

CITIZENS LEAGUE RESEARCH INSTITUTE
Education Policy Report

**WHAT HAPPENED TO
SCHOOL GOVERNANCE COUNCILS?**

**Cleveland Municipal School District's
Pilot Decentralization Program, 1998-99**

**Patrick Joseph Ryan
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Project Staff

Author and Primary Researcher: Patrick J. Ryan, Ph.D.

Research Director: Richard A. Marountas

Office Manager: Laura Schubert

Executive Director: J. Lee Bailey

I. THE SCHOOL GOVERNANCE COUNCIL BLUE-PRINT

In August of 1998 the Cleveland Public Schools' Mission Statement declared that the district was committed to "strengthening school effectiveness through decentralization..." School Governance Councils (SGC's) were created as part of a larger decentralization effort that "The Blueprint for Reform," and the Cleveland Teacher's Union contract referred to as a transformation from "a school system to a system of schools." The district initiated the first wave of eight SGC's in the fall of 1998, published a manual called "School Governance Council Procedures and Guidelines" to assist the new councils, and in this manual, proclaimed:

"The Cleveland Public Schools recognizes the rights of parents to be involved in their children's education, and for parents, community members and school staff to be involved in key decisions affecting the future of our schools. To that end, in each of the district's schools, parents and the school community are to be provided an opportunity to establish a school governance council. Each council will have a role in governing the school, through shared-decision making, as it moves toward improving its ability to provide quality teaching and learning."

Each SGC consists of the principal, four parents, four teachers, a non-certified staff member, a community representative, a corporate-partner representative, and in the high schools, two students. The manual compared the new councils to legislative bodies in representative democracies and went on to define two basic jobs for them: (1) "develop powerful partnerships" between the school and the community, and (2) "set policy in key operational areas" for individual schools.

Under the area of policy, the teacher's union contract stated that the SGC's had authority to set "general policy goals, objectives, and institutional priorities." Two of the strongest powers given to the SGC's were the authority to select new principals and "establishing and managing the school's budget." But this was not all; the union contract listed eight specific areas of responsibility. They are, in brief:

- 1) Determine the school's organizational structure
- 2) Report the school's performance to the district administration
- 3) Establish, renew, and approve the school budget
- 4) Select school principal from a list of candidates recommended by the administration.
- 5) Participate in staff interviewing and selection
- 6) Determine the number of persons employed in each job classification as long as this is consistent with contracts and monies available
- 7) Determine supplemental instructional materials and student support services
- 8) Determine policies in areas of curriculum, student discipline, the use of school space, selecting extracurricula, school climate, and community involvement

Backed by this clear language in the contract, the SGC manual pronounced that the councils were part of a reform effort intended to "alter governance structures to give administrators, teachers, and parents real power and authority." Principals were to retain responsibility for making day-to-day operational choices and for implementing council decisions, but the councils were empowered to approve, facilitate, determine, assist, help, select, report, initiate, monitor, develop, and establish a wide range of school policies.

II. Difficult Beginnings, Some Promising Signs

Providing a plan for reform is only the beginning of the process of improving schools. To assess them, we need to know what shape the School Governance Councils actually took during the first year. We found that during the 1998-99 school year the first eight SGC's failed to fulfill the policy roles outlined above, but that does not mean that they did nothing. For the most part, SGC members appear to have recognized that their councils lacked power to make policy, and so the effective councils tended to focus on small discrete programs that might help their schools.

When the Citizen's League Research Institute (CLRI) asked in an open-ended way what was their most important accomplishment of the year, only 17% of the time were SGC members

able to cite a specific task beyond holding meetings and writing by-laws. The single largest type of response was to refer to the ideal of community or better communication. But, these responses essentially repeated the language that was offered training manuals, and this suggest to us that they had difficulty naming a specific task or accomplishment when asked.

CLRI's visits to the schools and discussions with each principal confirmed these survey results. We believe that the eight SGC's can be broken into four groups of two in terms of their activities.¹ Two of the eight schools, Anton Grdina and Miles Park, failed to create councils that met each month. Anton Grdina's council failed to form after the school's principal left for health reasons in the fall. The one at Miles Park met three times, and seeing that their role was "unclear," made no policy decisions and initiated no new programs. The councils at Glenville and Gracemount met regularly but served only as discussion groups. Those at Charles Mooney and John Marshall went beyond discussion to play roles in furthering special projects at the schools. The most active councils were those at Newton D. Baker and Alexander Hamilton. They inaugurated

special programs, and changed or attempted to change significant school policies.

Within the schools that produced regularly meeting councils, each SGC either reviewed or formally approved the schools Academic Achievement Plan (A.A.P.). This task was well defined and

TABLE 1 - What Was Your SGC's Most Important Accomplishment?

Type of Response	Percentage
We Furthered Ideal of Community or Communication.	36%
We Held Meetings/Wrote By-Laws.	30%
We Worked on a Specific Task or Program.	17%
We Had No Accomplishments.	17%

N=30 (Total Number of SGC members = 82)

TABLE 2 - What do School Governance Councils Do?

