the present form of Korean education will help us understand the problems it is facing today.

The LESGS was initially discussed during the period of U.S. military occupation that immediately followed Korea's liberation from Japanese colonial rule. But actual implementation of the system was delayed until after the Korean War in 1952, when the Enforcement Act for Education Law went into effect. Since then, numerous changes in the LESGS took place. These changes are usually divided into three phrases. The *Fifty-Year History of Korea's Education,* published by the Ministry of Education in 1998, describes the three phases as follows: first, the "phase of birth and implementation," which spanned from 1948 to the military coup of 1961; second, the "phase of interruption and ordeal," beginning with the revision of Education Law in 1962 and ending with the promulgation of the Law for Local Educational Self-Governance in 1991; third, the "phase of resurrection and revitalization," which began in 1991 and continues to the present.[1] In the following section I describe the characteristics of the each phase in greater detail.

The First Phase (from Liberation to 1961)

The birth of the LESGS dates back to Korea's liberation from Japanese colonial rule. After liberation, a new system similar to the U.S. model was formulated and plans were made to implement it in September of 1948. That plan was not realized, however, due to the end of U.S. military administration. Still, elements of the original plan were included in the "Regulation for School District and Board of Education" section of the Education Law adopted on December 31st, 1949. But the LESGS was not implemented because the Education Law presupposed implementation of local-self governance, which was postponed owing to the Korean War. Further progress in

[1] A study conducted by the Korean Educational Development Institute identifies the same chronological periods, but labels them using different phrases: "adoption and testing," "reservation," and "implementation' phases" (Heung-ju Kim et al., 1999).

promoting educational self-governance did not occur until April 1953, when the Enforcement Act for Education Law was adopted. That progress was limited. Poor management of the LESGS, combined with friction between bureaucrats stationed in the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Home Affairs, triggered harsh criticism of the system. The little progress that had been made came to a halt in 1961, with the outbreak of a military coup. At that point, the Board of Education ceased to function. Previously, 17 locally managed boards of education had been operating in big and small cities and in 123 school districts.[2] In 1961, however, educational administration was absorbed by the general administration and support for the LESGS was withdrawn.

The Second Phase (1962-1991)

The LESGS was reconceptualized during the second phase and underwent a series of changes driven by revisions to the Education Law approved in 1962, 1968, and 1972. Yet its implementation was still not undertaken because most of the revisions to the Education Law presupposed local-self governance, which had yet to be achieved. Hence, during this phase introduction of the LESGS was again delayed, and the educational administration continued to be a responsibility of the general administration. Until the system of local self-governance was finally implemented in 1991, functions related to educational administration had been the responsibility of the general administration.

During this period, the LESGS experienced numerous turns and twists. At one point it was temporarily abolished, but thanks to strong protests from the education sector, led by the teachers' associations, it was quickly resurrected. The form of LESGS that emerged granted only limited authority to the Board of Education. Although the system appeared to delegate power to local levels, in actuality local offices were expected to carry out centrally-conceptualized policies and administrative orders; the Minister of Education retained authority to appoint members of the Board of Education. Therefore, during this period the term LESGS was actually a misnomer--authority continued to be concentrated at the center. The LESGS practiced until 1991 should be regarded as an example of decentralization in name only.

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[2] The functions carried out by the two different level BODs were different. For example, the city-level BOD was an executive organ, while school district-level BOD was a decision-making body. The decision-making authority of BODs at school districts was also limited, as they were allowed to make decisions pertaining to only elementary education.

The Third Phase (from 1991 to the present)

A critical change in the status of the LESGS finally occurred in 1991. At that point, increasing demand for local autonomy and political support for the idea finally yielded policies that gave local education authorities some meaningful power. In March of that year, the Regulation for Education Self-Governance, which had previously been included in the Education Law, became a separate piece of legislation, the Law for Local Education Self-Governance (Law 4347). The law specified that the primary goal of local education self-governance was to "activate autonomy of education, professionalism, and uniqueness of local education." Authority to supervise education, science, technology, arts, and other forms of learning was transferred to the offices of education, which located in metropolitan cities or provinces and were headed by superintendents of education. The basic jurisdiction that LESGS was applied to was metropolitan city and province levels, which included 7 metropolitan cities and 9 provinces. As the LESGS was not carried out at primary local self-governing units, it was called a "great-sphere level" LESGS. Therefore, boards of education, which assumed the role of a decision-making organ, were created at each of the 16 metropolitan or provincial levels, excluding primary local self-governing units.

