

Improving Schools by School-based Management

The mills of God may grind slowly in North American education, but with the assistance of Peter Coleman they can grind exceedingly small. The impatient conviction of many people, that the single most significant figure in education must be the head of a school, has always had to be balanced with the corollary that, like people in other walks of life, good heads are exceptional, unusual, atypical. So how can a public system cater for that sort of thing and still be accountable? With practical common sense Coleman patiently shows how it is done, establishing every proposition conservatively and firmly on contemporary research, yet assembling the entire framework of the argument around a revolutionary vision. That vision would place the centre of educational decision-making in the school instead of at the school board or higher. It is not only in Quebec that this idea is the subject of interest and controversy.

The approach to school district administration variously known as school-based budgeting, school site management, school-centred administration, or school-based management, is being treated as an innovation, although it has a considerable history in Florida and California and has been practised in a few places in Canada.

The approach requires the decentralization of decisions from the district office to the school. Although discussions typically focus on resource allocation decisions, the basic principle applies to all educational decisions. It is a simple notion: **Every decision which contributes to the instructional effectiveness of the school, and which can be made at school level, should be made at school level.** This would represent a major shift in orientation. At present, "The school as an institution may well be the most inactive or ineffective part of the decision-making structure that includes classroom, individual

school, district and state."(Goodlad, 1983a, p.38)

This decentralization of responsibility for decision-making generally has four linked objectives, which help to define the approach and also provide a set of criteria by which its utility can be evaluated (see Table 1). Not all of these objectives are asserted in every application, but all are frequently mentioned. Table 1 also proposes indicators by which success in achieving the objectives could be measured.

A general rationale for school-based management will be developed here, in the form of propositions supportable by current knowledge. These propositions will then be linked to the objectives of school-based management schemes, in an attempt to demonstrate how such schemes can assist in providing more effective schooling. Sufficient illustrative material will be provided to yield a reasonably complete definition of school-based management.

Table 1

School-Based Management: Objectives and Indicators

OBJECTIVE	INDICATOR
<p>1. To allow for greater diversity in instructional programs and services, so that schools can accommodate the preferences of student and parents better.</p>	<p>Survey of parents and students perceptions of school programs. Analysis of school spending patterns and internal budget transfers.</p>
<p>2. To increase cost-effectiveness by reducing (proportionately) central office costs and efficiency.</p>	<p>Analysis of per-student costs, the percent spent at school level, and of school reserve accounts.</p>
<p>3. To facilitate staff involvement in instructional decision-making and hence strengthen commitment to school improvement</p>	<p>Survey of staff perceptions of climate and decision involvement, before and after implementation.</p>
<p>4. To increase the accountability of school administrators for school effectiveness.</p>	<p>Monitor annually data on performance of the schools.</p>

Improving schools: freeing principals

There is a growing sense that schools must be made more effective. In general, this arises out of pressures for increased accountability. Such pressures are due to concerns about both the success of the public schools in producing literate graduates and the costs of the public schools. In a period when other public sector costs are being accorded higher priority by policy-makers at both provincial and federal levels, complaints about school quality are readily used as reasons for the limitation of funding by senior governments.

Although efforts to implement educational change have generally been unsuccessful, they have helped to demonstrate what are the requirements for effective implementation (Fullan and Pomfret, 1977). Major amongst these is the focus on the school.

Proposition 1:

Efforts to improve schools must focus on the school as a unit.

This point has been argued at length by Goodlad, and in essence emerges from research on unusually effective schools which finds very significant differences in quality between schools, even within a group of schools serving the same community and with equivalent resources (Rutter et al., 1979). Although Goodlad believes that the utility of such an approach cannot yet be demonstrated, evidence from other kinds of research supports it (e.g., Garms, Guthrie & Pierce, 1978).

Recent research on school effectiveness has focussed on so-called "outlier" schools; that is schools which are unusually effective. Most of this research now supports one important proposition:

Proposition 2:

Unusually effective schools almost always have unusually effective principals.