SCHOOLS	Met Regularly	B &
Alexander Hamilton & Newton D. Baker (attempted governance)	Yes	Y
Charles Mooney & John Marshall (special programs)	Yes	Y
Glenville & Gracemount (advisory discussion)	Yes	Y
Anton Grdina & Miles Park (inactive councils)	No	N

it required no SGC initiative because the A.A.P. is produced by the Core Planning Team. Outside of reviewing the A.A.P., the Glenville and Gracemount SGC's spent most of the year determining their "purpose" and writing by-laws. The more active councils at Mooney and John Marshall went a step further and focused on trying to create support services for students and their families. At Mooney the SGC wrote and approved a policy that the school must hold at least one community event on the school grounds each quarter of the year to bring parents and families into the school. Mooney's SGC also played some role with the Core Planning Team and the school's corporate sponsor to develop a "Back-pack Sign-out" program to help parents prepare their children for academic tasks and proficiency tests. John Marshall's council helped pull together community resources for a Teen Center in collaboration with West Side Ministry. Marshall's SGC also played a role in setting up an attendance reward program with the Rotary Club, and asked National City Bank to donate used computers to update the school's lab.

Like the councils at John Marshall and Charles Mooney, the SGC's at Newton D. Baker and Alexander Hamilton helped foster collaboration with corporations and community organizations to enhance services provided to students. But, they also took on at least one significant school policy issue. For example, Hamilton is joining with the Mt. Pleasant Village Council to more fully utilize the school's facilities in a "Family Education Center." This Center provides family based intervention programs, basic child supervision after school hours, and academic tutoring. Hamilton's corporate sponsor, Nestles, provides \$50 saving bonds to students for passing all elements of the proficiency exams. The SGC has helped bring these programs along in the last year, but the council also adjusted Hamilton's third-quarter marking period to work best with the school's other events and schedules. Moving the date of the marking period may seem like a small change, but mid-term grades are an important venue for communicating with parents. Moving it to a better date suggests that the SGC at Hamilton has begun to take on seriously the initial stipulation that SGC's should influence basic policies

and school structures.

The SGC at Newton D. Baker was probably the most active. This SGC's general approach has been to garner resources to strengthen the school's services. The school's principal, Yvonne Aguilera, said that she began the year as a "doubter," but now is a "believer" that SGC's can help spur significant school improvement. Baker's SGC wrote a grant for collaboration with a nonprofit called Applewood to help at-risk children. They fostered a continuing relationship with Eaton Corp. They also helped create a Saturday tutorial program. To get the tutorial program off the ground, the SGC brought together key members of the school community. The Union Contract Committee chair and other teacher representatives worked out issues of compensation and mustered support from the staff who agreed to do the tutoring. Parents volunteered to provide care for the children of teachers doing the Saturday teaching. The Principal lobbied hard with the central administration to get the transportation services. The tutorial program ran for over three months. Baker's spring test scores show the impact of it evolving school community. The students tested above district averages in all areas, and above state average in all but reading.

Baker's council also asked the custodians to attend a meeting and to explain to them why ceiling tiles were falling at the school. The result was the replacement of 750 tiles with better adhesive. Even more important, a new dialogue has opened between the custodians and the school administration. After fixing the tile problem, the custodians came back to the council with a list of needs, which if unattended, might cause operational trouble in the near future. These newly identified items became part of the SGC's agenda for the coming year. Baker's SGC also initiated a plan to change the school's hours, measured the support for the plan in the school community, and petitioned the central office to put the plan into practice. Their plan to change school hours has not been approved by the administration, but clearly the SGC at Baker is trying to take on the role of shaping the types of basic operations that were specified in the original blueprint.

There was a great deal of variation among

what the first eight SGC's accomplished, but there were also common short-comings. None of the SGC's "approved" their school's budget in the meaning of the term that their approval was required before the school small discretionary funds could be allocated. None of the SGC's played a significant advisory role in the selection of staff, and none of them have approached the task of changing the numbers of persons employed in various job categories at their schools. In the two SGC schools where new principals are to be hired for the coming year, it appears that neither council has been allowed to select (as is set forth in the contract) the future principal from among candidates determined by the central office.

III. ILL-DEFINED AUTHORITY & LACK OF CENTRAL OFFICE SUPPORT

The reasons why certain councils developed a more active role than others are in some senses unique to each school. For example, it seems likely that Anton Grdina failed to develop a council because the school lacked a permanent principal for about half the year. Miles Park's reasons for forming only a weak council were totally different. The principal at this school has been involved in grant writing and school-community collaboration for years. Seeing that the SGC lacked a clear purpose and authority, it seems as if the members of Miles Park's many active staff committees, and their leader quickly lost interest in it. The uniqueness of a school's history, and the fact that persons within each school will have varying views on how the SGC's developed, should not allow us to overlook the overwhelmingly common explanations that council members gave for the limitations of the SGC's. They identified two problems: (1) a lack of defined SGC authority and (2) a lack of support from the central office for SGC activities and ideas.