Since the promulgation of the Law for Local Education Self-Governance in 1991, the manner of forming and managing the boards of education has also changed. Those revisions mainly targeted the methods used to select board members and superintendents, placing restrictions on their qualifications. Although the boards of education were officially responsible for making and reviewing educational decisions within their jurisdictions, they did not actually enjoy full power in making decisions. Their authority was incomplete and limited. The metropolitan and provincial assemblies were granted the power to make important decisions related to budgeting, balancing accounts, and taxing residents; the boards of education only reviewed those decisions. Thus, decision-making power for local education was split between boards of education and local assemblies.

Current Conditions of Local Education Self-Governing System

In order to better understand the current LESGS in Korea, it is necessary to briefly examine the structure and function of the central and local organs in charge of educational administration. The education system in Korea is divided into three levels of authority: central, intermediate, and primary. The Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MOEHRD) is located at the center,

16 metropolitan and provincial offices of education constitute the intermediate level, and 180 local offices of education operate at the primary (or local) level.

The MOEHRD, under the leadership of the Deputy Prime Minister, is in charge of wide-ranging affairs related to school education, lifelong education, and academic learning. Among its major functions are: planning for the overall education system, establishing mid- and long-term plans for educational development, implementing education reform, and developing indices for education and producing and managing education statistics. Although the scope of the MOEHRD's authority was significantly reduced in the 1990s when many of its functions were transferred to metropolitan and provincial offices of education, the traditional centralizing tendency still remains strong.

The 16 metropolitan and provincial offices of education support the superintendents of education. Their major functions are limited to daily administrative affairs, such as supervising the opening and closing of schools, overseeing the curriculum, promoting social education, producing accounting reports, and maintaining school campuses. They do not perform functions related to self-governance in its truest sense, such as developing education policy or establishing plans for local educational development.

180 local education offices can be found at the city, county, and district levels. These offices are primarily responsible for guiding and inspecting supervision of all public and private schools. Whereas in general administration local self-governance has been implemented down to the primary level, in educational administration self-governance is not yet occurring at the primary level. First of all, boards of education have not been created at this level. As I mention earlier, the LESGS has been implemented at the great-sphere level, which includes 7 metropolitan cities and 9 provinces. The local offices of education at city, county, and district levels merely carry out routine educational functions determined at the central or intermediate authorities. Thus, local education offices are just deconcentrated administrative organs that lack independent authority (Chung-il Yun, 2000).

Based on the Law for Local Education Self-Governance, boards of education were established in 16 metropolitan cities and provinces. Members of the boards of education (which vary in size from 7 to 15 members) are elected by electoral colleges composed of parents and teachers. For the purpose of securing professionalism in education, half of the board members must have experience in education or educational administration of over 10 years. The boards are in charge of reviewing and legislating important affairs in education, science, technology, sports, arts, and learning in their respective regions. But, with respect to some of the important matters, current

regulations grant the boards authority to review but not create new legislation. The boards therefore remain incomplete legislative bodies.

The superintendents of education are the executives in charge of affairs related to education, arts, and learning in each metropolitan city or province. While the superintendents mostly carry out those educational matters decided by boards of education, they sometimes execute policies delegated by the central government. Following the same procedure as the election of the board members, superintendents are elected every four years by secret voting and must receive the vote of more than half of the votes cast by members of the electoral colleges. Their primary responsibilities include: producing drafts of ordinances and budgets, balancing accounts, making educational regulations, overseeing the curriculum, and making decisions regarding the opening and closing of schools. Before making any decisions that involve financial burdens placed on residents or general accounting, the superintendents must consult with mayors or governors.

New Demands Requiring Changes to the Current System

As I note above, Korea has traditionally been a centralized nation and the central government's role in determining, implementing, and evaluating educational policies remains very strong. Such an approach worked well in the past, when the government was forced to reconstruct the nation's economy after the end of the Korean War. The concentration of power in the capital allowed the government to facilitate rapid expansion of education by providing a majority of the Korean people with educational opportunities.

Since the 1990s, however, when access to elementary and secondary education became universal and opportunities for higher education dramatically improved, the Korean government initiated a variety of reforms designed to shift the focus from quantitative growth to that of qualitative development. In contrast to the growth-oriented policies of the post-war period, this round of reforms promoted a consumer-oriented education system. The concepts of localization, decentralization, and autonomy guided those reforms. In the past, critics of Korean education frequently pointed out that the system did not provide enough autonomy to local levels. During the 1990s, demands for decentralizing the structure of educational administrative authority gained currency.

