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SCHOOLS AS ORGANIZATIONS

Formal and Informal Education

The bell rings, lockers slam, conversations end, and classroom doors shut as the school day begins. We are all familiar with these signs that the formal school day is about to start. Schools provide the framework for meeting certain goals of societies and preparing young people for future statuses and roles. School organizations, just as other organizations, have formally stated goals, criteria for membership, a hierarchy of offices, and a number of informal goals, such as friendship and sharing of interests. Although individual schools around the world share a number of similarities in their structures and roles, they also have their own distinct personalities.

This chapter begins our analysis of the formal and informal parts of educational organizations: the structure, stated goals, and what “really” happens in schools. Organizationally, schools are divided into classrooms, the day into periods, teachers into subject areas and rank, and students into groups by grades or performance results on examinations (Hurn, 1993; Parsons, 1959). Like other formal organizations, schools have memberships composed of individuals holding different status positions necessary to carry out the functions and goals of the school. Each position holder has certain roles to perform—administrating, teaching, learning, and providing support functions such as driving the bus and preparing the meals. These activities are the processes of schools, the means to meet goals.

The broad functions and goals of schools are common knowledge and shared by many people as pointed out in the reading in this chapter by Mary Haywood Metz. However, there is conflict over how to carry out those functions and goals—what curriculum to teach, what courses to offer, and how to best prepare all students for society. As discussed in the previous chapter, conflicts can occur between the school and its environment, between the school and school board, with different groups in communities, and between schools and the government. Even religious and political interest groups want a say in what schools teach and how they teach it. These conflicting goals can be seen in readings throughout the text.

Although the organizational goals of schools call for educating all students, not all students meet the requirements for passing to the next grade level or for graduating, especially when exams are administered to promote and graduate students. However, to give up on the students—that is, to “fire” them—would be to lose societal resources. Therefore, schools cannot be run by the same rules and under the same efficiency model as business organizations. Schools are expected, according to their goals, to prepare students for the next generation by transmitting shared knowledge, societal values, and ideals;

foster cognitive and emotional growth; and sort and select students into different categories—college material, gifted, talented, slow, rebellious, and so forth—with consequences for future adult status.

The readings in this chapter discuss educational organizations from large systems to individual classrooms. Overseeing the schools are state and federal organizations that make decisions about laws governing schools and money spent in schools, as described in Chapter 3. Local school boards translate these broad mandates into policies to meet the goals of the local district. To begin our exploration of schools as organizations, Rebecca Barr and Robert Dreeben focus on schools and classrooms. Their reading covers events that take place in schools, the division of labor in schools, the roles of participants, the organization of classrooms, and how time structures the day in schools and classrooms.

Anthony S. Bryk continues the discussion in organizing schools for improvement, comparing school organizations that work with those that don't work. Based on a large study of Chicago schools, he points out the essential elements for school improvement and how these can lead to better student achievement. Debates continue over the role of school boards in determining the organization of schools and whether states or local governments should take control of schools. Gene I. Maeroff discusses the roles school boards can and should play in strong educational systems.

Discussion about how to make schools more effective for student achievement stimulate social science research. A key research question has focused on a defining dimension—the most effective size of schools and classrooms; policies and funding reflect this interest, if not always the research findings (Honig, 2009). The reading by Bruce Biddle and David Berliner in Chapter 2 reviewed studies of class size and the impact of class size on student learning, considering the effect of size on school organizations and processes of teaching and learning. Linda Darling-Hammond's reading in Chapter 8 also touches on class size, as well as a number of other school practices that can result in improving school quality.

Behind the formal rules, classroom and school size and structure, and goal statements is another layer to explore—the informal system, or what really happens in schools. Whenever you enter a classroom, especially for the first time, interact with peers or teachers, or determine what you really need to do for a class, you are dealing with the informal system. In the second part of this chapter we look at this aspect of what goes on in school organizations and its importance for the overall understanding of educational systems.

Students learn both the formal and informal systems, each quite important to understanding how schools work. In fact, Philip Jackson (1968) argues that success in school requires mastery of both systems, even though there are contradictions between them. Students who have problems in school are often the ones who have not learned to balance the two systems or to negotiate the contradictions. The “hidden curriculum,” as labeled by Snyder (1971) in his book by the same name, defines this system as “implicit demands (as opposed to the explicit obligations of the visible curriculum) that are found in every learning institution and which students have to find out and respond to in order to survive within it” (p. 6). These unwritten regulations and unintended consequences are an education in themselves and determine how we learn to cope with the unspoken expectations in life.

Sociologists who study education ask numerous questions about the role of the informal system in selection and allocation of students: how students and teachers learn to cope with the expectations of school; feelings about themselves and others that students bring to school and develop in school; the classroom and school climate, or culture; and power relationships in schools between teachers, students, and peers.

The not-so-obvious aspects of the informal system of schooling include the subtle messages and power relationships inherent in any system. These aspects of schooling cannot be studied by looking at lists of goals, school documents, descriptions of role responsibilities, or recorded test scores. In fact, most studies of the informal system are ethnographies (as described in Chapter 2), or carefully

documented observations of interactions, behaviors, and the atmosphere in schools that record the “school climate.” Two examples are included in this chapter, one by Harry Gracey and another by Mary Haywood Metz.

School climate, or culture, which makes up one aspect of the informal system, refers to several parts of the school experience: the interactions that result from grouping students, the resistance of some students to schooling, and teachers’ expectations of students that affect their achievement levels. Factors inside and outside the school influence school climate (Ballantine & Hammack, 2012). Sociologists refer to the school value climate, learning climate, and power dynamics, among other types of climate. For instance, “effective schools” studies consider both the formal and informal systems in school, making recommendations on how to change school climate to make schools more conducive to learning for all children (Brookover, Erickson, & McEvoy, 1996). These studies measure school climate by considering teacher expectations, academic norms, students’ sense of futility (giving up on school), role definitions, grouping patterns, and instructional practices.

Several of the best-known studies of the informal system use ethnographic methods in which the researchers immerse themselves in the school settings to observe the more subtle workings of schools and messages students receive from schools. These studies have generally fallen into the categories of conflict theory or interaction or interpretive theory. Conflict theorists, as described in Chapter 1, see in the hidden curriculum a social control and power element that reproduces the social class of students. Working-class students find that they are not fully integrated into the educational system; they learn to cope with boredom in school, which prepares them for the boredom of future jobs. Consider the following examples.

In a now classic ethnography, Paul Willis (1979) describes the activities of two groups of English students, the “lads” and the “ear’oles.” The lads experience an informal hidden curriculum that reinforces their working-class status and prepares them for factory work. The ear’oles suck up the knowledge from teachers in preparation for further education and success in higher level professional jobs in the work world. The lads show resistance to school in their “counterschool culture” and create a “shop-floor culture” of chauvinism, toughness, and machismo to cope with the unpleasant situations they face in the middle-class school culture and hidden curriculum. In another ethnography, Jay MacLeod (2009) provides a vivid description of two groups of kids from a poor Chicago housing project and their experiences negotiating the educational system. He talks about the differences in the groups, one group of boys with high aspirations and the other whose members have given up on the system, and how those differences are influenced by the messages and experiences they receive in the informal system of the school. Unfortunately, in both the Willis and MacLeod studies, whether they give up or have high aspirations, all students tend to have trouble succeeding in life in general.

The readings in this chapter continue the ethnographic tradition by taking us through the lives of children experiencing the informal system of education, starting with kindergarten. Students learn both the formal and informal rules of the classroom from their earliest experiences in schools. Harry Gracey describes a day in the life of a kindergarten class for the teacher and the students. He points out both the formal lesson plans and time schedule and the informal learning that takes place in lessons about punctuality, obedience, respect, and other rules that govern the informal aspects of the classroom. This illustrates the interaction between formal goals of schools and informal lessons learned by children from teachers and peers to prepare them to move to the next levels of schooling.

Mary Haywood Metz’s ethnographic study of classrooms included interviews with teachers in eight diverse settings. In studying aspects of the informal system, Metz found a “common script” in schools. All the schools were recognizably similar in many respects, but she found clear differences in the way the script was carried out based on the dominant social-class background of the students and the informal system this created in the schools.

We end this chapter with a provocative view of school organizational decision making by Diane Ravitch, a former Assistant Secretary of Education under President Clinton. She examines the current organizational structure of schools, arguing that recent movement by districts toward using a business model that includes charter schools is depriving communities of their role in school policy decision making. After studying these readings, you should have a clearer idea of what the formal organization of schools means, what sociologists of education look for in the formal organization of schools, and an exploration of informal systems in schools.