The characteristics of such schools include assertive, achievement-oriented leadership; orderly, purposeful, and peaceful school climate; high expectations for staff and pupils; and well-defined instructional objectives and evaluation system. (Shoemaker and Fraser, 1981)

In addition, it has become clear that the institutional leadership of the principal is essential to successful implementation of change (McLaughlin & Marsh, 1979; Leithwood and Montgomery, 1982). Not surprisingly, a consistent association has been found between school adaptability and school success. (Goodlad, 1983a)

Decentralizing decision-making

Studies of the work of principals frequently find that they do not control resources essential to their schools, and are heavily constrained in what they can do by central office policies and practices. Leithwood and Montgomery's review of research, focussing on the differences between effective principals and typical principals, is particularly revealing:

"Effective principals' relationships with district staff may be very close to quite distant, depending largely on the perceived value of district staff in helping to achieve priority school goals. Typical principals, in contrast, appear to be much more responsive to the demands of district administrators, placing expressed district priorities ahead of school priorities".(1982, p.325)

Goodlad's findings that, in very effective schools, principals report that they have the amount of influence they think is appropriate (1983a) seems quite consistent. Facilitating the work of good principals is a prime purpose of decentralization efforts. Such principals rarely feel the urge to compliance, and for them central office policies are often barriers to school improvement.

Proposition 3:

Decentralization of decision-making to the school level is intended to free principals from unproductive constraints.

A number of other benefits are likely to follow from the decentralization of decision-making, all potentially contributing to the improved effectiveness and efficiency of individual schools. However, there are already some signs of a tendency to decentralize only trivial decisions. If school-based management is to lead to more effective schools, it is important that the **critical decisions**, those which determine school effectiveness, be made in the school.

Proposition 4:

Decentralization attempts should focus on the critical decisions, i.e., those which relate closely to school effectiveness.

Research has identified a relatively small number of factors as having significant correlations with school effectiveness, as measured by student learning. These are summarized in Table 2.

Briefly, the table asserts the following relationships:

1. Student achievement is directly affected by the quantity of Academic Learning Time (Berliner, 1979). In turn, achievement affects student self-esteem.(Scheirer and Kraut, 1979)

2. Academic Learning Time is directly affected by student motivation and behaviour, by the assertive leadership of the principal in setting priorities and the "work rate" of the school, and by the effectiveness of instruction, including such issues as grouping, teacher expectations, and instructional planning.(Peterson, 1979)
3. Student motivation and behaviour are directly affected by student self-esteem, family environment (Walberg and Marjoribanks, 1976), school climate (Brookover et al., 1979), and effective instruction.
4. School climate is directly affected by family environment, the assertive leadership of the principal, and by teacher characteristics and the quality of instruction.(Brookover et al., 1979)
5. Effective instruction is affected by school climate, by teacher characteristics, and by assertive leadership. (Centra and Potter, 1980)
6. Teacher characteristics are affected by the assertive leadership of the principal (through teacher selection and development).
7. Family environment can be directly affected by school programs for home-based reinforcement, which lie within the initiative of the school principal.(Barth, 1979)

This allows a summary to be made of the decisions which should be made at school level, by the principal in consultation with staff and others. (In what follows, every reference to school decisions should be read as collective decisions for which the principal is responsible to the central office.)

1. **Staffing decisions**

Within budget limits, the school should decide how many and which teachers should comprise the instructional staff, and how many and which support staff (aids, secretaries, clerks, counsellors, librarians, supervisors, markers, substitute teachers, laboratory assistants, tutors, and so on) are needed.

2. **Instructional decisions**

Within budget limits, the school should make decisions on issues such as appropriate instructional techniques (includes use of space, A/V aides, tutorial and other assistance), classroom grouping, standards of performance, student-teacher interaction (includes supervision, discipline, and behaviour policies), and planning for instruction (includes sequences and links between subjects and grade levels, pacing, and purchase and use of materials).

3. School climate

Within budget limits, the school should make decisions on school attendance and discipline policies, the school timetable, the extra-curricular program, parent involvement and reporting to parents, the program offerings and emphases deriving from the school's educational goals, and general community relations.

Since many of these decisions are in part resource allocation decisions, the decentralization of such resource decisions becomes an important element (although **only one** element) in school-based management.