The recent surge in attention to local education self-governance is related to broader changes in the educational environment and changing societal demands regarding schooling. The development of a knowledge-based society interested in lifelong learning is significantly changing

the concept, role, place, timing, and method of education provided in Korea. The governance structure has been transformed to cope with the overarching changes that have taken place. A number of notable changes designed to encourage local self-governance of education have been introduced.

First, a large-scale transfer of education-related functions from central to local governing bodies has been called for. In its continuing effort to create a smaller and more efficient government, the Korean government amended the Law for the Government Organization in February of 1998. Based on that amendment, the size of the Ministry of Education was reduced and functions were adjusted. A second restructuring of the Ministry took place in May of 1999. Those actions were prompted by the government's desire to reduce the size of the central Ministry and to redistribute authority from central to local administrations. That power transfer has been requested, but the transfer itself has not yet been accomplished.

Second, societal demands regarding education became stronger and more complex. For example, Korean education had historically been uniform and highly standardized, with middle-level students receiving the most attention. That "mass production" system, which had proved successful in the past, no longer pleased Korean citizens. Because education is perceived of as a key to upward mobility and an important determinant of one's future social status, consumers' expectations regarding education continued to rise. Those consumers are demanding increased choices for schooling, more diversified and specialized educational programs, and curricula that reflect contemporary realities and needs. It has become apparent that the uniform and centralized system of educational administration can no longer satisfy those demands. In order to cope with new demands for education, many argue that it is necessary to transform educational administration from a rigid, top-down structure into an "intelligent organization" based on professionalism, accountability, and information (Shin-Bok Kim, 1998).

Third, with increased awareness that educational development is a critical precondition for national development, education reform and development strategies have become subjects of foremost interest to the Korean government. However, it has also been recognized that reform efforts that fail to generate cooperation and support from local school communities are doomed to fail. There is a belief that educational administrators should abandon the practice of commanding and directing their subordinates. If central authorities transfer some of their powers to local administrative organs, those bodies will make more realistic assessments of the needs of local communities and individual school sites. Local education administrators can also do a better job

cultivating the necessary material, human, and financial resources. Consequently, reform measures will have a more positive impact on actual settings for learning.

Fourth, Korean people's demands for democratization have accelerated since the 1990s. Development of democratic politics has been relatively slow, compared the economic advancement that has taken place in Korea. Unequal distribution of political power among different regions of the country has produced great friction. Conflicts between different socioeconomic strata that arose in tandem with industrial development driven by large corporations have produced another obstacle to political development. But after the first civilian government was created in the 1990s, democratization at the central government level began to accelerate and expectations for local self-governance strengthened. Also, citizens who had previously felt alienated from politics began to demand an increased role in political decision-making and more responsive government administration. As local residents showed increased interest in educational policymaking (along with other matters such as health care, housing, and social services), the call for local governance of schools also rose.

Fifth, citizens became more vocal in their demands for administrative accountability. In the past, parents, citizens, local communities, and non-governmental organizations were quite accepting of educational administrators. The outcomes of education policies were rarely evaluated in detail. However, as diverse educational consumers began to recognize the importance of the quality of instruction provided in schools, educational administrators, schools, and teachers were increasingly held accountable for the outcomes of their actions. School evaluations became more and more important, and new attempts were made to understand why and how the quality of education differed from school to school. This development provided yet another argument for transferring authority from the center to local administrative organizations. The educational institutions and personnel in charge of local schools, it was believed, should be held accountable for the outcomes produced by those schools.

The extent to which Korea will succeed in developing its local education self-governance system in the future will be closely related to how actively it responds to the changes described above.

Major Controversies Associated with the Current System

Korea's education experts and educational administrators offer a variety of viewpoints in diagnosing the current local education self-governance system. For instance, some argue that the

current system is incomplete in that it betrays the fundamental principles such as decentralization, resident control, independence from general administration, and professional management. Others criticize various problematic aspects including the lack of autonomy, the bifurcated system of legislative power, and a flawed procedure for electing the superintendent and members of boards of education. While it is possible from a macro perspective to distinguish those problems caused by flaws in the system from those caused by problematic management of the system, in the section that follows major issues will be discussed without dwelling on such distinctions.