Seven of the eight principals told us that the SGC's powers and responsibilities needed to be better defined for them to grow and improve. This same sentiment was expressed in our survey.

Council members' most common responses (33%) to the open-ended question, "What areas would you like to have more training?" stated that the authority of the councils needs to be better and more thoroughly defined so that they could determine what types of issues to confront. We also measured whether there was common understanding of how decisions were made at the school by asking members to fill out a chart identifying who was responsible for 25 specific operational areas. Although members commonly viewed the principals and central office as having the most authority, in no single area was there a majority consensus on who was in charge.² This suggests to us that there is a general confusion about how decisions are made at the schools. This word "confusion" was in fact commonly used by those we interviewed and surveyed to describe their experiences in the schools.

The sources of confusion over SGC authority and responsibilities probably varied according to each individual, but there were some factors encountered by all council members. If one examines the manual provided by the central office in August of 1998, you will find some good advice on how to build teams. However, the language used in the manual to define the "Range of SGC Responsibilities and Influence" is unnecessarily vague and incomplete when compared with the clear and decisive language used in the teacher's union contract. Perhaps the most troubling aspect of this part of the manual is the absence of key clauses that are needed to relate the new councils to existing bodies in the district. To give just one of 15 examples that we found, the manual states that the SGC's were supposed to "assist in the development of job description and postings of building staff members." This is a good start, but key details are missing. Assist whom? Must they assist? Do they need to be asked to assist? Is there a timeline for these postings, or are there other documents that specify personnel procedures that should be consulted? What would their assisting role in job descriptions and posting consist of precisely? How does it relate to the tasks undertaken by the more established positions such as the Union Contract Committee (UCC), the principal, and the central office? These questions

need to be answered if SGC members are to be involved meaningfully and helpfully in personnel decisions.

The union contract is much clearer than the SGC manual. It says the SGC's are to be allowed to interview applicants, but that they can only advise principals as to whom they liked best because the decision rests with the principal. The exception to this rule was the hiring of the principal. In this case, the SGC is supposed to choose from a list of acceptable candidates provided by the central office. In all of these matters the UCC plays a role of insuring that the rights of employees are protected.

The vagueness of the SGC authority appears to have been compounded throughout the year by a lack of central office support for the SGC. Several pieces of evidence force this judgement. Midway through the school year the central office administrator who was assigned to facilitate the creation of the SGC's was reassigned as a regional superintendent. No replacement was made. With no office for facilitating SGC formation one principal asked, "if we have a question, who do we call?" The district's new strategic plan of May 1999 provides no details on the School Governance Councils other than to note that they will be evaluated sometime in 1999. We are already several years behind the original reform time line, yet no word has emerged from the central office indicating which schools will make-up the second wave of 40 schools. Thus, elections could not have been held for new SGC's in 1999-00. The 1999-00 budget mandates a series of district-wide programs, but it fails to set aside monies for SGC facilitation or training. According to council members and school principals, the course is unclear and this sense of doubt about the viability of the councils undermines grassroots support for reform.

Along these lines, several principals said that the CEO needs to take a stand on the future direction of decentralization. In absence of this, one principal simply concluded that, "the district is not decentralizing, it is re-centralizing." Then s/he held up a stack of new weekly and monthly reports saying the purpose of the reports was unclear and that they gobbled-up time. Alexander Hamilton's

Principal (who is schooled in the Comer model of collaboration) claimed the issue should not be one of opposition between the central administration and the SGC. But, he added if the councils are given a responsibility on paper, "the district must follow through and allow them to make decisions." He then gave two examples involving the overdue budget and the hiring of his replacement where the central office acted in ways (whether it was intended it or not) that undercut SGC involvement. Without solicitation on CLRI's part, five of the seven other principals express similar sentiments and told similar stories of lagging central office support for the SGC's.

As is shown in Table 3 below, when council members were asked in an open-ended way what was the biggest challenge faced by the SGC's, their most common response state that the central office lacked support for their efforts (35 %). Another 14 % cited a lack of SGC authority. The confusion over SGC authority and the lack of central office support caused significant frustration among SGC members. One wrote, "We are not really decentralized. Central office still controls, vetoes our decisions." Another added, "I believe that there is a high level of frustration among members who don't know what the purpose or goal of the council is." One simply pointed out there were "discrepancies between what the council is supposed to do and central office desire to recentralize control." Over half of the respondents (56%) who added comments at the end of the survey (a completely open-ended opportunity) identified a lack of central office support for the SGC's as their greatest impediment. One member summed up a typical message in clear language and wrote, "We need to know if we should even continue pursuing this since it is obvious the new Administration is [on] a direct course toward centralized control! If this is to succeed we must be given the free hand to do it." It seems likely that the doubt and frustration of council members has had a negative effect on their commitment. The second most common problem reported by SGC members was lagging interest in their own ranks.

