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Abstract: This article represents a preliminary exploration of the impact of mayoral control of two large urban school systems and the legislative changes in school governance and policies—spearheaded by business leaders and politicians—which affect students, teachers, and traditional school leaders in terms of accountability, decision making, and school renewal. Through the voices of university professors who teach in teacher education and administrative preparation programs, and the teachers and administrators who work in these school systems, we challenge a unique governance structure that potentially disenfranchises the "grassroots" of public education, i.e., parents, teachers, school administrators and students.

   The authors initially employ data drawn from legislative documents and other school reform artifacts of both cities, print media in both cities, the researchers' personal observations while working in Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and Cleveland Municipal School District (CMSD), teaching graduate courses to CPS teachers and administrators, and from discussions and interviews with CPS teachers and administrators regarding

school reform successes and obstacles. The long-term goal is not only to increase the scrutiny of politically motivated educational policy, but to challenge education preparation programs to provide teachers, administrators, and other educational leaders with the tools needed to be successful in their craft, for children's sake, in light of these new governance structures.

Introduction

This inquiry grew out of a conversation about an observation one of us made regarding the not-so-apparent connections between redevelopment projects in the city of Chicago and the locations of schools placed on probation and eventually reconstituted by Chicago Public Schools administration. This conversation led to discussions about how these actions could take place without much dissent from educators and the general public because the process was being "controlled" by the mayor's office—the mayor having authority over the school system and influence over community development projects. This dialogue led to the suspicion that Cleveland might be facing similar experiences—placing control over the schools in the hands of the mayor.

As a result, we decided to look at the two cities, Chicago and Cleveland, to ascertain why the management and leadership of two major urban school systems would be taken from the educators and placed in the hands of municipal/corporate leaders. Our inquiry has led us to the basic premise that at the core of the mayoral controlled school system takeovers are key political, corporate and legislative figures who have formed a partnership designed to control access to knowledge, money and power. To achieve this goal, governance of large urban school systems has to be placed in the hands of mayors and their municipal appointees, who not only will control the districts' financial assets, determine who has access to knowledge, and decide which stakeholders have voice in those decisions, but will have the power and "clout" of the "City Hall" behind them.

We contend that the real issues are not about student achievement and learning, they are about power and money and who controls. If we extend this line of reasoning in the context of existing corporate influence over municipal governments, mayoral control of school systems is the logical preference over the traditional board-superintendent governance structure. In the municipal governance structure, key decision-makers (e.g., Board of Trustees or Municipal School Board) need not be elected by the people—they are appointed by the mayor or his designees, and as a result, need not be concerned about the views or concerns of "grassroots" stakeholders (parents, teachers, school administrators, students). How-

ever, in the traditional board-superintendent structure, all are elected/ selected by the people and are answerable to them. The key difference is that, under the municipal structure, the chief school officials have the power and influence of the mayor's office supporting them as opposed to the chief school officials under the traditional structure, who may even have the mayor's office fully opposing them.

Background

While not apparently a strategy that comes out of educational reform literature or research (e. g., Hill, Campbell & Harvey, 2000; Hill & Celio, 1998), municipal control of public schools is clearly one which students, parents, teachers, principals and career central office personnel (a.k.a. superintendents) of some major cities must endure as a result of business and legislative fiats aimed at reforming large urban school districts. Two school systems, Chicago (IL) and Cleveland (OH), are examined with these questions in mind: Why is mayoral leadership of large urban school districts perceived as preferred over the traditional elected school board/ superintendent model? If the reason for creation of this new structure is to improve public schools, how, if at all does mayoral control of school systems generate or accelerate the process of school renewal? Where is the voice (influence, power, control) of traditional school leaders, i.e., central office administrators, principals and teachers in this latest process of school renewal?

In both cities, traditional school leaders, i.e., principals, central office administrators and classroom teachers, find themselves responding to and implementing a school renewal agenda not of their own making, perhaps created out of political expediency rather than research on "best practices" or "effective schools." They have discovered that formal processes of identifying benchmarks of student achievement are dictated by "City Hall." The combined political poll-driven/economics "bottom-line" business strategies of research with which the new management is most familiar, seems to foreclose recognition of research findings, particularly qualitative data, which present a richer view of student achievement, teaching and leadership.

We initially use data drawn from legislative documents and other school reform artifacts of both cities, print media in both cities, the researchers' personal observations while working in Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and Cleveland Municipal School District (CMSD), teaching graduate courses to CPS teachers and administrators, and from discussions and interviews with CPS and CMSD teachers and administrators regarding school reform successes and obstacles. The long-term goals of

our exploratory study are to increase the scrutiny of politically motivated educational policy, and to challenge education preparation programs to provide teachers, administrators, and other educational leaders with the tools needed to be successful in their craft, for children's sake, in light of these new governance structures.