Local Education Self-Governance System Excluding the Primary Level

Korea's local education self-governance is limited to the intermediate level (metropolitan cities and provinces) and excludes the levels in lower administrative hierarchy. Therefore, complete decentralization of the system has not yet been achieved. One critic argues that despite the government's public support for local self-governance, the failure to extend authority to lower levels of the system indicates that the system is unfair (Heung-ju Kim, 1999). Young-chol Kim (1999) asserts that the spirit of local education self-governance cannot be realized in a system that is not decentralized to the primary level. The problems experienced by local communities or individual schools should be tackled through self-governance and until authority is extended below the intermediate level, critics argue, teachers, parents, and local residents will not feel that the LESGS is truly operational.

Lack of Autonomy

The issue of autonomy is one of the core elements of the LESGS. Autonomy means having the power to execute authority in one's own work without being directed or impeded by external parties, and being responsible for the outcomes of one's own performance. The current LESGS, however, does not grant enough power to local authorities to make decisions in areas of educational importance such as education planning, teacher policies, and curricula. The Law for Local Education Self-Governance and its supporting acts regulate current LESGS in a uniform manner. For example, the election procedure and qualifications of superintendents and board members are precisely prescribed in the law, and applied to each and every locality without exception. That prevents local authorities from effectively responding to the unique attributes and environmental factors of a region (Nam Soon Kim, 1999). Also, the fact that the deputy superintendent is appointed by the President upon the recommendation of the Ministry of Education generates criticism that the

central government's control over local administration still lingers (Heung-ju Kim, 1999).

Bifurcated Legislative Authority

The authority of the board of education is greatly weakened by the bifurcated system of legislative authority. Local education self-governance bodies and general local self-governance bodies are often in conflict. Critics have asserted that the board of education has lost its independence as a legislative organ and does little more than review the actions of the local assembly. In most cases, a board's decisions must be approved by the local assembly. Especially those matters related to educational finance are subject to the decisions made by the local assembly. Due to this bifurcation, friction between boards of education and local assemblies is increasing and the authority of the boards authority is being undermined (Shin-Bok Kim, 2002).

Currently, a board of education meets 60 days each year while metropolitan and provincial assemblies convene 120 days per year. Issues related to budgets, accounting, and drafts of ordinances are reviewed by both boards of education and local assemblies. This duplication of effort represents a waste of time and energy. Uncooperative relationship between boards of education and local assemblies can also make it difficult to gain support from other local governing bodies. Moreover, the superintendents of education have ultimate authority over affairs pertaining to education, learning, and arts. Therefore, local heads of governing bodies (such as mayors and governors) have no direct incentive to provide financial support for improving conditions in the schools.

Issue of Separation of Educational Administration

This concept refers to the separation of educational administration from general government administration. The issue has provoked continued debate among scholars, particularly between those in the field of general administration and those in education, and even among scholars of education. Major controversies include the following: Is educational self-governance really necessary? Should boards of education remain separate from offices of education? For what and by whom should education self-governance work? To what extent should local assembly and the head of local governing bodies be involved in local educational administration and finance?

Within the education sector, there is a tendency to advocate complete local education self-governance, with educational administration that is distinct from general administration. Officials in the general administration, on the other hand, generally push for the integration of local education administration into the general administration so as to improve operational effectiveness

and efficiency. Others feel that educational administration should focus on development rather than self-governance, and call for more accurate assessments of decentralization efforts that have been implemented thus far (Ki-Chang Song, 1997). In the midst of these controversies, the Korean government recently considered the idea of incorporating educational administration into the local self-governance system and discussed the possibility of integrating legislative organs and finance into the general administration. This has triggered severe debates among scholars and practitioners. A satisfactory resolution that can be agreed to by many parties involved in the issue of self-governance has yet to be made.

Method of Electing the Superintendent and Education Board Members

After the education self-governance system was put into motion in the 1990s, members of education boards were elected in the local assembly and those board members, in their turn, elected superintendents of education. This doubly indirect method proved to be unsatisfactory. Through a series of changes, during the 2002 election, electoral colleges comprised of all school council members elected superintendents and school board members. Previously, the electoral colleges awarded each school council only a single vote. This practice was criticized by the general public for many reasons including its failure consider the size of schools. The present system of electing board members and superintendents allows a larger number of voters to express their views about the candidates. However, many observers still wonder whether or not the electoral college truly represents the will of local residents (Shin-Bok Kim, 2001). Such critics claim that the current election system cannot be considered democratic because the electoral college does not take into consideration the opinions of the entire resident population. They point out that limiting number of the members of electoral college makes it difficult for that body to respond to the opinions of the whole resident population regarding educational provisions.