V. RENEWING THE REFORM EFFORT

Because almost no public statements have been made by the central administration about decentralization or the SGC's over the last year, it is impossible for CLRI to determine if there is an effort afoot to move reform in a new direction. Perhaps, the rocky road traveled by the first School Governance Councils has been an unavoidable product of a difficult and chaotic transition in the central office itself. If we can not determine intentions easily, the available research literature and our conversations with persons in other districts do suggest eight steps the central office should take if they are serious about implementing a "system of schools" to replace "the" school system. These suggestions do not pretend to detail all that must take place on the school level for school-based management to reach optimal performance, but they do highlight district-wide steps that are particularly important given the situation in Cleveland.

Eight Central Office Steps to Renew School Governance Councils

1. Clarify the new authority relations
2. Follow-through by allowing SGC's to exercise given powers
3. Invest in facilitators on a permanent basis
4. Decentralize significant budgetary decisions
5. Negotiate union contracts to give schools discretion in personnel decisions
6. Develop staff in accordance with a decentralized structure
7. Promote public awareness of SGC and the decentralization of the schools
8. Stay the course long enough for decentralization to evolve

1. Clarify Authority

If the district is serious about local school governance, its leaders must work to more thoroughly decentralize control over significant monetary and human resources to the school and the school's council. Yet, school-based management should not be a simple devolution of power, because central administrations provide services that schools can not create in isolation. Marilyn Roberts, Director of Assessment & Research of Denver Public Schools, said that one of the first questions that participants must asks themselves is "why do we have a district?" What services should be provided at the district level, and what decisions should be approved or made at the district level? In what ways should the district monitor, train, and reward people?

To the extent that policy makers in Cleveland have asked these questions, they have not resolved them adequately. Our data shows that Cleveland's SGC's organizational powers and responsibilities should be clarified. Research from other districts and even other industries suggests that organizational confusion is a barrier to high-involvement management techniques. According to Wohlstetter, Robertson, and Mohrman (1994, 1995, 1997), if we are trying to use school-based management to improve schools, we must allow decision-makers at all levels to obtain power, skills, information, and incentives. For these elements to be present at the school level, the definition of decentralization must be clear. How can the central

TABLE 3 - What were the SGC's Biggest Challenges?

Type of Problem	Percentage
Lack of Support from Central office	35%
Lack of Commitment from SGC Members	17%
Lack of SGC Authority	14%
A Particular Policy Difficulty	14%
Finding a Common Meeting Time	14%
Position Not Explained to Members Before-hand	7%
N=29 (Total Number of Council Members = 82)	

office or non-profit organizations develop good training materials, if they are unsure what will be expected of school-level participants? How can anyone tell what information is relevant to principals and local council members, if their powers are unclear? And of course, one can not design a rational system of accountability and rewards until one knows what powers, skills, and information are available to various personnel.

The role of the SGC also must be clear if it is to build strong bonds with work teams and committees at each school. These links will help each school construct a self-sustaining cadre of local people who are committed to a specific school and a particular group of children, rather than just the ideals of education. Wohlstetter and Mohrman (December 1994, 2) warn that undefined authority relations can result in “struggling schools bogged down in establishing power relationships. They tended to concentrate power in one faculty group, leading to an atmosphere of ‘us’ and ‘them.’ One struggling school spent almost a year developing a policy manual that specified who had power and under what conditions.” In Cleveland the problem of “us” and “them” appears more readily in active councils, and it exists between the central office and the school rather than within the school community. Yet, it is clear that the two schools who spent all year writing by-laws, like those in Wohlstetter’s study, did not have the energy to actually work toward school improvement.

2. Follow Through

Ogawa and White (1994, 55) estimated that about one-third of American school districts were using school-based management in some form. But, in most places it is probably more of a slogan than a way to revolutionized school systems. Summers and Johnson (1996, 84-91) reported that in 20 systematic studies of SBM only one reported that significant authority had actually been given to the schools in the operational areas of curriculum, budget, personnel, and strategic planning.

Why has it been so difficult for large districts to decentralize? First there is probably a legitimate concern common among upper management that decentralization will result in a complete loss of

accountability and that a significant number of principals and councils will not be able to successfully operate schools. However, there are ways to address this problem. In Edmonton, Philadelphia, and Chicago the central administration regularly evaluates schools and identifies the ones that need to be placed under greater centralized control. Anthony Jelinek, principal of Hibbard School in Chicago, told CLRI that the administration “must have reconstitution power” to deal with failing schools and regulate local school councils. Bryk, Kerbow, and Rollow (1997) agreed with Jelinek and argued persuasively that strengthening reconstitution powers of the central office was the key to advancing school-based reforms in Chicago.

Developing this facility in Cleveland will require a number of changes. Substantial funds will need to be allocated each year to an office of school assessment and evaluation, and clear procedures for removing councils and principals that fail to meet performance standards will need to be negotiated and implemented. But before these steps can take place, the current practice of leaving school reconstitution to a joint union-management committee will need to be changed. This has been, and likely will continue to be, a contentious issue. All parties should ask whether a committee has the capacity to continuously monitor school performance. This is a fundamental issue. For school-based management to become a reality, continuous monitoring must replace continual mandates. As the central office greatly reduces mandates, it must simultaneously implement systems of accountability.