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READING 16

HOW SCHOOLS WORK

Rebecca Barr and Robert Dreeben

In this excerpt from Rebecca Barr and Robert Dreeben's book, *How Schools Work*, the authors discuss the functioning of schools and classrooms. They examine different levels of organization in school districts from district offices to instructional groups in classrooms; they identify distinct events that take place in each unit, and how what happens in one unit affects others. They also discuss the roles and division of labor among some participants. Within classrooms there are instructional groups, often by ability level of students. Organization of time is another determinant of how schools work. From the length of the class period and day to the number of days in a year, the way time is structured affects opportunities to learn. The importance of this excerpt is in providing the methods and framework needed to understand the organization of educational systems and how schools work. The reading provides an example of the levels of analysis in the open systems model.

Questions to consider for this reading:

1. What are topics to consider and methods that can be used to study how schools work?
2. How do these articles relate to the open systems model and levels of organization?
3. What is the division of labor that influences classroom activities, directly and indirectly?
4. Relate what you read here to a school system with which you are familiar.

Our formulation begins with the idea that school systems are organizations that like others can be readily subject to sociological analysis. In all organizations labor is divided, which means that different activities are carried out in the different parts and that the parts are connected to each other in a coherent way. The parts of school systems are very familiar. They consist of a central administration with jurisdiction over a school district as well as local administrations situated in each school with

responsibility for what happens therein. The business of schooling, mainly instruction, takes place in classrooms run by teachers; and teachers preside not only over classes but over parts of them as well when they rely upon grouped forms of instruction. We will show how the work that gets done in district offices, schools, classes, and instructional groups is different in character, that these separate jurisdictions are locations for carrying on different sorts of activities. Indeed, this proposition is true for teachers as classroom

From *How Schools Work* (pp. 2–11), by R. Barr and R. Dreeben, 1991, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Copyright 1991 by University of Chicago Press. Reprinted with permission.

instructors and as group instructors in that teachers do different things in organizing a class from what they do while instructing subgroups within it. Part of the answer to our question of how schools work, then, is to be found by identifying the distinct events happening at each level of school system organization.

A second part of the answer can be found by discovering how the events characteristic of one level influence those taking place at another. It would be a strange organization indeed if the parts were hermetically sealed off from each other; if, for example, what the principal did had no bearing on what teachers did and if what teachers did made no difference for what students did and learned. Yet it is precisely the failure to come up with satisfactory answers to these questions that has caused so much grief in our understanding of educational effects. The answer must come from identifying correctly what the activities are and from being able to trace their antecedents and effects across pathways that connect one level to another.

The third part of the answer pertains not so much to what to look for as it does to how to look for it. School systems, like other forms of social existence, are characterized by variability. We can learn about their workings by attending to the different ways that comparable parts act: different schools in the same system, different classes in the same school, different groups in the same class. What can vary in these levels of school organization is the way in which resources are allocated, transformed, and used. A particular resource, like books, may be purchased by the district office. All fourth grade mathematics texts, for example, can then be distributed to each elementary school, thence to be stocked in each fourth grade class. Thus, a simple process of resource transmission takes place. From there, teachers in the same school may use the text in almost identical ways or in vastly different ways depending on how they organize their instructional programs. The program itself determines the instructional use, and hence the meaning, of the resource. Accordingly, insofar as the school is no more than a transmission belt for transporting books from the district

office to the classroom, school-by-school comparisons will show similar activities. Class-by-class comparisons in textbook use, however, might show sharp contrasts. Depending upon the nature of those class contrasts, they may average out to show no school differences or bunch up to show marked school differences. In either case, it is the comparison of events at the same level—school and class in these examples—that tells us what is going on.

THE FORMULATION

Levels of Organization

Labor in school systems is divided; it is differentiated by task into different organizational levels in a hierarchical arrangement. While we customarily think about hierarchies as pertaining to relations of authority, rank, and power, they not only are manifestations of stratification and status distinction, but also represent organizational differentiation, a manifestation of labor being specialized and other resources distributed to different locations, of the elements of production having been both separated and tied together in some workable arrangement. We are concerned here with hierarchy in this latter sense.

In an educational division of labor, school systems comprise several levels of administrative and staff officers as well as “production” workers occupying positions with district, school, and classroom jurisdictions. In addition, school systems are differentiated according to the resources they use, such as time and physical objects—like books—that constitute instructional materials. As we shall indicate shortly, time is a resource that has meaning at all levels of the hierarchy, but its meaning has different manifestations at each level. Textbooks, by contrast, are productive resources only inside classrooms. School systems also contain one additional element: students who are both the clients of the organization, the intended beneficiaries of its services, and, because schools are engaged in effecting change in children, productive resources in their

own right because they participate directly and actively in their own learning.

When organizations are differentiated, it is because their parts make distinct contributions to the overall productive enterprise. This means that people located hierarchically at different places perform different kinds of activities; it also means that resources come into play in different ways depending upon where they are utilized in the productive process. A complete formulation of school production, therefore, should identify all relevant combinations of people, time, and material resources at each hierarchical level.

More specifically, school systems characteristically contain a managerial component responsible for centralized financial, personnel, procurement, plant maintenance, and supervisory functions applicable to all their constituent elements. This component is also engaged in direct dealings with agencies of the federal and state governments as well as with locally based interest groups and units of municipal government. Activities occurring at this managerial level have nothing directly to do with running schools or teaching students but rather are concerned with the acquisition of resources, with general supervision, and with the maintenance of relations with the surrounding community including suppliers of labor. We refer to this as the district level of organization; its jurisdiction includes all schools in the district.

Even though districts are divided into levels (elementary and secondary) related to the ages of students, and some are also divided into geographical areas as well as functional units, we are primarily concerned—at the next lower hierarchical level—with schools. Contrary to conventional belief, schools are not organizational units of instruction. They are structures akin to switching yards where children within a given age range and from a designated geographical area are assigned to teachers who bring them into contact with approved learning materials, specified as being appropriate to age or ability, during certain allotted periods of time. Schools deal in potentialities; they assemble a supply of teachers, of students, and of resources over a given period of

time. Their central activities are the assignment of children to specific teachers, the allocation of learning materials to classrooms, the arrangement of a schedule so that all children in the school can be allotted an appropriate amount of time to spend on subjects in the curriculum, and the integration of grades so that work completed in one represents adequate preparation for the next.

These activities are the primary responsibility of school principals; they are core functions peculiar to the school level of organization. This is so because decisions affecting the fate of all classrooms in a school are not likely to be left to individuals (teachers) who have in mind primarily classroom interests rather than whole school interests and whose self-interest puts them in a poor position to settle disputes among equals. Nor are they likely to be left to district-wide administrators, whose locations can be too remote and jurisdictions too widespread to allow them to make informed decisions about local school events.

While these decisions constitute the peculiar core activities of school level administration, they by no means exhaust the responsibilities of school administrators, which frequently include such matters as planning curriculum; establishing disciplinary standards; and making school policies for homework, decorum in public places, and the like. But while such concerns are frequently characteristic of school administration, they are not peculiar to it because district-wide administrators and teachers also participate in them at the school level in fulfilling responsibilities within their own respective jurisdictions.

While instruction is not the business of the school, it is the business of classrooms and of teachers responsible for the direct engagement of students in learning activities. Aggregations of children are assigned to specific teachers who direct their activities and bring them into immediate contact with various sorts of learning materials. These activities are more than potentialities because children's active engagement working with teachers and materials is what enables them to learn.

Because classes contain diverse aggregations of children, it is not automatic that the instruction

appropriate for one member of the aggregation will be appropriate for another. Hence, teachers in the lower grades characteristically create an additional level of suborganization to manage activities not easily handled in a grouping as large as the class. For example, in primary grade reading, there are suborganizations called instructional groups that represent still another level of organizational differentiation.

Finally, there are individual students. It is only individuals who work on tasks, and it is only they who learn; so that while work tasks might be set for all students in the class or in a group, the individual members vary in how much work they do and in how much they learn.

We argue here not only that school systems can be described by their constituent organizational levels, but that the events, activities, and organizational forms found at each level should be seen as addressing distinct as well as partially overlapping agendas. Districts, schools, classes, and instructional groups are structurally differentiated from each other; and what is more they make different contributions to the overall operation of the school system. We recognize that not all schools have precisely the same organizational pattern. In the upper elementary grades, for example, formalized instructional groups characteristically used for primary level reading might or might not be employed; and in secondary schools, which lack self-contained classrooms, a departmental level of organization usually appears as does formal tracking that distinguishes students largely on the basis of ability within schools but not within classes. Despite these variations, the general principle of differentiated structures and agendas holds.