In summary, if the school has control over the decisions described here, then the school can have a decisive influence on student learning. Responsible authorities then have a right to expect effective schools, or at least, schools which annually become more effective. This is discussed later.

School-level decision-making: involving teachers

The bureaucratization of schools in recent years has led to attempts to standardize work processes, even at the classroom level. Professionals have resisted the control efforts of the bureaucracy, and have asserted professional standards, including the norm of collegial decision-making. Such decision-making is appropriate in "loosely coupled" systems (Weick, 1976) such as schools, in which, in the absence of clear causal connections between actions and results, decisions should be made using a combination of "judgmental" and "inspirational" strategies (Thompson, 1967). Consultative leadership, emphasizing coordination rather than control, is essential in professional bureaucracies, as is a considerable degree of professional autonomy.

Such assertions are common. Precise specification of decision-making models, based on the results of recent research, is less common. Three issues need to be dealt with in order to describe a useful model: first, the actual decision-making practices of typical principals versus those of effective principals; second, teacher preferences for involvement; and third, the problem of information gathering.

The actual decision-making behaviour of principals has been described with some care in recent studies. The common pattern is a face-to-face presentation of a problem by a subordinate, and a concluding decision on-the-spot by the principal under some influence of the subordinate. A second common pattern is one in which the principal perceives a problem and makes a concluding decision, without explicitly consulting anyone else. (Crowson and Porter-Gehrie, 1980)

The following characterization of principals' decision-making is supportable: principals typically make many decisions (100 approximately) each day, of which about 5 are

considered critical. Their decision-making style is reactive, influenced strongly by subordinates, rapid, informed only by subordinate opinion, and based on norms within the school rather than on policy guidelines in the district.

Such on-the-spot decision-making is a response in part to time limitations, the "unrelenting pace" which seems characteristic of administrative life (Mintzberg, 1973). Principals seem to be constantly on the move, with most activities and interactions being brief, averaging less than four minutes (Crowson and Porter-Gehrie, 1980). It may also be a response to role ambiguity, in that such decision-making emphasizes the principal's importance, and helps him or her maintain close personal control, on the grounds of decision-making efficiency. It is also an expression of anxiety. Effective principals operate quite differently. They seem to formalize decision-making in an attempt to encourage staff participation, but without losing opportunities to influence decision personally.(Leithwood and Montgomery, 1982)

At school level, however, recent research has emphasized the costs to teachers of participation, suggesting that decisional saturation was more common than decisional deprivation. One study suggests that the major cost of participation in decision-making is clearly time; the major benefits are varied, and are considered more important than the costs. Yet teachers choose not to participate largely because they believe that "shared decision-making does not mean shared influence".(Duke, Showers, and Imber, 1980, p.104)

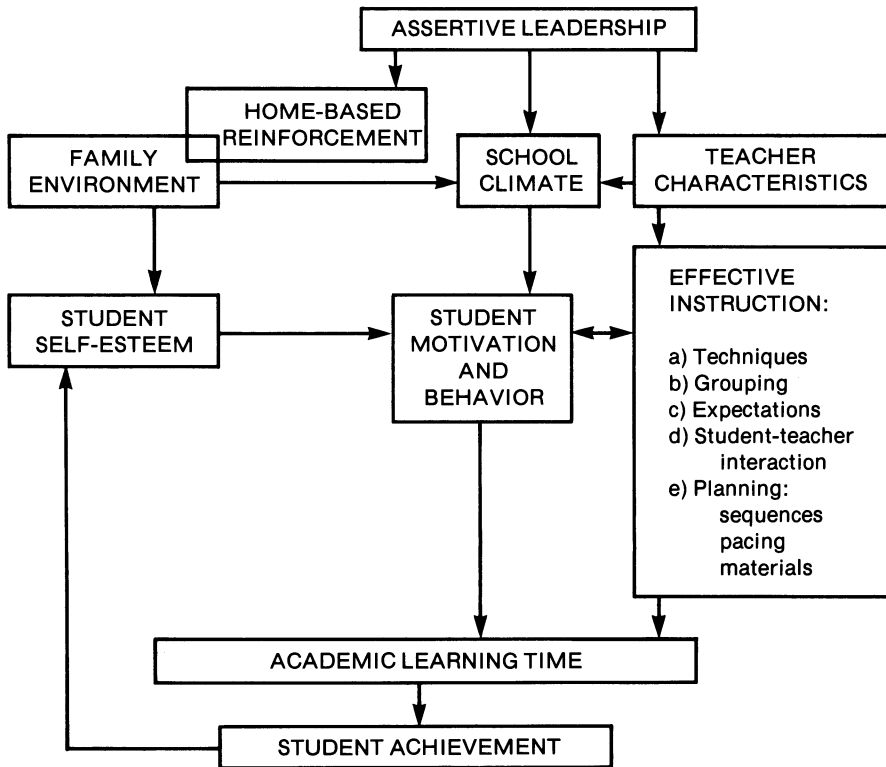
The information base for school-level or district-level decisions is notoriously slight, and few school districts collect and use adequate data, either on school outcomes and associated variables (see Table 2) or on the preferences of participants. Data on outcomes is best collected as a part of district monitoring, and is dealt with later. Gathering valid and reliable information on preferences from participants in the schooling process is not in fact very difficult, given modern data processing and polling techniques. It is essential, however, to ensure that a representative sample is used, rather than to accept the assertions of special interest groups that they speak for the community.