Genesis of Mayoral Control

Chicago Public School System

In 1987, U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett proclaimed Chicago Public Schools (CPS) "the worst in the nation." Many in Chicago were not surprised by Bennett's remarks for, in fact, the city was failing to educate its children, as indicated by the following quote from the *Chicago Tribune* (Squires, 1988):

> Chicago Public Schools are hardly more than daytime warehouses for inferior students, taught by disillusioned and inadequate teachers, presided over by a bloated, leaderless bureaucracy, and constantly undercut by a selfish, single-minded teachers' union. (p. x)

Approximately one year after Bennett's proclamation, and following the city's longest teacher strike and a massive school reform rally convened by the former Mayor Harold Washington, a rather sweeping reform plan was adopted by the Illinois Legislature, which shifted significant powers and responsibilities from central administration to local school communities (Bryk, Sebring, Kerbow Rollow, & Easton, (1998).

Reform was not deemed completely effective until 1995, when Mayor Richard M. Daley joined forces with the state's Republican leaders to revise the School Reform Act of 1988. Mayor Daley (1997), in an address to the National Press Club, stated:

> Instead of bailing out the schools, the Republican State Government decided to turn over responsibility to the City of Chicago...I wanted this new responsibility...It was only with authority over the schools that I could take action and demand results, to improve performance and make our schools accountable. (p. 3)

The 1995 amendment to the Reform Act provided freedom from fiscal crisis and a strong administration that could intervene for schools in decline. The Chicago School Reform Amendatory Act:

- ◆ reversed the trend towards decentralization of school operations;

- ◆ turned control of the school system over to the mayor;

- ◆ gave the mayor power to appoint a new School Reform Board of Trustees;

◆ created a corporate style of management by replacing the position of superintendent with that of Chief Executive Officer (CEO), with system-wide authority to hold schools, including principals and teachers accountable;

◆ formed linkages among the school board, district administration and city hall created through mayoral appointments;

◆ reduced competing authorities. (Wong, Anagnostopoulos, Rutledge, Lynn, & Dreeben, 1999)

Cleveland Public School System

In 1995, when the tenth superintendent in seventeen years, and other high ranking school personnel resigned, and the District was potentially accruing a debt of $1.4 billion, substantially impairing the ability of the District to fulfill its commitments regarding desegregation, the Federal Court ordered the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to assume immediate, complete, direct supervision of the Cleveland Public Schools (*Reed v. Rhodes*, 1996). By March 1998, prior to the mayor's takeover, the Federal Court ruled that the Defendants had met all of the demands of the Remedial Order, the 1978 court mandate that the school district take affirmative action on 14 components of the system's operations including student assignments, desegregation of faculty and reduction of the achievement gap between African American and white children (*Reed v. Rhodes*, 1978).

Rather than return control of the District to an elected board, whose alleged political dysfunction precipitated this latest crisis, an Advisory Committee on Governance proposed that the Mayor of Cleveland be given authority over the schools. Two Republican legislators, neither of whom represented Cleveland residents, proposed and successfully passed a bill that created the "municipal school district." The language is well defined:

> "Municipal School District" means a school district that is or has ever been under a Federal Court order requiring supervision and operational, fiscal, and personnel management of the District by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction…Whenever any municipal school district is released by a Federal Court from an order requiring supervision…by the State Superintendent, the management and control of that District shall be assumed, effective immediately, by a new nine-member Board of Education. Members of the new board shall be appointed by the Mayor…(Ohio Rev. Code Ann. 3311.71(A)(1)-(B), Page, 1998)

The legislation also requires that the president of the state university located within the District and president of the community college that has the largest main branch within the District serve as ex-officio members of the school board.

In addition to appointing the nine-member board of education, the Mayor of Cleveland also appoints the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), a person who carries all of the powers and authority of a superintendent but who, by law, need not "hold any license, certificate, or permit" (Ohio Rev. Code 3311.72 (F), Page, 1998). Serving at the pleasure of the Mayor and the power to appoint other executive staff and consultants, the CEO must "develop, implement, and regularly update a plan to measure student academic performance at each school within the district" (Ohio Rev. Code 3311.74(B), Page, 1998) and take whatever corrective action is deemed necessary where schools do not meet the established standards. Perhaps inadvertently, the legislation also specifies that "The Cleveland City School District shall base the goals and accountability standards required...on the October 1996 working draft "A Commitment to Action 1996-1997 Strategic Plan and School-Community Covenant," a document developed by the twelfth superintendent of the Cleveland Public Schools and the Mayor of the City of Cleveland.

Chicago and Cleveland: Why Mayoral Control?