Linkages Between Levels

If organizational levels are as distinct as this analysis suggests, how is it possible to think about a coherent production process for the whole school district organization? How should the connections between levels be formulated? We contend that each level of a school system

has its own core productive agenda even though certain activities are performed at more than one level. That is, productive events of differing character occur at each level to effect outcomes that are themselves characteristic of each level. For example, a school outcome becomes a productive condition in classes yielding in turn a class outcome; the class outcome in turn becomes a productive element for instructional groups yielding a group outcome; and so on. We see, then, a set of nested hierarchical layers, each having a conditional and contributory relation to events and outcomes occurring at adjacent ones.

Consider an example of how levels of organization are connected to each other to constitute school production. As we observed earlier, classroom characteristics do not directly affect individual learning; they influence the formation of instructional groups. This might seem to be a strange statement since everyone knows that classroom teachers are responsible for instructing all children in a class. However, the teacher's job, we maintain, is first to transform an aggregation of children into an arrangement suitable for establishing an instructional program. In first grade reading, this usually means creating instructional reading groups. Hence, before any instruction takes place, decisions are made about how to arrange the class; whether to teach everyone together in one group, as in recitation; whether to establish subgroups in which only some children work intensively with the teacher while the others proceed by themselves with little supervision; whether to set everyone to work independently at their desks to perform at their own rate such more or less individualized tasks as are contained in workbooks.

The results of these classroom decisions are not instructional, nor do they appear as individual learning. They are alternative grouping arrangements which should be thought of as class outcomes, or values. We must draw a distinction between what teachers do in organizing classes for instruction and the instruction they actually provide for the groupings of children that make up classroom organization. Down the road, those grouping arrangements influence individual learning through a chain of

connections consisting of instructional activities. Individual learning, however, is not itself a class outcome. As our story unfolds, we will show how class grouping arrangements determine certain characteristics of the groups composing them, in particular the level of children's ability characteristic of each classroom group. As it turns out, this level of ability is a direct determinant of certain instructional activities undertaken by teachers, who treat differently composed groups in different ways.

One form this treatment takes is the amount of material covered, which we construe as an outcome, or value, created by instructional groups. (Note again: individual learning is not a group outcome any more than it is a class outcome.) Then, depending on how much material children cover over a given span of time, in combination with their own characteristics, they learn proportionally more or less. In sum, group arrangements are the value created at the class level, coverage the value at the group level, and learning the value at the individual level. Note particularly that the activities and outcomes characteristic of each level are qualitatively distinct—grouping, coverage, learning—and that they are linked together in a coherent manner.

Most readers will have recognized that we have been describing aspects of the familiar phenomenon of ability grouping, but not in a familiar way. Instead of simply distinguishing students according to whether they belong to homogeneous or heterogeneous groups, which is the usual (and not very illuminating) way of studying grouping, we have tried to identify distinct though related activities that refer to sets of decisions that constitute class organization, grouped instruction, and individual learning.

This brief analysis shows the concatenation of distinct activities that constitute and surround classroom instruction. An implication of this analysis is that we can take any single educationally relevant resource and trace its manifestations across several hierarchical levels of school system organization. To illustrate the logic of the formulation, we will consider here the resource of time.

A school district administration makes three kinds of decisions about time. The first reveals its responsibilities of law enforcement to the state: the schools must remain open for a stipulated number of days to qualify for state aid. While this enforcement of state law places an outside limit on time available for teaching, it does not bear directly on teaching, instruction, or learning. Furthermore, when the length of the academic year is combined with a determination about the length of the school day, the second type of district decision is made: how much time teachers (and other employees) will work as part of a contractual agreement with suppliers of labor. The third type of decision pertains to when the schools will start and finish each academic year, open and close each day, and recess for vacations, decisions that determine when and whether parents can leave the household for work and arrange for the care of very young children. Basic time considerations, then, at the district level of organization are tied up with law enforcement, labor contracts, and the integration of the school system with households in the community; and district outcomes can be defined in these terms.

School systems, of course, do not hire teachers in general, but teachers who instruct in particular subjects in secondary schools and in a variety of basic skills in elementary schools. Hiring teachers by subject and skill presumes that curricular priorities have been established, which means that decisions have been made about how much time will be devoted to each segment of the curriculum: to English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, and so on, in secondary schools; to reading, arithmetic, science, social studies, and so on, in elementary schools. At the level of schools, these decisions become manifest in the time schedule, a formal statement written in fine-grained time units of how much time will be devoted to each subject matter and to extracurricular pursuits.

The school schedule is really a political document that acknowledges the influences of administrative directives and the preferences of teachers and parents expressing varying views about the welfare of the student body, of

individual students, and of different types of students. It embodies past decisions about how much ordinary instruction there will be, in which subjects, at which more or less desirable times, and in which more or less desirable places. It expresses how segregated or desegregated classes will be in response to higher level administrative directives as well as the integration of the handicapped in regular and special classes. These resultant priorities conventionally expressed in the time schedule are an outcome of school level organization.

The curricular priorities expressed in the school time schedule represent temporal constraints upon the work of teachers in classrooms. While in secondary schools the order of classes throughout the day is established by the schedule itself, in elementary schools the teachers themselves arrange activities within the confines of daily time allotments, deciding which activities come earliest in the day, which next, and which last, with some flexibility about how long each successive activity will last. In addition to determining which activities take place during the “better” and “worse” times of the day, teachers also establish, within school guidelines and across parts of the curriculum (reading, arithmetic, science), how long instruction will last in each of a variety of classroom formats (whole class, grouped, individual instruction) and how much time gets wasted through interruptions, poor planning, and transitions between activities. At the classroom level, then, teachers allocate time in ways that bear directly upon instruction by determining the amount of time that students will have available for productive work in various subject areas.

Finally, given the time that teachers make available for productive work, students then decide how much of that time to use and to waste, and in so doing influence the amount they will learn.

What we have done here is to trace the allocation of time through the layers of school system organization to show how it takes on different manifestations as district, school, class, and individual phenomena. We have also shown how the

nature of time at one level becomes a time condition for events occurring at the next lower level.

What our formulation does is very simple. It locates productive activities at all levels of the school system that in more common but less precise parlance are known as administration and teaching. It also states that productive activities specific to levels produce outcomes specific to levels. Accordingly, we distinguish carefully between the productive processes that constitute the working of school organization from the outcomes, or values, produced by those processes. They are not the same thing, although they have commonly been confused in discussions about educational effects. The distinction between production and value not only is important conceptually, but provides a principle that ties the parts of the levels of school organization into a coherent pattern.

The formulation also carries us some distance in thinking about how the effectiveness of schools should be viewed. The common practice of using individual achievement (or aggregations of individual achievement) as a primary index to gauge whether schools are productive is of limited value because there are other outcomes that are the direct result of productive processes occurring at higher levels of school system organization. There is no question that achievement is an important outcome at the individual level; it may or may not be an important outcome at other levels, as our previous analyses of time and grouping indicate. Perhaps, for example, the properly understood outcome of instructional groups is a group-specific rate of covering learning materials or the amount of time a teacher makes available for instruction, outcomes that when considered at the individual level are properly construed as conditions of learning. An important class level outcome may be the creation of an appropriate grouping arrangement or the establishment of a productive time schedule, both of which are conditions bearing on the nature of group instruction.

Similarly, at the school level, the important outcomes may be the allocation of time to curricular

areas that makes enough time available for basic skill subjects, an assignment of teachers to classes that makes the most appropriate use of their talents or that provides equitable work loads, or the appropriate coordination of skill subjects from year to year so that children are

prepared for the work of the succeeding grade. At the district level, perhaps negotiating labor contracts that satisfy employees, administrators, and the taxpayers, or having a satisfactory book and materials procurement policy represent significant outcomes.

READING 17

ORGANIZING SCHOOLS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Anthony S. Bryk

Two of the worst schools in Chicago make efforts to raise student achievement. One is impressively successful, but one fails. What is the difference? Anthony Bryk addresses the differences between schools that succeed and those that fail, using findings from their major study results of hundreds of elementary schools. The researchers identify five essential supports for school improvement. These five essential supports touch on many aspects of school organization and relations to parents and community, the environment surrounding schools. The author reminds us that schools are complex organizations with many subsystems that must be considered in efforts to improve teaching and learning for students.

Questions to consider for this reading:

1. How do the five essential supports for school improvement work to help schools?
2. How do these five essential supports relate to levels of organizations described by Barr and Dreeban in the previous reading?
3. What are some challenges that we might encounter when applying these five essential supports to effect school reform?

Alexander Elementary School and Hancock Elementary School began the 1990s as two of the worst schools in Chicago in terms of math and reading achievement. Only two miles apart, the schools are in bordering neighborhoods and appear similar in many ways. Both enrolled nearly 100% minority students from families considered low income.