Proposition 5:

Good school decision-making requires (a) the principal to adopt an atypical decision-making style; (b) teachers to donate time because they believe they will influence decisions; and (c) valid and reliable information about program outcomes and about the preferences of participants.

Good decision-making structures which allow problems to be solved are not only associated with unusually effective principals, they also seem to be significantly related to student achievement.(Cooke and Rousseau, 1981)

Table 2
Important Variables Determining
School Effectiveness In Promoting Student Achievement



School level decision-making: involving parents

Recent discussions of school-based management emphasize the gains in accountability and responsiveness to be gained from decentralization by parents. Amongst other things they advocate careful school-level governance mechanisms, including parental participation in major decisions. It is anticipated that responsiveness to parental preferences would make the schools become more diverse as majority opinion prevailed and began to shape the programs and services available.

Such hopes are not new. Over 20 years ago, for example, Lieberman responded angrily to the perceived non-responsiveness of school boards by proposing that they be replaced by governing bodies at the school level. In Canada, MacKinnon made a similar proposal. British schools have had such bodies for a considerable time. However, in Britain they tend to be totally dominated by the educators who sit on them. A recent Canadian trial of mandatory Parent Advisory Committees in the Province of Quebec found similar professional dominance.(Lucas, Lusthaus, and Gibbs, 1978-1979)

Nevertheless, such school-level bodies continue to be advocated, most recently by the Commission on Educational Governance of the National Committee for Citizens in Education (1975). In Canada, the Canadian Education Association, after a very substantial review of the issue of public involvement, came out firmly in defence of the status quo, with school boards being advised to make more effort to elicit very carefully limited kinds of public involvement (1979).

There is some reason to believe that school-based management could improve the situation. The NCCE testimony emphasized that the size and hierarchical nature of metropolitan school systems was an important barrier to citizen involvement, while access to a cooperative principal was important to success in dealing with the schools. Similarly, Michaelsen has provided a convincing account of why and how the public choice model of school district and school decision-making as been subverted by the educational professionals, and cites evidence to suggest that private schools, funded largely by fees paid by users, "provide a mix of services that more closely matches the needs and interests of its clientele".(1981, p.232) Mann has reported in some detail on the "representative" role of the principal, and how some principals do in fact provide for school level responsiveness (1976).

The most recent evidence on parental involvement is reviewed by Fullan, who concludes that "the closer the parent is to the education of the child, the greater the impact on child development and educational achievement".(1982, p.193) However, at the school level, it is essentially involvement in instruction which is important. It is clearly associated with student achievement. Parental involvement in governance has no such outcomes, but does contribute generally to positive school-community relations.

Proposition 6:

Community and particularly parental involvement in the school is essential to the diversity objective: involvement in governance is important to ensure that services are responsive to needs; involvement in instruction is important to student achievement.