Considering that both Chicago and Cleveland had already embarked upon ambitious programs of reform for the cities' schools, why was mayoral control still deemed necessary? After all, the Cleveland school district had met the vast majority of the Federal Court's requirements under the Remedial Order. Cooperative relations between Cleveland's mayor and the school superintendent had generated a city-wide public school enhancement process. Chicago's democratization of school governance through its local school councils offered the promise of school-by-school transformation, even before Mayor Daley took control.

One explanation may be the need to move away from the debilitating pace of incrementalism: "Quantum thinking must become a way of life" (Tichy & Devanna, 1986, p. 216). These urban schools, like critically ill, intensive care patients, require multidisciplinary, even radical treatment to be healed. Thus, as Hill, et al. (2000) conclude, Chicago's reform process relies "on a strong chief executive operating under the mayor's personal authority" (p. 63). For example, when Chicago's CEO deemed that mid-term state testing was not beneficial for Chicago's process of reform and refused, initially, to have the test administered, he was supported by the mayor. We contend that this rather bold action of questioning and refusing to follow a state mandate would not have been taken by a traditional school leader.

The mayor of Memphis, a former teacher and school superintendent, stated that unless issues related to the family, i.e., housing, employment, and health care, are addressed, nothing will change

appreciably and permanently in public schools (National Alliance of Black School Educators Conference, Mayors Panel, 1996). Thus, there appears to be an expectation that mayoral control more feasibly provides the consolidated services needed by impacted children and families. As Hill, et al. (2000) proposed as one of the bolder reform options, "all of the community's resources would be available in an organized way to meet children's educational needs and their general well-being" (p. 77). These explanations for mayoral control are supported by Arne Duncan, Chicago Public Schools' new chief executive officer. He contends that mayoral control is the best approach to confronting stagnation, bureaucracy, financial troubles and low achievement levels—that it is easier for different city departments to cooperate in helping children. Duncan stated, "If you have a mayor who says he's in charge of the schools, he's the one on the line, and he has to get results or he'll be voted out" (Lewin, 2002).

Furthermore, there is an expectation of more responsible financial stewardship of sparse school funds. In 1996, Cleveland Public Schools were incurring debt well beyond their ability to pay: "The Cleveland City School District ('CCSD') is in the midst of financial crisis that is perhaps unprecedented in the history of American education. If current revenue, spending and borrowing trends continue unchecked, by the year 2004, the CCSD will be $1.4 BILLION in debt" (Petro, 1996, p. 2-1).

Finally, there is the belief, from the Ohio legislators' capitol perch, that the local politics of the city's elected school boards are part of the problem. As a Cleveland columnist, Dick Feagler (2000), reminisced:

> The elected school board became a farm club for political hacks. Most of them cared no more for education than a cow cares for geometry. They viewed the school board as a steppingstone to a brighter political future…They wanted the TV cameras to show up at meetings so they could screech and babble and get 10 seconds on the 11 o'clock news…None of this had anything to do with education. (p. 1-B)

Even the Federal Court acknowledged this dysfunction when it ordered the state superintendent to take over the Cleveland city schools:

> The momentum generated by the initial implementation of Vision 21, coupled with the high profile public image and popularity of [the superintendent] that overshadowed the less than impressive performances of the local Board of Education and its politically motivated mentors, caused friction and underlying personality conflicts, which appeared to have precipitated a series of orchestrated public confrontations calculated to encourage the ultimate resignation of [the superintendent, et al.]. (*Reed v. Rhodes*, 1996, p. 1538)

The outcome of these challenges was the assertion and diminution of the voices of several constituencies in both cities.

Corporate "Voice"

Chicago

Behind the scenes of the initiation of mayoral control, especially in Chicago, were the corporate coalitions that recognized that poor public schools jeopardized the economic health of the city (Shipps, 1997; Daley, 1996). Shipps (1997) offers an extensive "genealogy" of the corporate entities that influenced and oversaw reform of Chicago's public schools, beginning with the Commercial Club of Chicago. Corporate activism on school policy making has taken various form in the last thirty years: "[T]hey developed and funded career education programs, sponsored management training for superintendents and principals, conducted a survey of business satisfaction with the schools, and privately advised the mayor on school board candidates" (Garay, 1982, cited in Shipps, 1997, p. 84). According to Shipps, the Commercial Club was able to maintain its "voice" (influence, power, control) on school issues over time and through various city administrations, by "creating three subsidiary associations to address different aspects of social policy" (p. 85).

Corporate Chicago also maintained leverage by its membership publicly speaking with one voice. Closed-door debates either resulted in consensus or no comment. Errant staff who violated this rule were dismissed (Shipps, 1997).