Fear that individual schools will fail is only one of several factors that inhibit the implementation of school-based management. Federal and State regulations, district-wide contracts with unions and businesses, as well as countless administrative habits (all of which were intended to benefit students) stand in competition with the present impulse toward building school communities, and empowering the significant adults within individual schools. Oravitz (1998) explained that a morass of overarching regulations and agreements makes school management rigid and inefficient. But, changing authority relationships is difficult. Hill and Celio (1998, 82) reminded us that “there is no way to sugarcoat the

fact that the existing system is buttressed – and potential reforms are hampered – by central office structures and collective bargaining agreements whose weakness led to the current crisis.” Returning power to individual schools runs counter to powerful interest groups, and seriously pursuing school-based management requires that these conflicts be dealt with in some manner.

3. Invest in Facilitators

According to Mitch Chester, Executive Director for Accountability and Assessment in Philadelphia’s public schools, “if you create local councils you must support them or you will produce frustration.” This prediction of frustration was verified by our survey of the first year of Cleveland’s School Governance Councils. If SGC’s are to continue in Cleveland, it is absolutely essential that the central administration budgets for and develops an office of training and facilitation to support the councils. This obvious point is well documented in the literature. Joyce and Calhoun (1996,127) reported that school improvement initiatives, “require substantial amounts of technical assistance and facilitation for every school. Faculties were asked to do many things that were new to them.” A program in Compton, California addressed this challenge by providing a “coach” to work with each school’s leadership team (Ponessa, 1995). James Comer (1996, 136) explained that official “facilitators” who are familiar with the schools pre-existing programs and trained in the new reform direction are the keys to implementing their school development program. After appointment by the district and training in the Comer approach, “facilitators provided the school administrators and staff members with formal [program] orientations and training to help initiate the establishment...” of the three main work teams used in the Comer program.

Oravitz (1998) pointed out that unlike large corporations with similar economic resources school districts spend almost nothing on research and development for the improvement of services and products. This greatly inhibits their ability to muscle the human resources necessary for successful internal reform. In Cleveland there has been no money budgeted in 1999-00 for SGC support, and

since the promotion of Judy Smith to Regional Superintendent no contact person or office exists in the Central office to provide support or even to monitor SGC efforts. Other districts that have embarked more earnestly upon the road to school-based management, have devoted more resources to the transition. In Boston, a combination of public and private monies provided approximately a million dollars to get their 131 local councils going the first year. But, facilitating transition is not enough. Betty Washington, a school council facilitator in Boston, stressed to CLRI that once a school is actively pursuing local initiatives, it will need ongoing support and monitoring. New people periodically join the councils and they will need training, and new situations arise that force new questions about the relationships between the school, the community, and the district. To respond to such needs the New York City system provides \$12,600 to each school per year for supporting the facilitation of local councils and work-teams.

Facilitating local school governance can be accomplished through many means outside of traditional training. In Edmonton the central office created a “Dumb Rules Committee” to eliminate unnecessary obstacles to school initiatives. In Chicago the Purchasing Department streamlined the paperwork required from schools, and according to one account “started calling up principals to alert them to sales.” In contrast, a principal in one of Cleveland’s eight pilot schools, asked a question about the councils voiced by many, “If we have a question, whom do we call?”

4. Give Schools More Budgetary Flexibility

More than any other single power, the ability to alter school policies and operations depends on allocating monetary resources. In the words of William Andreakapoulas, a Principal at Fritsche Middle School in Milwaukee, “... if you want to get people engaged at the local level, you’ve got to talk about money.” (Cincinnati Public Schools, 1998, 1) These sentiments were common among Cleveland’s SGC members. Yet, during 1998-99 the SGC’s did not become truly involved in the budget process because the delays implementing a new accounting system resulted in schools across the district having

about a week to determine how to spend discretionary monies. In the words of one principal “they [the central office] gave us no time for collaboration, so I just made the decisions myself.”

The districts in both Edmonton and Chicago have tried to expand the discretionary funds available to local school communities, but they have approached it in different ways. In the public schools in Edmonton the route has been direct as slightly more than 90 percent of schools’ budgets are under the control of the principals and local school councils. Ingrid Neitsch, Principal of Smith school in Edmonton, explained to CLRI that much of this money is consumed by ordinary school functions. Every decision to allocate monies for one need requires that cuts be made somewhere else when resources are finite and the observed needs nearly infinite. However, the access they are given to a greater proportion of the budget allows them to move more effectively in a given strategic direction such as investing heavily in staff development, or hiring additional support staff, or purchasing improved materials.