Central office responsibilities: data and support

Since the major decisions concerning the quality of education are all made at school level in the school-based management model of operation, two important consequences follow. First, a good school district becomes one in which all or most of the schools are good. The task of central office personnel then becomes to provide support and assistance to these schools, in an effort to help the schools to develop their autonomy, and then improve their quality.

The work of effective superintendents, in this view, essentially parallels the work of effective principals. The superintendent provides assertive, achievement-oriented leadership; an orderly, purposeful, and peaceful political and administrative climate in the district; high expectations for trustees, administrators, and teachers; and well-defined district objectives and evaluation system.(see Table 1)

Two kinds of support and assistance to schools are essential. First, the district must monitor results at school level, so that data on school performance, both norm- and criterion-referenced, are made available to the schools. Such monitoring typically would involve collecting data annually on a variety of measures of school quality and providing these data back to the schools. Obviously, this monitoring could include the collection of longitudinal data, on the accomplishment of the school-based management objectives, described in the Indicators column of Table 1.

Experience over several years with such monitoring suggests several conclusions: the longitudinal data are very useful in showing minor fluctuations in school quality, as well as in reflecting major changes such as a change in principalship very accurately. Further, the indicators of school quality vary together. As Goodlad (1983a) points out, schools are unitary with regard to positive and negative features: good schools are good by any measure. In addition, good schools are relatively frugal: the schools ranking highest on satisfaction indices invariably had substantial reserve accounts. Again, good schools are magnets for good teachers -- internal transfers showed a consistent pattern. Finally, good principals can in fact, over a period of years, have an impact even on standardized test scores.

Second, support services for school improvement must be provided: the most important such service is probably staff development. Such development is generally not technically but attitudinally oriented. In Goodlad's recent study, successful

schools had "staff members who decided to take care of the school's business".(1983b, p.555) The first purpose of staff development is to develop such attitudes.

These are closely related to teacher perceptions of school climate. A recent B.C. study (Coleman and LaRocque, 1982) yielded some survey items which were strongly associated, in the opinions of teachers, with positive elementary school climate:

Teachers can participate in decision-making in this school if they wish.

Staff meetings serve a useful purpose.

The principal makes opportunities for teachers to plan together in this school.

The principal encourages teachers to try alternative ways of solving instructional problems.

Teachers plan the instructional program cooperatively in this school.

The main need teachers have, in order to undertake staff development, is meeting time. In a decentralized budget system, the schools may be able to modify staffing patterns in such a way as to provide for this. In addition, some technical support for school self-improvement efforts seems essential. A Teacher Centre is the most obvious way of providing for this. (Coleman, 1975)

Accountability

There are two levels of accountability in a school-based management system. At the district level, the Superintendent becomes accountable to the Board for school quality and costs, and the Board to the community at large. The main criteria for judgement become school effectiveness and economy of operation. Although cost-effectiveness study in education is still crude by comparison to industrial studies, useful analyses can be made. Such concerns are at the heart of the pressure for accountability in all areas of public service, but particularly in education.

Educators have argued that results-based accountability is inappropriate, that educators can only be held accountable for processes. In response, school district offices and governments have in fact tried to regulate processes by writing detailed curriculum guides and lists of authorized materials, for example. Such attempts to limit professional autonomy have been resisted by teachers, as they have been by other professionals working in professional bureaucracies. Attempts to control processes have

led to very large bureaucracies (Wise, 1979) and to notions such as school accreditation and inspection.

The main arguments used by educators to evade responsibility for results, that is accountability in terms of effectiveness, are three: collective responsibility; goal confusion; and efficacy. The first and third are essentially similar, in that proponents argue that the school alone cannot achieve the goals of education. The appropriate response is simple, and has already been given here: some schools are measurably more effective than others, although sharing a community and student group.

The second argument, on goal confusion, is simply not true. Although philosophers of education disagree violently about desirable outcomes, in fact educators, students, and citizens are in broad agreement on the objectives of schooling (education is too broad a term). Hence it is perfectly possible to state, in contractual terms, what is expected of schools by those who are obliged to pay for them. This is the essence of program budgeting approaches.