Cleveland

In the early 1990s, as the school board sought release from the Federal Court's supervision, the mayor of Cleveland began a series of summit meetings, similar to those held by Mayor Washington in Chicago, to which all citizens interested in school reform were invited. Plenary sessions and small group break-outs with facilitators seemed to offer a pluralistic voice to participants, parents, educators, philanthropic and corporate entities, alike. The state take-over accelerated this process and resulted in the formation of specific task forces to make recommendations to the state superintendent (Boyd & White, 1996).

The team responsible for looking at restructuring governance was initially composed of teachers, parents, corporate and philanthropic representatives. For reasons yet to be discovered, it was dissolved and later reconstituted as the Advisory Committee on Governance, without the teacher and parent components, and chaired by the head of one of the

city's major foundations. This panel recommended that the mayor be given control of the schools (Stephens, Ortiz, & Jones, 1996). There would be no referendum on this issue until 2001, at which time the voters could decide to maintain this system of mayoral control or return to an elected board of education (Cleveland Summit on Education, 1996). Thus what began as an ostensibly democratic process of restructuring Cleveland's schools, devolved to the prerogative of corporate and philanthropic "movers and shakers" of the city.

Voice of School Leaders

Chicago

The mayoral control of schools provides the opportunity and challenge of collaboration in areas not necessarily familiar to traditional school leaders. First, there is the "politics" of education, which, up to now, school leaders left to others to address. Unfortunately, this "ostrich" mentality resulted in dramatic changes in public education by non-educators who were frustrated by the intransigent problems. Therefore, the savvy of urban politics and economic development must now be a part of a school administrator's repertoire.

Prior to the reform movement of the 1980s, the principal was primarily responsible for implementing and maintaining the mandates of the central office administration. The principal's main focus was on school building efficiency rather than instructional leadership. Principals who were deemed successful followed directives without question, maintained an orderly building, completed reports in a timely manner, and maintained the status quo (Oberman, 1999).

The school reform mandates of 1988 and 1995 have created new challenges not only for Chicago principals, regional and central office administrators, but for colleges' and universities' school administration programs as well. The roles of principals and other administrators have changed significantly in the years since school reform policies have been implemented. The eradication of tenure and the ability of local school councils (LSC) to hire and fire principals have forced principals to become more accountable for student achievement. The practices and policies that became effective in 1995 threatened principals' job security. If students did not achieve minimum test scores, a school could be placed on probation and/or reconstituted—the administration and teaching staff replaced, as in the case of a principal in one of our educational leadership classes. When this school leader's principalship was taken away without advance warning, the impact was immediately felt in a class in which

many of the students had some personal experience with having the school where they worked reconstituted or placed on probation. This principal stated:

> I thank you for your patience and understanding for my delay in turning in these documents. This has been a very difficult period of time for me. It has defocused my concentration from my commitments. (Journal notes education leadership, Spring, 1997)

Instances of this type were quite common for us immediately after Paul Vallas was given the authority to reconstitute schools and remove administrators and teaching staff.

However, not every school leader experienced the same trauma. As another administrator shared:

> I probably have a different perspective compared to other administrators because I came into my position under mayoral reform. So there really has been no culture shock for me in that regard. I attended all of the training to extend my "shelf life" in the District; professional development that was paid for by government and local partnerships.
>
> As CEO, Vallas had high energy, was a quick learner, and had the full backing of the Mayor. He knew administrators by name, face and job description. There was a "love/hate" relationship between Vallas and building administrators, all the latter being given a 30-day notice stay or be removed after determining their job classification or progress, when he took charge. Those who remained or who replaced others, were then provided additional support to reform the most troubled schools. As he became more familiar with children's issues, his heart for children grew. That led to the increase of security in schools, parent patrols, and responsiveness to gang activity.
>
> Unlike the previous superintendents who had to operate at the will of the School Finance Authority, he also had direct control of the funding, which enabled him to really address the much needed capital improvements in schools—roofs, painting, asbestos removal. However, changing the culture of the District and the neighborhoods is more difficult and therefore, takes more time. For example, the old central office patronage system still remains and a new one has been created through the Local School Councils and mayoral appointments to jobs. Reconstitution really broke the spirit, the brain power, of school-based reformers among the administrative and teaching staff. (Personal communication, November 1, 2003)

Thus, much needed reform on the budgetary and capital improvements side has come at the expense of the human capital that veteran administrators represent.

Cleveland

These new governance dynamics led to the removal of the elected board of education and the legally required resignation of all central office administrators and supervisors, many of whom were not retained by the new administration. Fourteen principals were fired and approximately 30 others retired, the impact of which would be felt in many of the 119 schools now open in the District.