In Chicago, each school controls a much smaller percentage of their budgets (about 10 percent in the two schools we examined), but this is enough to complement their efforts to join with foundations, non-profit service providers, city, county, and state governments. For example, the Local School Council at Beethoven Elementary in Chicago worked to gather resources from the Harris Foundation and Cooke County Hospital to open a health clinic in the school. The school’s principal Frances Oden explained that the health needs of her students, 93 percent low income, disrupt classroom continuity and the focus on learning. For a similar reason the school purchased a washer and dryer, so that it could not only set a standard that clothes and coats must be clean, but also help students reach that standard when it was otherwise difficult. The council has helped initiate ideas and pulled together resources from the district, foundations, neighborhood non-profits, and government agencies to create an intensive parental involvement school. Beethoven has developed a parental reading night, G.E.D. counseling, home visits, resume writing classes, and training in how to help your child with

home work. Since 1993 the percentage of Beethoven students scoring above the national norm on Iowa Basic reading tests has climbed from five to 35 percent.

If Cleveland Municipal School District hopes to foster school-based approaches to instruction and social problems, it should increase the size of its schools discretionary funds and continue to encourage private and third sector collaboration in the schools. As the district allows schools more budgetary discretion, it should follow Edmonton’s example in three ways. (1) It should develop a way for schools to voice concerns about the fairness of the district-wide allocation formula. (2) It should implement district-wide fiscal monitoring of individual schools. (3) It should provide incentives for schools to conserve public resources.

Empowering local schools increases the size of the turf that is open for conflict, and it increases the potential for unproductive fighting between schools for program funding. Polansky (1997, 35) warned “. . .it is important that accessibility to programs, funds and materials be equalized so as not to pit program against program” or school against school. In Edmonton, the communication among principals has grown through a formal organization to the point where secondary-school principals recently agreed to a reduction in their allocation of funds in order to restore a fair balance in the monies allocated to primary schools in the district.

Another key feature of Edmonton’s fiscal decentralization is ongoing budgetary oversight from the Superintendent’s office. Ken Dropko, Assistant Superintendent in Edmonton, told CLRI that the central office does not attempt to tell the local council how to spend their monies, but they do demand that the schools keep their books in good order. Deficits and surpluses are carried over by the school from year to year. The central office tracks each school’s fiscal pattern. Deficit spending by a given school is not allowed to get out of control.

Edmonton also organizes a utilities incentive program that financially rewards schools for spending less than is projected annually for utilities at the school level. Myers (1997, 3) reported that a similar utilities program in Philadelphia resulted in

approximately a 115 million dollar savings in utility bills between 1983-97. According to Myers, “the success of the program has been attributed to the participants’ ability to see the tangible results of their conservation efforts in the items they were able to purchase for their school community.”

5. *Give Schools More Discretion in Staffing*

As with budgeting, allowing schools to make staffing decisions is a vital part of school-based management. Even though the SGC’s did not fulfill their prescribed personnel roles in their first year, the responsibilities purportedly held by the councils and the principal in this area acknowledges this point. Perhaps because these are highly contentious issues, there has been very little written in the national literature to guide us in these matters. Yet, simple logic suggests that if councils and principals are to exercise meaningful power in the area of personnel, then district-wide contracts must be negotiated in such a way to allow for substantial differences between schools in staffing practices. We do know that in most cases where school-based management has been pursued in earnest, such as Denver, Edmonton, and Chicago, it originated along with new labor agreements with teachers and other personnel. This was also the case in Cleveland. In our case, however, the district-wide contract defined a key part of decentralization: the SGC’s. It is at least worth considering whether this reverses the appropriate order of things. Shouldn’t contracts be negotiated in terms of the basic organizational structure of the district? If that structure is a decentralized one, then the contracts should allow school-level administrators and councils wide discretion. Making the transition from contracting for a centralized system to a decentralized one will be a prolonged process involving many parties, but such a negotiation can not be avoided if we hope to implement successful school-based management.

6. *Develop a Staff for Local Control*

Developing strong principals is the most important single element of staff development in a decentralized system. Although researchers stress different aspects of successful principalship, it is clear that principals in a decentralized system will

have to be able to usher in collaborative efforts, and foster links between multiple constituencies in a school community.³ The principals that we interviewed seemed to be highly competent individuals, and most expressed confidence that they could use increased discretion to improve their schools. But, one explained that the job consisted primarily of returning forms to the central office promptly and said, “I give them whatever they ask for, and they ask a lot.” Clearly this is not the model of strong principalship and community initiative that school-based management hopes to foster. The central office must not only develop training programs for their principals, it must also function on a daily-basis in ways that encourage principals to focus their energies upon school-based solutions to problems, to facilitate team-work among their staff members, and to lead neighborhood-based projects.

Principals can only lead staff where they are prepared to go. Several studies have associated staff training with student performance, and emphasized that a primary goal of any reorganization of school governance must be better instruction not just power shifting. Joyce and Calhoun (1996, 119) reported that “. . . the creation of a strong system of staff development for current personnel may be a more direct route to school improvement” than administrative reforms such as school-based management. Other researchers point out that there is a link between staff development and institutional organization. They argue that the poor efficacy of staff training programs is directly related to the fact that under centralized systems teachers are not allowed to determine the content of the in-service training. Jones (1998) summed-up her findings about school-level staff development when she wrote, “Some administrators might hesitate to let teachers choose and/or design their own staff development, but it’s working well in Colorado’s Mesa County Valley School District.” The teachers at an elementary school there examined students’ performance on math assessment tests, discussed how they taught computational skills, studied the literature, and brought in trainers to help them. Associate Superintendent Jan Henwood claimed that this teacher-driven approach is better than “spoon-feeding” ideas to teachers:

*If [teachers] think something is a district idea, they don't see the need. But if they decide on their own, based on their students' performance and needs, teachers will be the first ones to say, 'We need to learn how to do this better.'*⁴

In contrast to this story from Colorado, one of the eight principals in Cleveland said that the school's staff wanted to continue using the curriculum that they developed under the previous administration. This was not said to imply that there was anything wrong with the programs that the district is mandating, but only that the teachers at this school understood and could better teach the materials they picked and developed.