During the 1990s, both launched an array of initiatives aimed at boosting student achievement. Hancock moved impressively forward, while Alexander barely moved the needle on improvement. How did Hancock “beat the odds” while Alexander failed to do so?

This puzzle led us to undertake a systematic longitudinal investigation of *hundreds* of elementary schools in Chicago, just like Alexander and Hancock. Beginning in 1990, the Consortium on Chicago School Research initiated an intensive longitudinal study of the internal workings and external community conditions that distinguished improving elementary schools from those that failed to improve. That unique 15-year database allowed us to develop, test, and validate a framework of essential supports for school improvement. These data provided an extraordinary window to examine the complex interplay of how schools are organized and interact with the local

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community to alter dramatically the odds for improving student achievement. The lessons learned offer guidance for teachers, parents, principals, superintendents, and civic leaders in their efforts to improve schools across the country.

FIVE ESSENTIAL SUPPORTS FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Students' academic learning occurs principally in classrooms as students interact with teachers around subject matter. How we organize and operate a school has a major effect on the instructional exchanges in its classrooms. Put simply, whether classroom learning proceeds depends in large measure on how the school as a social context supports teaching and sustains student engagement. Through our research, we identified five organizational features of schools that interact with life inside classrooms and are essential to advancing student achievement.

1. Coherent instructional guidance system. Schools in which student learning improves have coherent instructional guidance systems that articulate the what and how of instruction. The learning tasks posed for students are key here, as are the assessments that make manifest what students actually need to know and provide feedback to inform subsequent instruction. Coordinated with this are the materials, tools, and instructional routines shared across a faculty that scaffold instruction. Although individual teachers may have substantial discretion in how they use these resources, the efficacy of individual teacher efforts depends on the quality of the supports and the local community of practice that forms around their use and refinement.

2. Professional capacity. Schooling is a human-resource-intensive enterprise. Schools are only as good as the quality of faculty, the professional development that supports their learning, and the faculty's capacity to work together to improve instruction. This support directs our attention to a school's ability to

recruit and retain capable staff, the efficacy of performance feedback and professional development, and the social resources within a staff to work together to solve local problems.

3. Strong parent-community-school ties. The disconnect between local school professionals and the parents and community that a school is intended to serve is a persistent concern in many urban contexts. The absence of vital ties is a problem; their presence is a multifaceted resource for improvement. The quality of these ties links directly to students' motivation and school participation and can provide a critical resource for classrooms.

4. Student-centered learning climate. All adults in a school community forge a climate that enables students to think of themselves as learners. At a minimum, improving schools establish a safe and orderly environment—the most basic prerequisite for learning. They endorse ambitious academic work coupled with support for each student. The combination allows students to believe in themselves, to persist, and ultimately to achieve.

5. Leadership drives change. Principals in improving schools engage in a dynamic interplay of instructional and inclusive-facilitative leadership. On the instructional side, school leaders influence local activity around core instructional programs, supplemental academic and social supports, and the hiring and development of staff. They establish strategic priorities for using resources and buffer externalities that might distract from coherent reform. Working in tandem with this, principals build relationships across the school community. Improving teaching and learning places demands on these relationships. In carrying out their daily activities, school leaders advance instrumental objectives while also trying to enlist teachers in the change effort. In the process, principals cultivate a growing cadre of leaders (teachers, parents, and community members) who can help expand the reach of this work and share overall responsibility for improvement.

Using extensive survey data collected by the consortium from teachers, principals, and students,

we were able to develop school indicators for each of the five essential supports, chart changes in these indicators over time, and then relate these organizational conditions to subsequent changes in student attendance and learning gains in reading and mathematics. Among our findings:

- Schools with strong indicators on most supports were 10 times more likely to improve than schools with weak supports.
- Half of the schools strong on most supports improved substantially in reading.
- Not a single school weak on most supports improved in mathematics.
- A material weakness in any one support, sustained over several years, undermined other change efforts, and improvement rarely resulted.

This statistical evidence affords a strong warrant that how we organize schools is critical for student achievement. Improving schools entails coherent, orchestrated action across all five essential supports. Put simply, there is no one silver bullet.

DYNAMICS OF IMPROVEMENT

Schools are complex organizations consisting of multiple interacting subsystems (that is, the five essential organizational supports). Personal and social considerations mix deeply in the day-to-day workings of a school. These interactions are bound by various rules, roles, and prevailing practices that, in combination with technical resources, constitute schools as formal organizations. In a sense, almost everything interacts with everything else. That means that a true picture of what enables some schools to improve and others to stagnate requires identifying the critical interconnections among the five essential supports: *How do these five essential supports function together to substantially change the odds for enhancing student engagement and academic learning?*

Schools that improved student attendance over time strengthened their ties to parents and community and used these ties as a core resource for

enhancing safety and order across the school. This growing sense of routine and security further combined with a better-aligned curriculum that continually exposed students to new tasks and ideas. Engaging pedagogy afforded students active learning roles in the classroom. High-quality professional development aimed to enhance teachers' capacity to orchestrate such activity under the trying circumstances that most confront daily. When this combination of conditions existed, the basic recipe for improving student attendance was activated.

In terms of the organizational mechanisms influencing academic achievement, this can be told in two contrasting stories. Schools that stagnated—no learning improvement over several years—were characterized by clear weaknesses in their instructional guidance system. They had poor curriculum alignment coupled with relatively little emphasis on active student engagement in learning. These instructional weaknesses combined with weak faculty commitments to the school, to innovation, and to working together as a professional community. Undergirding all of this were anemic school-parent-community ties.

In contrast, schools in which student learning improved used high-quality professional development as a key instrument for change. They had maximum leverage when these opportunities for teachers occurred in a supportive environment (that is, a school-based professional community) and when teaching was guided by a common, coherent, and aligned instructional system. Undergirding all of this, in turn, was a solid base of parent-community-school ties.

Leadership drives change in the four other organizational supports—but the actual execution of improvement is more organic and dynamic. Good teachers advance high-quality instruction, but developing good teachers and retaining them in a particular school depends on supportive school leadership and positive work relations with colleagues. Meaningful parent and community involvement can be a resource for solving problems of safety and order; but, in a reciprocal fashion, these ties are likely to be stronger in safe and orderly schools. This reciprocity carries over

to leadership as the driver for change. While a principal commands formal authority to effect changes in the four other organizational supports, a school with some strengths in these four supports is also easier to lead.

Arguing for the significance of one individual support over another is tempting, but we ultimately came to view the five supports as an organized system of elements in dynamic interaction with one another. As such, primary value lies in their integration and mutual reinforcement. In this sense, school development is much like baking a cake. By analogy, you need an appropriate mix of flour, sugar, eggs, oil, baking powder, and flavoring to produce a light, delicious cake. Without sugar, it will be tasteless. Without eggs or baking powder, the cake will be flat and chewy. Marginal changes in a single ingredient—for example, a bit more flour, large versus extra-large eggs—may not have noticeable effects. But, if one ingredient is absent, it is just not a cake.

Similarly, strong local leadership acting on the four other organizational elements constitutes the essential ingredients for spurring school development. Broad-based instructional change and improved student learning entail coordinated action across these various domains. Correspondingly, student outcomes are likely to stagnate if a material weakness persists in any of the supports. The ensemble of supports is what's essential for improvement. Taken together, they constitute the core organizational ingredients for advancing student engagement and achievement. . . .

UNRECOGNIZED CHALLENGES

In many recent discussions about school reform, ideas about parent involvement and school community contexts fade into the background. Some school reform advocates believe only instruction and instructional leadership matter. This perspective assumes that a school's social and personal connections with local families and communities play a small role in reform. Our evidence, however, offers a strong challenge. To be sure, instruction matters—a lot. But social context matters too.

We have documented that strength across all five essential supports, including parent-school-community ties, is critical for improvement to occur in all kinds of urban schools. Unfortunately, we have also learned that this organizational development is much harder to initiate and sustain in some community contexts than others.

As data accumulated in Chicago and school-by-school trends in attendance and student learning gains became clear, a complex pattern of results emerged. Improving schools could be found in all kinds of neighborhoods varying by socioeconomic and racial/ethnic composition. Stagnating schools, in contrast, piled up in very poor, racially isolated African-American neighborhoods. We became haunted by the question, “Why? What made reform so much more difficult to advance in some school communities?”

Our analyses led us to two different answers. First, the social capital of a neighborhood is a significant resource for improving its local school. We found that the latter was much more likely in neighborhoods where residents had a history of working together. In contrast, the absence of such collective efficacy in the surrounding community increased the likelihood that a troubled school would continue to stagnate. Correspondingly, communities with strong institutions, especially religious institutions, were more supportive contexts for school improvement. These institutions afford a network of social ties that can be appropriated for other purposes, such as improving schools. They also create connections that can bring new outside resources into isolated neighborhoods.