Furthermore, the diversity objective in decentralization schemes implies that the schools will attempt to identify with some precision the expectations of their particular clientele, and modify programs to meet the particular hierarchy of objectives on which their clientele achieves consensus. Given open boundaries, with some reasonable transportation availability, this constitutes a rational district response to the varieties of specific educational needs within the broad consensus found in most communities.

The most defensible form of accountability is probably that described by Goodlad under the label "ecological accountability." This avoids the reductionism which asserts test scores as the ultimate measure of school effectiveness. Goodlad (1979) argues for broad goals, evaluation of school effectiveness on the basis of stated criteria, consideration of the interrelatedness of aspects of school functioning, and some sense of what constitutes a healthy educational setting. He also maintains that such broad-based notions of accountability are desired by taxpayers and parents (1983a).

Survey research methodologies, and particularly factor analysis, allow us now to identify with ease the important things about schools for various groups. Surveys of parental opinion reveal, for example, items which correlate closely with parental assessments of school quality. One such survey dealing with elementary school climate (Coleman and LaRocque, 1983) suggests the following as amongst the items important to parents.

The principal is open and approachable.

The principal in our school treats parents' opinions with respect.

Students are excited about learning in this school.

The academic emphasis in our school is challenging to students.

Parents are given information in advance of any changes in the school.

My child is happy to go to school.

Teachers in this school feel they are responsible to parents.

Such surveys readily yield what students think is important about classrooms and schools, and what teachers feel is important. They could be used as broad-gauge measures of school effectiveness, approximating the notion of ecological accountability proposed by Goodlad. The schools can then utilize the autonomy available to them to improve their effectiveness, on the basis of the data from surveys provided to them by the central office monitoring system.

Proposition 7:

A broad-gauge model of accountability focussing on school effectiveness should be developed, in which central office monitoring services provide schools and school boards with reliable and valid longitudinal data on effectiveness.

There are important technical considerations which arise in school-based management schemes concerning the allocation and control of funds.

Allocation and control of funds

Analyses of existing school-based management schemes very frequently find that one of the major concerns of participants is the provision of up-to-date financial information to schools (Cooper, Dreyfuss, and Boekhoff, 1980). It is necessary to adopt some form of program budget, computerize the financial record of the district, process all purchase orders in the district office, and charge the face value of the purchase order against the school budget, rather than charge the eventual payment made.

Much more complicated is the problem of resource allocation. Most schemes use some form of grade-level weighting of pupils, for two main reasons: it provides **apparent** equity with regard to the criterion of equality of educational opportunity; and it resolves mechanically a wide range of possible disputes regarding the needs of schools.

The equity is apparent only. The debate of the 1970's on

equality of educational opportunity made it clear that simple equity was not sufficient. Compensatory educational resources were required to aid the initially disadvantaged. Unless the pupil-weighting scheme provides for compensatory weighting for particular groups of students, in addition to the typical grade-level weighting, equity in resource allocation is not being achieved.

Given some attention to this issue, and to the small school problem, which is similar, a weighted pupil formula like the following would probably emerge:

$$\text{Number of pupils} \times \text{grade level weighting} \times \text{special needs weighting (proportion of identified children in the school)} \times \text{school size weighting (deviation below or above average size)} \times \text{per pupil allocation} = \text{school budget.}$$

Arriving at the per pupil allocation for the first time is usually accomplished in one of two ways: a zero-based budgeting exercise can be done, in which the proposed expenditures for the current year on all the necessary staff, materials and equipment, and services for the average pupil are calculated. More commonly, the actual cost of the existing educational program, at school level, is calculated on a per student basis. In subsequent years, adjustments are made to the formula by Board decision.

Frequently, teachers' salaries, as the major component, are treated separately. Rather than a cash allocation, a teacher allocation can be made on a pupil/teacher ratio basis. Should the school decide not to take up its total staff allocation, or to add to it, credits or debits can be made on the basis of the average teacher salary for the district.