7. Promote Public Awareness and Support

Local control should not be confused with the issue of generating adequate funding, nor should it be viewed as a way to lower costs. In a study of the schools of Chicago, Cleveland, St. Louis, and Milwaukee, Delin and Hess (1996) showed that the levels and sources of school funding do significantly influence school performance. The implementation of local school governance may allow districts to work toward better, more efficient schools, but good schools will not be cheap. High quality teachers will demand to be properly compensated for their work and districts spend most of their funds on staff related costs. Even district-wide incentive programs that encourage individual schools to cut costs in certain areas work best when they return most or all of the savings back to the schools to spend on improvements. Polansky (1997, 35) observed that "Unless an appropriate amount of funds are provided for enrollment growth, operations and expansion, site-based management will not work."

Berliner and Biddle (1998) and Troy (1998) have argued persuasively that the so-called "liberal" media has been extremely biased against public education. Public Agenda's 1997 report *Different Drummers* demonstrated how inept the communication between educators and the wider public has become. And so, Wright, Palmer, and Kavanaugh

(1995) call for educators to spend more resources on marketing educational innovations because "stakeholder acceptance" is a key to successful implementation of any improvement plan. As with any system of governance, decentralization can not be expected to improve schooling unless districts convince voters and legislatures to invest in education. The fact that the administration in Cleveland has been virtually silent on SGC's and decentralization over the past year has limited any public support for reform that might have been generated.

8. Stay the Course

One of the reasons that school systems have had difficulty reforming is that leaders are under immense pressure and can not allow time for reform plans to be implemented, to be adjusted, and to permeate institutions before moving on to the next fashion. The result is a cycle of unrealistic confidence followed by disillusionment. Hill and Celio (1998, 2) put the problem succinctly: "Once a superintendent leaves, officials responsible for the school system search for and hire a new superintendent, usually a capable and experienced person who takes the job confident in his or her plan to improve the schools and raise student achievement. Three years later, on average, that person is gone, plans only partly implemented and goals unfulfilled. Then the process repeats itself." Ken Dropko believes that Edmonton's cultural shift has been unfolding for over 20 years. And now they are seeing benefits in student test scores, attitudes, attendance, and other aspects of school performance. Comer et al. (1996, 140) reported that even under the best conditions their school improvement plan can not be institutionalized in even a single school in fewer than four or five years.

VI. CONCLUSION

We have only just begun to implement the SGC's in Cleveland. Any judgement of them must take into account that they were not well supported by the central office in their first year. It is also important to remember that even with their current limitations, half of the councils did something positive for their schools, and another quarter of them

reported that they have plans to become more involved in school improvement in the coming year.

Given our findings, we believe that the district should continue to develop and evaluate the pilot SGC's before implementing the next wave of 40 councils. But, if the administration is serious about decentralized reforms, it should reestablish a commitment to the councils by designating a new implementation timeline and by following the steps that we outlined above. These include: clarifying SGC's authority, allowing SGC's to use granted powers, investing in facilitators, decentralizing more of the budget and personnel, developing staff for a decentralized system, promoting public awareness of local control, and staying the course long enough for school councils to make a difference.

VII. A NOTE ON THE ORIGINS AND METHODS OF THIS STUDY

(Begin with paragraph on the origins of this study — CLRI's mandate to do this)

Our methods consisted of surveying council members, attending SGC training meetings, visiting the eight SGC schools and interviewing their principals, and reading all the documentation pertaining to SGC in Cleveland that we could find. We also conducted phone interviews with school level and central office administrators in other large decentralizing districts, reviewing the literature on school-based management.

We began the study by an intensive review of literature on local school councils and school-based management reforms. Out of this reading we wrote a questionnaire that consisted of 29 questions for council members. The survey was reviewed by staff from the Cleveland Summit on Education, and staff members in the district's central office. Marva Richards and Clairisa ? offered particularly important suggestions and helped shape the questionnaire's final form. Some questions were multiple choice ones that provided a scaled range of responses (eg. always, usually, sometimes, never). Another asked respondents to fill in a chart. The questions that yielded the most significant data were the open-ended ones where council members were asked to write a response of their own. There were 82 council members and 32 responded to the survey

for a response rate of 39 percent. This is comparable to response rates in other written surveys of local school councils. Almost all the questionnaires that were returned were completed in full.