So, differences among neighborhoods in their bonding and bridging social capital help explain why the essential supports were more likely to develop in some neighborhoods than others. But this was only a partial answer for a subset of the school communities.

A second mechanism was also at work. We found that the proportion of children who were living under extraordinary circumstances—neglect and abuse, homeless, foster care, domestic violence—also created a significant barrier to improvement in some schools. To be clear, these students were learning at about the same rates as

their classmates in whatever school they were enrolled. So, the learning gains for these particular students were not depressing the overall results for their schools. But the odds of school stagnation soared when a concentration of these students appeared in the same place. On balance, schools are principally about teaching and learning, not solving all of the social problems of a community. However, when palpable personal and social needs walk through doors every day, school staff can't be expected to ignore those needs. Our evidence suggests that when the proportion of these needs remains high and pressing, the capacity of a school staff to sustain attention to developing the five essential supports falls by the wayside. A few schools managed to succeed under these circumstances, but most did not.

In sum, a nettlesome problem came into focus on improving student learning to truly disadvantaged communities where social capital is scarce and human need sometimes overwhelming. These schools face a “three-strike” problem. Not only are the schools highly stressed organizations, but they exist in challenged communities and confront an extraordinary density of human needs every day.

Our findings about schooling in truly disadvantaged communities offer a sobering antidote to a heady political rhetoric of “beating the odds” and “no excuses.” To be sure, we believe that all schools can and must improve. Such claims represent our highest, most noble aspirations for our children, our schools, and systems of schools. They are ideas worthy of our beliefs and action. But there are also facts, sometimes brutal facts. Not all school communities start out in the same place and confront the same problems. Unless we recognize this, unless we understand more deeply the dynamics of school stagnation, especially in our most neglected communities, we seem bound to repeat the failures of the past.

Our concluding point is straightforward—it is hard to improve what we do not understand.

We need more attention on how to improve schools in these specific contexts. All plausible ideas for educational improvement deserve serious consideration. Absent systematic analysis of not only where we succeed but also where and why we fail, we will continue to relegate many of our students and their teachers to a similar fate.

READING 18

SCHOOL BOARDS IN AMERICA

Flawed, but Still Significant

Gene I. Maeroff

Who should make decisions about school policies and operations? Traditionally, local governments in the form of school boards are elected to represent the views of community citizens. However, these boards have come under fire as governments and citizens look for explanations to why schools fail children. Some large school districts have shifted to mayoral control—with mixed results. Gene Maeroff discusses some concerns with this level of the school organization. He recommends careful consideration of the school board and its roles before dismissing its usefulness.

Questions to consider for this reading:

1. Who should make decisions for schools? Locally elected school boards? Mayors of cities? Other decision makers?
2. What impact do state and federal governments have on local board decision makers?
3. In what ways does the nation expect too much of school boards?

If the problems of school district governance lent themselves to quick repair, they would be fixed by now. But very little is easy when it comes to school boards and what ails them. . . . Some solutions require new commitments and radical changes. Even then, there are no guarantees that the future of school governance will be better than the past.

What reverberates strongest is the notion that school boards, like an old car past its prime, need attention and that the status quo won't suffice for those who want improved student outcomes. However, in some ways, school boards suffer a bum rap. They may be somewhat inconsequential, but sometimes circumstances leave school boards with few choices and limited autonomy. They've

been stripped of some of their authority, they face competition in a world in which they were accustomed to enjoying a monopoly, and they simply lack the fiscal wiggle room to attempt some of the initiatives they might like to promote.

It wasn't supposed to turn out this way when towns in New England formed the first school committees of citizen volunteers not only to govern their local schools, but also to run them. Eventually, superintendents took over the operations, and the huge school boards of the 19th century—which needed many members so as to perform tasks ranging from stoking the wood stoves to interviewing teacher candidates—shrank in size. But the school board was still seen, literally, as the personification of democracy.

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Now, the world of public education has been turned upside down and inside out. States and, increasingly, the federal government influence what occurs in classrooms. Teachers, especially in connection with collective bargaining, have assumed many of the prerogatives that school boards once reserved for themselves. New governance models threaten to make school boards in some locales as obsolete as yesterday's Pontiac. And financial pressures leave school boards less and less leeway in their spending decisions.

Think about the particulars. Fed up with low and uneven student performance, most of the states are collaboratively moving toward the creation of national standards. Organized teachers, not satisfied simply with bargaining for salaries and benefits, have greater input on working conditions. The largest school system in the country (New York City) has been operating without a school board for almost a decade, and the second-largest (Los Angeles) decided in August to explore how it might turn over 250 of its schools to private operators, which already happens in Philadelphia. With many school boards spending \$4 of every \$5 in their budgets on salaries and benefits for employees, the pot is shrinking for everything else, and board members have no idea where to turn for relief.

Such critics as Marc Tucker and Frederick M. Hess recommend radical surgery. Tucker would have the state, not the local district, hire teachers and would turn over the operation of schools to partnerships of teachers, organized as companies. Such changes, he maintains, would lift the caliber of school board members and shift their responsibility to improving or preserving the quality of education in their communities. Hess' way of putting the patient on the table reconsiders whether it makes sense for each of the more than 14,000 school districts to take responsibility for so many different tasks. He raises the possibility of individual school districts gaining expertise in a few specific areas and then making that expertise available to other districts so that those districts could focus on other specializations.

HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Ideas of this sort point to a major shortcoming of school boards. Society may expect too much of each of these small panels of citizen-volunteers. School boards oversee too many complex activities. Their governance extends to personnel, curriculum, and instruction—not to mention transportation, food services, and facilities. Every school board—whether it governs a district of 1,500, 15,000, or 150,000 students—is supposed to oversee the same conglomeration of duties. Furthermore, a great deal of the work of school boards is little more than window dressing, taking votes on matters on which the school board has no genuine authority.

Diane Ravitch cautions that we should be skeptical of critics of school boards who want to use the latest crisis to dilute or altogether eliminate the power of boards. Like snake oil salesmen, according to Ravitch, they have something to sell. She saves her sharpest criticism for Michael R. Bloomberg, who used the alleged failings of New York City's public schools as an excuse to shove the school board aside and take control of the system. In my opinion, the main questions to ask about any sort of change in school governance, such as mayoral control, is whether it's better than what it replaced, whether it improves student outcomes. Ravitch tells us that the result of no longer having a real school board in New York City is less accountability, a loss of a forum for parents, fewer checks and balances, and the end of budget transparency.

Whatever one feels about Mayor Bloomberg and the manner in which Schools Chancellor Joel I. Klein has operated the public school system in his behalf, it's doubtful that mayoral control will become widespread among the nation's thousands of school systems. Those searching for better forms of governance would do well to examine other possibilities.

A few school boards like New York City's may pass into irrelevance, but most are apt to remain on the scene for a long time, however hobbled they may be. I have found in my almost two years on a school board, reinforced by several

decades of experience as a professional observer of education, that change comes slowly to the governance of public education and that some board members don't even know to be dissatisfied when they should be dissatisfied.

Yet, school boards have their supporters. While these supporters grant that there is room for improvement, they maintain that wholesale upheaval is neither necessary nor practical. Anne L. Bryant and Michael A. Resnick make the case for school boards, which they call "cornerstones of democracy." They maintain that no other arrangement for governing elementary and secondary education is likely to produce people with the knowledge, focus, and commitment possessed by members of local school boards. Members of boards as they are now constituted have an edge in engaging their friends and neighbors on behalf of the public schools simply because they are part of the local community, [with] communication and transparency as the results.

Hayes Mizell acknowledges that school boards have lost some of their former authority, but insists nevertheless that they retain the flexibility to do a lot more than they currently do to improve the skills, knowledge, and practice of the educators on their payrolls. This approach would presumably translate into higher student achievement. Mizell wants school boards to think more about human resources and how they can be strengthened. Probably, few school boards in the country have given the kind of thought to the professional education of educators that Mizell would like to see.

Professional development is but one area in which school boards, if they have not bargained away their ability, can set policies that make a difference. They may determine class sizes, as well as the length of the school day and the school year. They may have their districts offer prekindergarten, and they may call for literacy specialists in the early grades. They may mandate enrichment for the gifted, call for Advanced Placement courses, and set in motion various initiatives to close achievement gaps. School boards, in collaboration with superintendents, may determine the number of central administrators and whether there should be assistant principals in elementary schools. They may put capital

referendums on the ballot and approve or disapprove of almost every dollar spent by the system.

Given this latitude for action, Michael D. Usdan holds out the hope that school boards can still be instrumental in school reform. He says that business, political, and education leaders pushing for improvement have not paid enough attention to the potential of local school boards in these efforts. He urges advocates and practitioners of school reform not to write off school boards, but to reach out and engage them.