Currently, because of the Cleveland mayors' hands-off policies, the impact of mayoral control is not really felt, as one principal shares:

> I probably have a different perspective from most principals. I have lived through all the phases of the school district, from the downtown administration to being a building principal.
>
> There is not as much politics as before. The focus is on education rather than whose nest is going to be feathered. I remember the board member who always made sure the trades were taken care of or the one who had had her house remodeled using school board employees.
>
> I have no sense that "City Hall" is imposing anything. The "gestapo" tactics of the past were not effective. What really make for change in a school system is people working together, understanding what the needs [of children] are, more concern about children.
>
> But, for the focus to really be on children, we have to look at their families' issues; things that the city government doesn't take responsibility for. Who is responsible for the non-existent and broken sidewalks my students use to walk to school, or the drug dealers they encounter on the way, or the impact of welfare reform that keeps them poorly housed and ill-fed? Or housing codes that are not adhered to by the landlords of the rented homes our children live in. Even under mayoral control, these problems are pushed back on the school district to resolve, with fewer resources. (Personal communication, September 27, 2002).

Voice of Teachers

Chicago

The 1995 school reform efforts in Chicago, not only impacted administrators at the building level, they had a most significant impact on teachers—teachers could actually lose their jobs. This was unheard of in Chicago Public Schools! Teachers once believed they had security for life—whether or not they were productive. Principals once believed there was little benefit in attempting to remove non-productive teachers—the union was there to support them—competent or incompetent! *Accountability! Children First*! These words are now the mantra for the Daley team in Chicago Public Schools:

> Our students, parents, teachers, and principals now know that low scores can put students in summer school and schools on probation. They are working hard and focusing on results. We have set the course for bold innovative educational action, and accountability is the catalyst. (*Making Everyone Accountable*, 2000)

The former Chief Education Officer put it this way: "People have to know that when there is educational failure there is an end game. Schools can close. Students can be held back. But we also can help people succeed" (*Educational Conversation with Cozette Buckney*, CPS, 2000). This was possible because the reform act of 1995 outlawed any work stoppage for a period of 18 months, and removed from collective bargaining issues like charter schools, layoff policies, class size, schedules, hours and places of instruction (Shipps, 1997). The subsequent lawsuit filed by the Chicago Teachers Union was dismissed (Duncan, 1995; *Chicago Teachers Union v. Illinois*, 1996). Therefore, for all but "bread and butter" concerns, the Chicago Teachers Union, the collective "voice" of teachers, was muted for an extended period of time. Thus, there is a mixed review about the impact of mayoral control from the classroom teacher's perspective:

> The mayor appoints the school board, the board president and the chief executive officer. All of them are politically connected to the mayor in some way, e.g., former campaign managers or members of his staff. Along with all of the other city services, this means that an awful lot of power is placed in one person's hands. So much power sometimes leads to inaction rather than progress.
>
> What happens is that the kids are lost in the process because the money is not distributed fairly. There have been many repairs and new construction of schools. And a lot of technology has been added. But, patronage still causes more expense at the top; more weight, that is, resources are still needed at the base, in schools. For example, there is still a shortage of books in some schools.
>
> While I admire the mayor's interest in raising test scores and his all-Chicago reading initiative, my life as a teacher has not changed that much since he was given control of the schools. Class size is still an issue. However, more resources have come to teachers as a result of the mayor's influence—more opportunities for professional development. What would really make a difference is the mayor showing his own respect for teachers and working with parents to do the same. (Personal communication, October 26, 2003)

Currently there is an impasse in the teacher contract negotiations (Grossman & Rossi, 2003). This implies that the 18-month window of time in which critical issues for teachers were suspended, may not have been used by the Mayor's team to remediate teachers' concerns.

Many of those we teach in the College of Education work in schools

that are involved in various stages of school reform, ranging from no outside interference, to remediation, probation or reconstitution of teaching and administrative staff. This has given us an opportunity to observe the impact of this governance structure on the "front line." The negative consequences of reform have produced added stress, insecurity, mistrust and a greater need for professional development and retraining of teachers and school leaders. This is exemplified in an incident during one of our classes:

> One of the students enrolled in my administration preparation class, shared his immense frustration, having found out through the media earlier that day that his school was "reconstituted." He broke down in class and cried. I had to restructure the objectives of this particular class session to include the issues raised for all students in the class by this student's situation. For example, they questioned continuing in such an educational system when the value of educators was under attack. They strongly believed that teachers have to be part of the educational decision making process because their daily lives are being influenced by decisions in which they generally have no voice. They also did not understand why all teachers in a reconstituted school, especially the outstanding teacher, would have to reapply for their own positions. (Personal journal notes educational leadership, Summer,1999)