Next we identified persons that had been involved in key positions in large urban districts during school-based management reforms. These individuals generously answered our questions, returned detailed e-mail responses, and sent to us internal studies and facilitation materials. We would like to thank them:

In Boston:

Betty Washington, School Site Council Facilitator
Jocelyn Mouton, Asst. Deputy Supt. for Teaching & Learning
Kathleen Armstrong, Principal of James M. Curley School

In Chicago:

Marie Leaner, Project Coord., Chicago Successful Schools
Frances Oden, Principal of Beethoven School
Anthony Jelinek, Principal of Hibbard School

In Denver:

Marilyn Roberts, Director of Assessment and Research

In Edmonton:

Ken Dropko, Assistant Superintendent
Ingrid Neitsch, Principal of S. Bruce Smith School

In Miami:

Eddie Pearson, Superintendent of School Operations
Robert Collins, Exe. Dir., Office of Educational Evaluation

In New York City:

Marysol Masse-Makimura, School Leadership Team Coord.

In Philadelphia:

Betty Klear, Principal of Franklin Smedley School
Mitch Chester, Executive Director of Accountability

Lastly we interviewed each of the principals from the eight pilot schools. The principals were generous and usually gave us from one to two hours of their day. Their responses to our questions appeared quite candid and we allowed them to lead the conversation. In some cases we reviewed meeting schedules and minutes with them, but in general we focused on the most significant actions of the councils rather on identifying the minute details of their work.

VIII. ENDNOTES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

Notes

¹ We have not attempted to describe the subtle social differences between councils. Table 2 only reports in roughly the sorts of tasks were taken on or accomplished. If SGC's are ultimately improve schools, research suggests that there are important internal dynamics that they must foster in schools. For example, does the ideal of "consensus" serve to shut-off honest discussion among members, or does it serve to unite members in the effort to find common ground while they continue to openly voice differences of opinion. These matters are crucial to the development of school communities, but we have not attempted to examine them because other basic issues in Central Office reform must come first.

² We asked council members to fill-out a chart specifying who made specific decisions at the school. They marked if a decision was shared or whether it was solely in the hands of one party, and were able to indicate which parties had advisory roles. The parties we named included the central office, the principal, the SGC, the C.P.T., another individual or group, and I don't know. The chart divided school tasks into five operational areas including instruction, extra-curricula, discipline and security, physical plant, and school-level administration. Within each of these broad areas we specified five types of decisions including allocating funds, making plans and setting policies, monitoring operations and outcomes, hiring and discharging personnel, and reviewing and developing personnel. When we designed this question, we realized that it asked a lot of respondents, but in general they took the time to fill out the charts completely.

Other than the general understanding that the central office and the principals have the most authority, there was no consensus in any given area about who or what combination of parties was in authority. We used two methods to reach this conclusion. First, we examined the distribution of responses visually using bar charts and frequency tables. This method shows that in no single operational area did a majority of respondents identify the same person or body as in authority. Across all areas the Principal was viewed in sole authority 19 % of the time, the C.O. 18 %, the SGC 4 %, I don't know claimed 11 %, but the area was viewed as "shared" 48 percent of the time. When respondents said the authority was shared, they indicated most often that it was shared among at least three bodies or persons. When they named only two, they usually chose the Principal and the Central office or the Principal and the SGC. Very rarely did they say that the C.O. and SGC shared decision-making power. The second method for determining whether the responses clustered around a single category was to measure the Kurtosis value for responses in each operational area. In general the Kurtosis values were negative indicating a lack of clustering. This confirms the visual impression we got from bar charts and frequency tables.

³ Polansky (1997, 35) wrote, "Some principals do not have the skills nor the desire to upset the status quo and make hard, often painful decisions. ... Principals are the experts on student development and instructional issues and don't receive much training in the fiscal area. ... Yet, in true site-based schemes, principals become the CFOs and CEOs of their schools, resulting in a strain on their personal resources and ability to first, articulate the fiscal needs, and second, provide fiscal accountability." Myers (1997, 5) disagrees with Polansky and says it is a "myth" that principals do not have the skills to manage large budgets. Wohlstetter and Mohrman (December 1994) stress that principals need to be good "facilitators and managers of change [more] than instructional leaders. Teachers often took the lead in the areas of curriculum and instruction," in the improving schools. Specifically they noted that in the stronger schools, "Principals took care to recognize the efforts of school staff through thank-you notes, and public acknowledgments in a newsletter or at faculty meeting."

⁴ Wohlstetter and Mohrman (1996), Wohlstetter, Mohrman, and Robertson (1997) found that schools successfully using SBM put an emphasis on staff development. They commonly reported that

staff development programs:

- Should emerge at the school-level from committees led by teachers
- Should be coordinated with the school's improvement plans
- Should be ongoing, but should change with the needs and perceptions of staff members

Brky, Camburn, and Louis (1996) reported from a survey of 5,690 Chicago teachers in 248 elementary schools that three practices (dialogue among teachers, "deprivatized practice," and peer collaboration), along with the structural factor of small school size, were all related to positive self-assessments of professional community at schools.

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