A multitude of forces, though, have limited school boards' options and lurk just outside the schoolhouse door to narrow their jurisdiction. Today, school boards must respond with increasing alacrity to the whims and orders of an array of officials seeking to influence the public schools—the U.S. Secretary of Education, state education departments, state boards of education, chief state school officers, members of the legislature, and even governors' education advisers in some states. Laws, regulations, and rules pour out like water from a broken main. State lawmakers and state officials who are hardly accountable to anyone are demanding that school boards be more accountable to them. Meanwhile, the federal government, wielding stimulus money like a cudgel, plays an ever more prominent role in local school board matters.

All in all, boards have less room to determine what to teach and how to teach it, though they remain responsible for making sure that broken furniture in the schools gets repaired and that copying machines have enough paper.

MANAGING THE MONEY

Money is the lifeblood of education, and school boards, like landlords handcuffed by rent control, have few options as costs mount. Public education is on an unsustainable financial course, especially when it comes to benefits for employees and retirees. School boards find little relief from fiscal pressures when they face the demands of teachers, who have bargaining rights in 75% of the states. Organized teachers and other public

employee unions exert such control in these places that legislators surrender all pretense of independence. School boards are mere pawns on this financial chess board.

Special education is the 800-pound fiscal gorilla about which school board members and administrators moan in private but say little in public, not wanting to be politically incorrect. Congress didn't recognize it at the time, but passage in 1975 of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, now known as IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), set loose forces that have altered public education. Special education is an entitlement that can force school boards to find the money to send kids with the most severe disabilities to residential schools that can cost the taxpayers \$100,000 per child annually.

Meanwhile, many school boards must authorize out-of-district daily placements for many more disabled children at an annual cost of anywhere from \$30,000 to \$80,000 per tuition. And this doesn't include the several hundred dollars that boards spend weekly on each child for transportation and the aide who must be on the bus, which sometimes is a van carrying a single student to a far-off location. It's all done in the name

of a federally mandated "free and appropriate public education" for every disabled child, no matter the cost. Nonspecial education students, in effect, subsidize those classified for special education. School boards are confounded and stymied by these requirements.

In America of the 21st century, many school boards struggle to attract top-flight members who are willing to put up with the grief that comes with the job. Interest in and support for the public schools have ebbed as the percentage of households using the public schools has declined and the portion of public school students who look different from the people who pay most of the taxes has increased. The neighborhood school is no longer the focal point of the local community as people are less attracted to what it offers. School boards continue to consume the largest share of local taxes, but they find less support from taxpayers for what they try to do.

The nation's school boards are not at their zenith. But neither are they at their nadir. The coming decade, filled with challenge, may well determine if school boards regain their vitality or simply slip further into irrelevance, reduced to discharging hollow legal responsibilities.

READING 19

LEARNING THE STUDENT ROLE

Kindergarten as Academic Boot Camp

Harry L. Gracey

The organizational structure of schools cannot be studied in isolation from the roles of individuals holding positions within the system. Part of the informal organization includes messages students learn about their expected roles. Bridging Chapter 4 on organizations and Chapter 5 on roles is Harry L. Gracey's classic discussion of young students learning their roles within the organizational structure. In his complete article, Gracey describes the socialization process into the role of "student" by documenting the organizational structure of the classroom and a day in the life of a kindergarten teacher and class. New initiates to formal schooling learn the expectations of school so that they will fit into the educational system and later into the world of work. In these excerpts from this classic article, some of the references may seem a bit old-fashioned; however, the article conveys a powerful message about the way students are socialized in school and for what purposes.

Questions to consider for this reading:

1. What are the formal and informal organizational structures of kindergarten classrooms and what role do they play in preparing kindergarten students for the next stages of school life?
2. Taking the message about learning the student role, how is this role perpetuated and expanded through other levels of schooling?
3. How might functional and conflict theorists described in Chapter 1 interpret the processes taking place in kindergarten?

Education must be considered one of the major institutions of social life today. Along with the family and organized religion, however, it is a "secondary institution," one in which people are prepared for life in society as it is presently organized. The main dimensions of modern life, that is, the nature of society as a whole, are determined principally by the "Primary institutions," which today are the economy, the political system, and the military establishment. Education has been defined

by sociologists, classical and contemporary, as an institution which serves society by socializing people into it through a formalized, standardized procedure. At the beginning of this century, Emile Durkheim told student teachers at the University of Paris that education "consists of a methodical socialization of the younger generation." He went on to add:

It is the influence exercised by adult generations on those that are not ready for social life. Its object is to

From *The Sociology of Education: A Sourcebook* (pp. 82–95), edited by H. R. Stub, 1975, Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press. Copyright 1975 by Harry Gracey. Reprinted with permission.

arouse and to develop in the child a certain number of physical, intellectual, and moral states that are demanded of him by the political society as a whole and by the special milieu for which he is specifically destined. To the egotistic and asocial being that has just been born, [society] must as rapidly as possible add another capable of leading a moral and social life. Such is the work of education.¹

“The education process,” Durkheim said, “is above all the means by which society perpetually recreates the conditions of its very existence.”² The contemporary educational sociologist, Wilbur Brookover, offers a similar formulation in his recent textbook definition of education.

Actually, therefore, in the broadest sense education is synonymous with socialization. It includes any social behavior that assists in the induction of the child into membership in the society or any behavior by which the society perpetuates itself through the next generation.³

The educational institution is, then, one of the ways in which society is perpetuated through the systematic socialization of the young, while the nature of the society which is being perpetuated—its organization and operation, its values, beliefs, and ways of living—is determined by the primary institutions. The educational system, like other secondary institutions, serves the society which is created by the operation of the economy, the political system, and the military establishment.

Schools, the social organizations of the educational institution, are today for the most part large bureaucracies run by specially trained and certified people. There are few places left in modern societies where formal teaching and learning is carried on in small, isolated groups, like the rural, one-room schoolhouses of the last century. Schools are large, formal organizations which tend to be parts of larger organizations, local community school districts. These school districts are bureaucratically organized and their operations are supervised by state and local governments. In this context, as Brookover says:

The term education is used to refer to a system of schools, in which specifically designated persons

are expected to teach children and youth certain types of acceptable behavior. The school system becomes a unit in the total social structure and is recognized by the members of the society as a separate social institution. Within this structure a portion of the total socialization process occurs.⁴

Education is the part of the socialization process which takes place in the schools; and these are, more and more today, bureaucracies within bureaucracies.

Kindergarten is generally conceived by educators as a year of preparation for school. It is thought of as a year in which small children, five or six years old, are prepared socially and emotionally for the academic learning which will take place over the next twelve years. It is expected that a foundation of behavior and attitudes will be laid in kindergarten on which the children can acquire the skills and knowledge they will be taught in the grades. A booklet prepared for parents by the staff of a suburban New York school system says that the kindergarten experience will stimulate the child’s desire to learn and cultivate the skills he will need for learning in the rest of his school career. It claims that the child will find opportunities for physical growth, for satisfying his “need for self-expression,” acquire some knowledge, and provide opportunities for creative activity. It concludes, “The most important benefit that your five-year-old will receive from kindergarten is the opportunity to live and grow happily and purposefully with others in a small society.” The kindergarten teachers in one of the elementary schools in this community, one we shall call the Wilbur Wright School, said their goals were to see that the children “grew” in all ways: physically, of course, emotionally, socially, and academically. They said they wanted children to like school as a result of their kindergarten experiences and that they wanted them to learn to get along with others.

None of these goals, however, is unique to kindergarten; each of them is held to some extent by teachers in the other six grades at Wright School. And growth would occur, but differently, even if the child did not attend school. The children

already know how to get along with others, in their families and their play groups. The unique job of the kindergarten in the educational division of labor seems rather to be teaching children the student role. The student role is the repertoire of behavior and attitudes regarded by educators as appropriate to children in school. Observation in the kindergartens of the Wilbur Wright School revealed a great variety of activities through which children are shown and then drilled in the behavior and attitudes defined as appropriate for school and thereby induced to learn the role of student. Observations of the kindergartens and interviews with the teachers both pointed to the teaching and learning of classroom routines as the main element of the student role. The teachers expended most of their efforts, for the first half of the year at least, in training the children to follow the routines which teachers created. The children were, in a very real sense, drilled in tasks and activities created by the teachers for their own purposes and beginning and ending quite arbitrarily (from the child's point of view) at the command of the teacher. One teacher remarked that she hated September, because during the first month "everything has to be done rigidly, and repeatedly, until they know exactly what they're supposed to do." However, "by January," she said, "they know exactly what to do [during the day] and I don't have to be after them all the time." Classroom routines were introduced gradually from the beginning of the year in all the kindergartens, and the children were drilled in them as long as was necessary to achieve regular compliance. By the end of the school year, the successful kindergarten teacher has a well-organized group of children. They follow classroom routines automatically, having learned all the command signals and the expected responses to them. They have, in our terms, learned the student role.