We recognize that issues like these must be part of a new focus of our teacher and administrative preparation programs, perhaps discussing with students ways to emphasize their strengths or how to recognize and shore up their own weaknesses. The following example from another student indicates how much they value the discussions we have in our classes regarding effective strategies for teachers and leaders during these stressful times:

> We had to reprogram ourselves—our minds—or our thinking on how to deal with things in our schools—our children, parents and district administration. And the classes through the university, helped us get in tune with our students and their needs and thereby presented a much more conducive climate for educating, for understanding our children's needs—for working with our children – and for working with our parents. (Personal journal notes educational leadership, Spring, 2002)

Cleveland

The Cleveland Teachers Union was initially opposed to mayoral control of schools, in part because of the antagonistic relationship that existed between the union and the mayor. For example, during negotiations prior to an impending strike, in an address to a public civic forum, Mayor White characterized the union's position as "the inmates running

the asylum;" "inmates" who drove expensive cars and only worked 4 1/2 hours a day. As with the citizens of the City of Cleveland, teachers had no "voice" in the imposition of mayoral control.

Recently, the Cleveland Teachers Union held a referendum to determine whether its membership now supports mayoral control of the schools. Eighty percent preferred working with a school board appointed by the mayor (Okoben, 2002). A union representative explained the "change of heart":

> It's true—the Cleveland Teachers Union was very much opposed to mayoral control when it was introduced. Why the change? We have had a very long period of labor peace to move the educational agenda. I don't just mean, no strikes. This has been a longer period of cooperation, working with the school district's administration. Mayor Campbell is clearly pro-education.
>
> Mayor White was anti-Teachers' Union. But he did have a hands-off policy with regards to education, running the school district. The mayor and the CEO are on the same page Teachers' voices are expressed through the individual Academic Achievement Plans and each school's plan for improvement has been accepted.
>
> Citizens of Cleveland have a voice by electing the mayor. And there is a citizens' committee that reviews the applications of potential school board members. (Personal communication, September 27, 2002)

It should be noted that less than one-third of the teachers reside in Cleveland (Okoben, 2002).

Pseudo Enfranchisement of Parents

Chicago

Though both governance measures were enacted by state legislative fiat, the Chicago model retained a process by which the citizenry has active voice in school reform through the local school councils (LSCs). As stated by Bryk et al. (1998):

> Chicago opted for an unparalleled level of parent and community control. In essence, it chose to shift from a centralized democratic control, exercised through a bureaucracy, to expanded local democratic control, exercised through school councils. It threw off the 'one best system' of education, and banked instead upon principles of citizen participation, community control, and local flexibility. (p. 17)

The LSCs have the authority to hire and fire principals and to determine how discretionary funds are spent, etc. The local school council is composed of parents (6), teachers (2), and community members (2).

Positions are held for two years. Public Act 85-1418 and the creation of local school councils are significant to school administration because no other large urban district in the United States has decentralized control of schools to this extent.

Under the Reform Act, principals are expected to work with the LSC and other members of the school community to analyze needs, set goals, develop plans, and establish policy. Additionally, principals are expected to develop the school budget, use and manage fiscal resources, adapt the system-wide curriculum objectives and standards to local school needs, identify instructional materials, create activities and programs, select and evaluate staff, provide for professional growth and development, meet federal, state legal and regulatory requirements, generate outside resources, and implement policies and plans with the LSCs' approval.

Similarly, "Local School Council members are accountable to their respective constituents and can be voted out of office if they fail to perform satisfactorily" (Bryk, Sebring, Kerbow, Rollow, & Easton, 1998, p. 290). Shipps (1997) contends that the influence of parents and community groups was actually weakened as a result of the 1988 School Reform:

> The community advocates who made common cause with organized business in 1988 got powerful allies and achieved substantial benefits. Their constituency, parents and community groups, became school-level policy makers. But the price was high. The reform empowered parents and community members as the dominant voice on each school's LSC, but simultaneously weakened their influence as citizens with interests in the system of schools serving all of Chicago's children. Instead, that voice was left to corporate business in 1988, formally guiding system-wide policy through its influence on an oversight authority, and helping to shape it informally with its extraordinary resources. (p. 75)

Shipps also contends that this view is due to the new governing system forged in the linking of the 1988 and 1995 laws for reforms—which corporate business influenced. What emerges when the business role is really understood, is less of a focus on the "growth of parent power and democratic revitalization, but instead on the replacement of centralized professional control with decentralized business management." In other words, businesses are linked to the fate of system-wide bureau-crats and political agents, while parents are linked to the fate of principals and teachers in schools. The true power and influence rest with corporate business, not with the LSC! These changes are a gradual return to the policymaking role that businesses played in the early years of public schooling.