Accountability of Local Self-Governing Authorities

Some critics feel that the current LESGS does not encourage authorities to take responsibility for local educational issues (Jae-Woong Kim, 1998). Despite the fact that local residents' interest in local education is becoming stronger day by day, superintendents tend to blame lack of support from local governments for the problems in schools, rather than accepting personal responsibility for those troubles themselves. The heads of local governments tend to behave in a similarly irresponsible manner arguing that they are granted little authority over education. Despite claims that

decentralization will lead to greater accountability of elected heads of local governments, some have ignored their responsibilities.

Another question concerns the task of evaluating local education self-governing bodies by the central government to reform the education system. The Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development has been conducting an annual evaluation of the metropolitan and provincial offices of education since 1996 in an effort to make them more effective and accountable. Some critics argued that local residents—not the central authority—should assume that responsibility for making the LESGS truly functional (Nam Soon Kim, 1999). They also claimed that determining the amount of financial support provided to local education self-governing bodies based on the results of those evaluations represents a betrayal of the principle of self-governance.

Management and Structure of Local Educational Finance

Observers have suggested that although the autonomy of metropolitan and provincial has dramatically increased as a result of decentralization policies, improvements in the efficiency of financial management have not kept pace with those changes in the authority structure (Heung-ju Kim et al., 1999). This issue began to attract public attention when the rate of public investment in education increased rapidly after the government set the education budget at five percent of the GNP in 1996. With the goal of improving educational equity, the central government began to estimate the financial needs of each metropolitan and provincial region. The level of central funds provided to each education office used to be determined by calculating the difference between standardized financial expenditure from standardized financial revenues, and making up the differences. That practice reduced local motivation to efficiently managing educational finances. There is little incentive for local education offices to adopt innovative management techniques or to secure independent sources of revenue.

In addition, local dependence on the central government is especially strong in the area of educational finance. The central government, via national taxes, continues to supply over 80 percent of all education funds in Korea. This situation tends to decrease the participation of local residents in supplying and managing local educational finances, and therefore undermines the goal of local self-governance. It is doubtful that problems related to local educational financing can be solved without restructuring the entire taxation system.

Concluding Remarks

No one can deny that the education in the twenty-first century must meet newly emerging demands that have surfaced in connection with globalization and the development of a knowledge-based society. Education authorities in Korea believe that decentralization can help the nation meet this goal. However, the system of local education self-governance currently practiced in Korea hardly guarantees autonomy and professionalism in educational management. The Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development applies unnecessarily specific standards and regulations to local education offices. The uniform nature of the guidance provided by the Ministry makes it difficult for local authorities to tailor education to the unique aspects of the communities they serve. Central officials also fear that local educational administrations will become overly concerned with the minute details of school management and fail to provide satisfactory support to the schools, thus lowering the quality of education offered at the local level. With a variety of interest groups attempting to express their opinions in public arenas, frictions and controversies related to educational matters have become increasingly detrimental. It is becoming more and more difficult to provide consumers with high quality education that meshes with the distinct realities of each region.

In Korea, autonomy and self-governance in education are no longer matters of choice or possible alternatives, but imperatives that must be followed. The government is challenged to come up with a form of educational decentralization that reflects the traditions, culture, and social structure of Korean society. Developments in the political arena would appear to support educational decentralization. The political system has become more democratic, with citizens enjoying rights and responsibilities previously denied to them. A system of local self-governance builds on these developments. The LESGS aims at encouraging local residents to express their own desires for local education and to take responsibility for realizing those goals. Such a system is rooted in a conception of education that views local residents as the leaders of their school communities. At the same time, such a model presupposes high degrees of cooperation and mutual support not only between central and local education authorities, but also among a variety of higher administrative authorities and subordinate administrative organs.

The strong tradition of centralized educational administration in Korea makes the process of transferring authority from the central Ministry to local educational bodies particularly challenging. Errors are bound to occur as people at different levels of the system adapt to new procedures and

expectations. However, such a transfer of authority is necessary if Korean education is to continue to progress. If the LESGS is not realized, the education system will pay a high price. Therefore, the central government should continue to promote educational decentralization. It must help local administrators build capacity in areas such as finance, personnel, and organizational management. As local administrative capacity grows, the transfer of authority to local self-governing bodies should become more substantial and more consequential.

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