TRAINING FOR LEARNING AND FOR LIFE

The children [at the Wright School] learned to go through routines and to follow orders with unquestioning obedience, even when these make no

sense to them. They have been disciplined to do as they are told by an authoritative person without significant protest. Edith Kerr, [the teacher] has developed this discipline in the children by creating and enforcing a rigid social structure in the classroom through which she effectively controls the behavior of most of the children for most of the school day. The "living with others in a small society" which the school pamphlet tells parents is the most important thing the children will learn in kindergarten can be seen now in its operational meaning, which is learning to live by the routines imposed by the school. This learning appears to be the principal content of the student role.

Children who submit to school-imposed discipline and come to identify with it, so that being a "good student" comes to be an important part of their developing identities, become the good students by the school's definitions. Those who submit to the routines of the school but do not come to identify with them will be adequate students who find the more important part of their identities elsewhere, such as in the play group outside school. Children who refuse to submit to the school routines are rebels, who become known as "bad students" and often "problem children" in the school, for they do not learn the academic curriculum, and their behavior is often disruptive in the classroom. Today schools engage clinical psychologists in part to help teachers deal with such children.

[It is interesting to look at Edith Kerr's] kindergarten at Wright School [and] to ask how the children learn this role of student—come to accept school-imposed routines—and what, exactly, it involves in terms of behavior and attitudes. The most prominent features of the classroom are its physical and social structures. The room is carefully furnished and arranged in ways adults feel will interest children. The play store and play kitchen in the back of the room, for example, imply that children are interested in mimicking these activities of the adult world. The only space left for the children to create something of their own is the empty center of the room, and the materials at their disposal are the blocks, whose use causes anxiety on the part of the teacher.

The room, being carefully organized physically by the adults, leaves little room for the creation of physical organization on the part of the children.

The social structure created by Edith is a far more powerful and subtle force for fitting the children to the student role. This structure is established by the very rigid and tightly controlled set of rituals and routines through which the children are put during the day. There is first the rigid "locating procedure" in which the children are asked to find themselves in terms of the month, date, day of the week, and the number of the class who are present and absent. This puts them solidly in the real world as defined by adults. The day is then divided into six periods whose activities are for the most part determined by the teacher. In Edith's kindergarten the children went through Serious Time, which opens the school day, Sharing Time, Play Time (which in clear weather would be spent outside), Work Time, Clean-up Time, after which they have their milk, and Rest Time after which they go home. The teacher has programmed activities for each of these times.

Occasionally the class is allowed limited discretion to choose between proffered activities, such as stories or records, but original ideas for activities are never solicited from them. Opportunity for free individual action is open only once in the day, during the part of Work Time left after the general class assignment has been completed (on the day reported, the class assignment was drawing animal pictures for the absent Mark). Spontaneous interests or observations from the children are never developed by the teacher. It seems that her schedule just does not allow room for developing such unplanned events. During Sharing Time, for example, the child who brought a bird's nest told Edith, in reply to her question of what kind of bird made it, "My friend says it's a rain bird." Edith does not think to ask about this bird, probably because the answer is "childish," that is, not given in accepted adult categories of birds. The children then express great interest in an object in the nest, but the teacher ignores this interest, probably because the object is uninteresting to her. The soldiers from "Babes in Toyland"

strike a responsive note in the children, but this is not used for a discussion of any kind. The soldiers are treated in the same way as objects which bring little interest from the children. Finally, at the end of Sharing Time the child-world of perception literally erupts in the class with the recollection of "the spooky house" at the zoo. Apparently this made more of an impression on the children than did any of the animals, but Edith is unable to make any sense of it for herself. The tightly imposed order of the class begins to break down as the children discover a universe of discourse of their own and begin talking excitedly with one another. The teacher is effectively excluded from this child's world of perception and for a moment she fails to dominate the classroom situation. She reasserts control, however, by taking the children to the next activity she has planned for the day. It seems never to have occurred to Edith that there might be a meaningful learning experience for the children in recreating the "spooky house" in the classroom. It seems fair to say that this would have offered an exercise in spontaneous self-expression and an opportunity for real creativity on the part of the children. Instead, they are taken through a canned animal imitation procedure, an activity which they apparently enjoy, but which is also imposed upon them rather than created by them.

While children's perceptions of the world and opportunities for genuine spontaneity and creativity are being systematically eliminated from the kindergarten, unquestioned obedience to authority and role learning of meaningless material are being encouraged. When the children are called to line up in the center of the room they ask "Why?" and "What for?" as they are in the very process of complying. They have learned to go smoothly through a programmed day, regardless of whether parts of the program make any sense to them or not. Here the student role involves what might be called "doing what you're told and never mind why." Activities which might "make sense" to the children are effectively ruled out, and they are forced or induced to participate in activities which may be "senseless," such as calisthenics.

At the same time the children are being taught by rote meaningless sounds in the ritual oaths and songs, such as the Lord's Prayer, the Pledge to the Flag, and "America." As they go through the grades children learn more and more of the sounds of these ritual oaths, but the fact that they have often learned meaningless sounds rather than meaningful statements is shown when they are asked to write these out in the sixth grade; they write them as groups of sounds rather than as a series of words, according to the sixth grade teachers at Wright School. Probably much learning in the elementary grades is of this character, that is, having no intrinsic meaning to the children, but rather being tasks inexplicably required of them by authoritative adults. Listening to sixth grade children read social studies reports, for example, in which they have copied material from encyclopedias about a particular country, an observer often gets the feeling that he is watching an activity which has no intrinsic meaning for the child. The child who reads, "Switzerland grows wheat and cows and grass and makes a lot of cheese" knows the dictionary meaning of each of these words but may very well have no conception at all of this "thing" called Switzerland. He is simply carrying out a task assigned by the teacher because it is assigned, and this may be its only "meaning" for him.

Another type of learning which takes place in kindergarten is seen in children who take advantage of the "holes" in the adult social structure to create activities of their own, during Work Time or out-of-doors during Play Time. Here the children are learning to carve out a small world of their own within the world created by adults. They very quickly learn that if they keep within permissible limits of noise and action they can play much as they please. Small groups of children formed during the year in Edith's kindergarten who played together at these times, developing semi-independent little groups in which they created their own worlds in the interstices of the adult-imposed physical and social world. These groups remind the sociological observer very much of the

so-called "informal groups" which adults develop in factories and offices of large bureaucracies.⁵ Here, too, within authoritatively imposed social organizations people find "holes" to create little subworlds which support informal, friendly, unofficial behavior. Forming and participating in such groups seems to be as much part of the student role as it is of the role of bureaucrat.

The kindergarten has been conceived of here as the year in which children are prepared for their schooling by learning the role of student. In the classrooms of the rest of the school grades, the children will be asked to submit to systems and routines imposed by the teachers and the curriculum. The days will be much like those of kindergarten, except that academic subjects will be substituted for the activities of the kindergarten. Once out of the school system, young adults will more than likely find themselves working in large-scale bureaucratic organizations, perhaps on the assembly line in the factory, perhaps in the paper routines of the white collar occupations, where they will be required to submit to rigid routines imposed by "the company" which may make little sense to them. Those who can operate well in this situation will be successful bureaucratic functionaries. Kindergarten, therefore, can be seen as preparing children not only for participation in the bureaucratic organization of large modern school systems, but also for the large-scale occupational bureaucracies of modern society.

NOTES

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1. Durkheim, E. (1956). *Sociology and education* (pp. 71–72). New York: Free Press.
 2. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
 3. Brookover, W. (1957). *The sociology of education* (p. 4). New York: American Book.
 4. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
 5. See, for example, Blau, P.M. (1956). *Bureaucracy in modern society* (Chapter 3). New York: Random House.

READING 20

REAL SCHOOL

The Universal Drama Amid Disparate Experience

Mary Haywood Metz

In this reading, Mary Haywood Metz discusses the similarities and differences in American high schools and contrasts them based on the social-class differences of the students they serve. Looking at a range of public and Catholic high schools, Metz studied teachers' work by observing their classrooms, interviewing them, and reviewing documents about each school. What Metz found was a "common script." The roles and plots within the school organization were similar, and the settings and actor lines were recognizable but different. The importance of this reading for the discussion of schools as organizations lies in the way the common script is carried out across educational institutions. Although the setting and goals and even some of the rituals may be similar across schools, each school differs in the way the common script is actualized, based on social-class differences of students and expectations for their futures.