Cleveland

No similarly powerful model of electorate/parent participation exists in Cleveland. In fact, a lawsuit filed by citizens, the Cleveland Teachers Union and the NAACP to oppose mayoral control was dismissed, the Federal Court finding that this legislation did not violate the Constitutional rights of parents and other citizens of the school district (*Spivey v. Ohio*, 1998). However excluded in the initial choice to establish mayoral control, it appeared that parents in Cleveland were not convinced that this model was worth retaining and were poised to reject the pilot whenever they would have the opportunity to vote on it in 2002: " 'The major issue is being disenfranchised,' aid former Rep. Mary Rose Oakar, who has been mentioned as a potential challenger to White" (Stephens & Frolik, 2002, p. 9-A).

The aforementioned survey reported that 68% of the respondents are not in favor of mayoral control of the schools, despite positive reactions to the accomplishments of the appointed CEO/Superintendent. The head of one of Cleveland's largest foundations and co-chair of the citizens' panel that recommended the change in school governance, captures the paradox: "It's interesting that people see the district getting better, but they don't make the connection between that and the governance change" (Stephens & Frolik, 2000, p. 1-A). It is possible that there is <u>no</u> connection.

Reality Check:
Student Achievement or Economic Development?

Unique alliances are exemplified by the assistance of Republican state legislators to give power to the Democratic mayors to control schools. It is still too early to determine the long-term impact this new form of governance has on the most critical issue, student development and achievement (Banchero, 2002). In Chicago, current indicators show marginal results:

> There are signs that the system's vaunted educational advances might be leveling off. Studies published this past year by the University of Chicago-based Consortium on Chicago School Research show that academic gains might have peaked in 1997 and not improved since then. The consortium also finds that students who have been held back gain no more than students who have been promoted or waived to the next grade. (Hurwitz, 2001, p. 15)

These preliminary findings belie the "tough talk" of the mayoral governance team about the impact of its accountability strategies.

There are "great expectations" that centralizing the authority in the

municipal government will clear the way for educators on the "front line," principals and teachers to concentrate and be held accountable for results. Yet, one wonders how much of these hopes are dependent upon the personal, political capital of the mayors, who willingly accepted the challenge of transforming their cities' school systems. The former president of CPS's Board of Trustees stated:

> The real secret to Chicago's success is that improving education has become a citywide cause, thanks, above all, to Mayor Daley. As our team's top leader, he has made sure that everyone in Chicago understands that our economy, our property values, and our future as an international center of commerce and culture are all directly related to the quality of our schools….We are closer to our goal of creating a school system that truly prepares our children for the world of work and for life. (Chico, 1999, p. 2-3)

On the other hand, a recent poll by Cleveland's only major newspaper indicated that despite Mayor White's long-term activism regarding schools, "62% flunked White on the school issue" (Frolik, 2000, p. 10-A). The context of this statistic was Sunday edition, front page headline which read, "White's Eroding Support: Poll shows voters may be ready for change after 10 years of Mayor Michael R. White" (p. 1-A). The Cleveland mayor's heavy-handed management style is cited as one possible reason for voters' "change of heart."

What may distinguish the public support of mayoral control of schools in Cleveland and Chicago may be a public policy issue of enfranchisement. Hill and Celio (1998) discourage parent and other grass roots involvement in the first stages of citywide school reform planning:

> This approach has the advantage of showing respect for the people who work in pubic education day to day. It has the disadvantage of returning the initiative to the very people who have found ways of living comfortably with the status quo. (p. 70)

Who should participate in educational decision-making? Sarason (1990) contends that:

> [A]ny individual or group who directly or indirectly would be affected by a decision should stand in some relationship to the decision-making process…When a process makes people feel that they have a voice in matters that affect them, they will have a greater commitment to the overall enterprise and will take greater responsibility for what happens to the enterprise. (p. 53, 61)

In both cities, election of the mayor is the only venue citizens have for system-wide school policy decision-making.

Reality Check:
Conclusion and Continuing Issues

This particular governance model is perceived as succeeding, where others have failed, to meet the extraordinary challenges of transforming education for urban children (e.g., Stodghill, 1999). In fact, Detroit and other large cities' school districts have been placed under similar authority. Where these non-traditional governance structures are emerging and non-traditional stakeholders are assuming key administrative or leadership roles in the school systems' organizational hierarchy, the roles of traditional school leaders and the institutions that prepare them are in question. We can learn important lessons from the experiences of non-educator superintendents in large urban school districts, according to Hurwitz (2001):

> **Putting learning first.** Continuous learning for all children…should motivate every management decision. A nontraditional superintendent might want to enlist a trained educator as a partner in guiding the instructional process.