In order to allow budget control and analysis, it is probably desirable to calculate separate per pupil allocations in each of several areas: professional staff; supplies and equipment; support staff; and school services. Ideally, these headings should form a matrix with program areas so that the budget provides a careful description of school activities and annual cost, as in the partial example given in Table 3, which was prepared for an elementary school of 400 students. (Note: "Services" is a catch-all for printing costs, fees, memberships, and other minor costs. The assumptions in the example include 25 students per class, some preparation time for teachers, and an existing stock of supplies and equipment which is being maintained.)

For district purposes, a composite of all elementary school classroom French program costs, for example, can readily be produced. For school purposes, a composite of budget allocations in each of the main categories represents total school budget.

Table 3
Illustrative School Level Program Budget (Partial)
(elementary school ; 400 students)

PROGRAM TITLE	DESCRIPTION IN BRIEF	ANNUAL COSTS					TOTAL
		PROF. STAFF	SUPPORT STAFF	SUPPLIES & EQUIP.	TRANS-PORT	SERVICES	
Elementary Phys. Ed.	40 minutes daily of physical educ. following district curriculum guide.	2.5	.5 clerk	400 st.	400 st.	400 st.	
	@	@	@	@	@		
	35,000	16,000	22	12	2		
		87,500	8,000	8,800	4,800	800	109,900
Classroom French	40 minutes 3 times weekly of French following curr. guide.	.5	.1 clerk	400 st.	—	400 st.	
	@	@	@	@	@		
	35,000	16,000	3.75	1			
		17,500	1,600	1,500		400	21,000
Administration	Principal, team leaders, head secretary and prof. development, substitute teachers, community involvement activities included.	3 (FTE)	1	400 st.	400 st.	400 st.	
	@	@	@	@	@		
	35,000	20,000	6	2	2		
		105,000	20,000	2,400	800	800	129,000
Library	40 minutes of instruction 3 times weekly, following dist. guides, program support materials, & leisure reading.	1	1	400 st.	—	400 st.	
	@	@	@	@	@		
	35,000	16,000	20	6			
		35,000	16,000	8,000		2,400 (includes periodicals)	61,400
Partial Totals		245,000	45,600	207,000	5,600	4,400	321,300

Such detailed analysis is not essential for school-based management, but is helpful to school decision-makers. The subsequent analysis of school program choices and the diversification between schools is simplified by a program budget format. Shifts between different programs, and between expenditure categories, can then both be traced, to reveal the outcome of staff choices.

Proposition 8:

Budget allocations should be made on a weighted pupil basis, and budget categories should if possible be broken down to program level for each school.

With regard to fiscal controls, two important principles must be mentioned. First, virtually unlimited shifts of funds between budget categories must be allowed within very broad constraints. Shifts of program time allocations, for example, might well be permitted, allowing quite different expenditure balances between programs. Second, schools must be allowed to accumulate "savings", i.e. reserve accounts which can be carried forward to the next year, and to run deficits. This requires schools to accept fiscal responsibility, and encourages cost-effectiveness. A sense of ownership of school funds has proved to be a great encouragement to careful management, and reserve accounts are an important element in this. (Cooper, Dreyfuss, and Boekhoff, 1980)

Proposition 9:

Schools should be allowed the maximum possible flexibility in fiscal control. Transfer of funds between budget categories should be permitted, as should budget surpluses and deficits.

Summary and conclusion

The task of the school district is to establish standards and expectations of performance for all district staff, and then allow schools the autonomy to provide services appropriate and satisfactory to their clients in ways which school staffs and principals find functional. The responsibilities of the central office are to allocate resources equitably, monitor results, and facilitate school development.

The task of the school is to assert its own goals and standards, within the general expectations of the district, and develop and maintain the maximum degree of operational autonomy possible. An efficient and satisfactory decision-making system, which takes into account parental concerns and encourages community support of the school, is essential, as is fiscal responsibility. Given a good flow of valid and reliable information from the district's monitoring system,

schools can successfully undertake self-improvement which is reflected in a broad range of measures.

It is too soon, and perhaps rather simplistic, to claim that school-based management is an essential prerequisite to school improvement. It is certainly true, however, that unusually successful schools have in fact asserted their autonomy under the leadership of strong principals. To encourage autonomy can hardly be harmful, given careful monitoring of the results. It may prove extremely productive, in allowing our schools to win back their lost credibility.

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