> **Find a capable manager.** Educating children in a large urban district is a supremely demanding management task. Whether traditional or nontraditional, a superintendent should have the expertise to manage people and resources in ways that improve instruction, which simultaneously coping with political and racial conflict.

> **Don't expect instant results.** School boards are often tempted to recruit nontraditional superintendents who will "shake things up" overnight. Strategies for turning around low performing schools require "coherence, continuity, and follow-through, and the commitment to stay focused over the long term. (p. 15)

Perhaps meeting the above criteria explains the favorable climate for mayoral control among some of Cleveland's parental constituency:

> Although Cleveland remains at the lower end of Ohio's school districts based on the State Report Card, we have a higher percent of improvement than any district in the county. That speaks to the work that's being done in the schools. All this occurred during the 1999-2002 period under a mayoral appointed school board. All the improvements continue to increase.
>
> As far as mayoral control/appointment is concerned, "City Hall", as does not interfere. We, the Board, are left to make policy that is best for the kids. Byrd-Bennett, the CEO, is well qualified, and she has competent staff around her. She knows education, curriculum and instruction and regularly updates the Mayor on school issues.

> You have an Administration in the District that has put the students' education first. The City's Administration and City Council are on the same page. It is understood throughout Cleveland, Ohio— "Educating Cleveland's Children" is a priority.
>
> The teachers' union is in favor of continuing mayoral control. There must be something good about it if they're willing to support it. (Personal communication, September 19, 2002).

Thus, despite the efforts of grassroots organizations like the Committee to Save the School Vote, in November, 2002, Cleveland voters approved continuation of mayoral control of the schools. (Okoben & Townsend, 2002).

Though primarily anecdotal, there appears to be a free exchange or replacement of central office school employees by city hall constituents. For example, upon leaving office, Cleveland's Mayor White had two of his staff transferred to the administrative offices of the school system.

The impact of mayoral control on privatization is not yet apparent in Cleveland. However, questions have been publicly raised in Chicago. Since Gery Chico, a former top mayoral aide, was appointed school board president of Chicago Public Schools, in 1995, by Mayor Daley, the amount of major school related business awarded to clients of Chico's firm has increased quite significantly in the past five years (total of $577 million) (Martin, Martinez & Becker, 2000).

Also of significance, as school systems grapple with reform, is the raising tide of non-traditional educational entities entering the "business" of education. Walsh (1999) states:

> As the education industry grows, will the bottom line be about learning or earnings? Raising student achievement or making a profit? Can it be about both? Those are the fundamental questions surrounding the expanding role of for-profit companies in public school instruction. Some educators worry that concerns about profits may take precedence over boosting student's educational outcomes. (pp.14, 16)

Soon after Chicago school's first CEO resigned, Standard & Poor sent a message to Mayor Daley that the system's A-plus rating was based largely on "strong faith in the abilities of the CPS management team led by Paul Vallas" (*Chicago Tribune*, p. 3). Paul Vallas now heads the Philadelphia school system where a large proportion of the public schools are now under private management.

In "A Nation Still at Risk," the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation (1999) concludes that the real issue of school reform is power, which is being concentrated more and more in the hands of a few who do not want things to substantially change. It is clear that fiscal crises generated the takeovers of Chicago and Cleveland's school systems and that corporate and

philanthropic activists initiated effective policies to remedy them. They also implemented restructuring that amplified their voice in school policy making, beginning with the corporate organizational models with which they were most familiar, e.g., CEO and CFO. The corporate influence in Chicago, through the School Finance Authority (SFA), even extended to limiting "voices" of school leaders, teachers and parents, the SFA having the power to "abrogate prior law and precedent in collective bargaining, determine which schools and employees are failing, and even disband LSCs and reconstitute schools" (Shipps, 1997, p. 104). No electorate chooses these decision makers.

From a more critical perspective, the issues raised by the former mayor of Memphis are still unaddressed. As one Cleveland principal stated:

> Look at the deplorable housing and ask, who's responsible for the housing code? Look at the sidewalks, which are nonexistent, where the kids have to walk to school each day. Who's in charge of that? The city. Now they're taking charge of the schools? Who's in charge of drug dealing? Who's responsible if the kids move when they are getting welfare—of keeping track of their residence? (Conniff, 1998, p. 25)

And as a Chicago administrator noted:

> The Mayor is sincere about improving education. He has taken on a declining city, attracted money to improve its physical appearance and amenities, especially its schools. However, the face-to-face intervention with children and their parents is not there. The high-rise population is being dispersed to the suburbs and social services are being moved to inconvenient locations even though the population of homeless, particularly children, is increasing. (Personal communication, November 1, 2003)

Without answers to these questions in the form of conscientious, continuous, consistent transformative action from those with "voice," however muted or constrained, children are left vulnerable and "silenced" in classic proportions.

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