Questions to consider for this reading:

1. What were some differences in the common script found by Metz in the eight schools she studied?
2. How would you explain the process by which school organizations with common scripts can be so different?
3. How does this reading illustrate that schools play a role in reproducing social class?
4. Why is there a need for us to have a common script of "real schools"?

Variations on the phrase "The American High School" adorn the titles of popular recent reports on reform (Boyer, 1983; Cusick, 1983; Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985; Sedlak, Wheeler, Pullin, & Cusick, 1986; Sizer, 1984), expressing a common belief that they address a single institution.

American high schools are indeed alike, strikingly so in many important respects. But they are also very different in other important respects.

Reformers have paid little attention to their differences; some ignore them, while others mention them almost reluctantly, hurrying on to describe what is common among schools. Still, the differences among schools are crucial to their daily practice and to their effects upon students, and so to reform. This article addresses the interplay of similarity and difference in American high schools, regarding their similarity, rather than their difference, as problematic and in need of explanation.

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THE DATA

The chapter arises out of a study of teachers' working lives undertaken at the National Center of Effective Secondary Schools. In that study we took a close look at a set of teachers in "ordinary" or typical high schools spread across the social class spectrum. We chose eight schools in midwestern metropolitan areas. Six were public schools and two were Catholic. Of the six public schools, two were in high, two in middle, and two in low SES areas. One of the Catholic schools served a predominantly middle class clientele and the other a predominantly working class one. We chose schools varying in social class as sites to study teachers' work because previous research in sociology and anthropology suggests that differences in the social class of communities and student bodies have serious implications for the life of schools (e.g., Anyon, 1981; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Connell, [Ashendon, Kessler, & Dowsett], 1982; Heath, 1983; Lubeck, 1985; Weis, 1985; Willis, 1977).

We visited each school in teams, spending more than two weeks, and a total of twenty or more person days in each school. At each school, we followed diverse students through a school day, spent a whole school day with each of eight teachers, and interviewed those eight teachers in depth, as well as ten others more briefly. We also perused and collected a number of documents and statistics about each school. While our fieldwork in each school was too brief to be genuinely ethnographic, the strength of the design lay in its comparative potential. We attended classes and interviewed teachers in situations that were formally parallel across the eight diverse schools. We could see their differences in clear relief.

THE COMMON SCRIPT

We chose the sample of schools we did because we expected to find some important differences among them. Our visits to the first schools quickly gave us dramatic evidence that our expectations were

correct; participation in the varied schools provided us radically different experiences. The buildings varied from resembling a college campus, at suburban Maple Heights, to resembling a fortress, at low income, urban Charles Drew. The use of time varied from intent and taut to relatively relaxed. Maple Heights allowed students to go home for lunch or to roam its spacious lawns in small groups after eating, while the two low income urban schools, Grant and Drew, kept all but the main door locked and security guards at Drew checked students' picture identifications both at the door to the school and at the entrance to the lunch room. More important, the content and tone of classroom discourse varied widely, as did the style of interactions between students and teachers.

While this variation riveted our attention as we moved from school to school, the discourse of the reform movement—which the Center hoped to address—assumes commonality, even sameness, among schools. As we puzzled over the discrepancy between our diverse experiences and the reformers' assumption that schools are standard, we came to see that we were looking at different aspects of schools' lives. The reform movement emphasizes formal structure and technical procedures in schools. In these respects, the schools we saw were indeed very alike. The meaning of that structure and technology, the cultural assumptions of participants about their activities, and the place of the school in relation to the society and to children's life trajectories differed significantly among the schools we saw.

As we watched the schools in daily action, and talked with the actors who gave them life, it seemed that the schools were following a common script. The stages were roughly similar, though the scenery varied significantly. The roles were similarly defined and the outline of the plot was supposed to be the same. But the actors took great liberties with the play. They interpreted the motivations and purposes of the characters whose roles they took with striking variation. They changed their entrances and exits. Sometimes, they left before the last act. The outlines of the plot took on changing significance with the actors' varied interpretation of their roles. Directors had

limited control over their actors; only a few were able to get the actors to perform as an ensemble that would enact the director's conception of the play. Directors often had to make the best of the qualities the actors brought to their roles and to interpret the play consistently with the players' abilities and intentions.

Just the same, the script was there, and the play was in some sense recognizable as the same play in all the schools. More important, the script was extremely important to some of the actors and some of the audiences. In fact, it was where the production was hardest to coordinate and perhaps least easily recognizable as the same play that was being produced at schools where action meshed more smoothly, that the school staffs were the most insistent that their production followed the script for "The American High School," varying from others only in details.

We found similarities in our schools that paralleled those recently noted by several writers (e.g., Goodlad, 1984; Sizer, 1984). There was little variation in school schedule and all schools had long hallways with nearly identical classrooms lined up along them. Class size and teachers' normal assignment to meet five groups of students for instruction five times a week varied little. The scope and sequence of the curriculum differed only in detail from school to school, though the number of sections available in subjects like advanced foreign language or vocational education varied significantly. Students were expected to attend all their classes promptly every day. There were extracurricular activities after school, or occasionally during the last hour of the day.

Textbooks were ubiquitous. We saw the same textbooks in use where students' scores on standardized tests were far below average and where they were concentrated well above the median. Instruction was conducted primarily through lecture, recitation, discussion, and seatwork, with occasional use of student reports, filmstrips, movies, and videotapes.

Teachers had undifferentiated roles. Department chairs held a slight measure of authority and engaged in some co-ordinating activities. A few

teachers were temporarily released from some portion of their teaching for a variety of special responsibilities, but these variations in routine were not permanent and conferred no formal special status, though they often brought informal prestige.

Despite these very strong similarities among the schools, there was variation in the appearance and style of the buildings, the strictness of enforcement of routines, and the relationships built among flesh and blood individuals on the staff and in the student body. The curriculum actually in use varied also. The content of classroom interactions, the questions asked on tests, students' written work, and the department of students in class varied widely from school to school even when classes used the same books.

COMMUNITY AND STUDENT PRESSURES FOR DIFFERENCES

Among Schools

Differences among the schools arose in large part from differences in the communities surrounding them. The communities we studied varied markedly in the financial resources they gave schools and in the relationship between school and community. They also varied in the resources parents brought both to their relations with the school and to the task of assisting their children with education. These communities had developed differing visions of how the high schools should be run—within the parameters set by the common script—and of the place of a high school education in their children's life trajectories. The communities affected the schools most intimately as they shaped the students who entered their doors. Students' skills, their understanding of a high school education, and their vision of its place in their overall lives differed markedly between communities. The effects of the ties between the communities and schools in our project are discussed in detail in other papers (Hemmings & Metz, 1990; Metz, 1990).

Despite different resources and quite different ideas about the nature and uses of high school education, there was no evidence that any of the communities wanted or expected schools to depart from the basic common script for “The American High School.” This support for the common script may seem “natural,” but in fact it requires explanation. Why should people with such different backgrounds and experiences and such different ambitions for their children all expect and demand “the same” high school education for them? Why do they do so even as they also exert pressures for interpretations of that “standard” education that produce important differences in students’ actual educational experiences?

The persistence of the common script seems most problematic when one looks inside the school at teachers and students engaged in the common work demanded by the script. Except at the three schools with the most skilled, best prepared students, large proportions of the students did poorly academically, including failing courses. At Drew, the school in the poorest neighborhood, the dropout rate was apparently over 50%; it approached 50% at Grant, the other school in a poor setting. Even at the two schools that had students from steadily employed blue collar and lower white collar families, the dropout rate was a worry to school officials and the failure rate substantial, though both were much lower than at the schools with students in poverty.

Furthermore, at all the schools where no more than half of the students were headed for college, students expressed alienation from the curriculum and from class and school procedures in various subtle or blatant ways. The favored forms for expressing alienation from the schools’ academic endeavors, and their severity and frequency, varied from school to school. Especially at the schools in the poor neighborhoods, students cut classes or cut school; at these schools there were chronic problems with severe tardiness. Once in class at these schools, students often carried on social conversations or read or wrote on unrelated projects, or sat limply staring, or put their heads down and slept. At the predominantly working class schools, where most

students wanted to graduate but did not expect to go to college, some objected to assignments or quibbled with teachers over small issues; a few engaged in expressive interactions with peers designed for maximum disruption. In a few classes some students carried on a running guerrilla warfare, teasing and badgering teachers in various ways. Especially at one of these schools, students in the majority of classes had successfully negotiated with teachers for time in class to do “homework” that became an open social hour. Students in tracked classes whose achievement was much higher or lower than average for their school tended to differ from their school in the direction of students in schools where their level of achievement was average.

TEACHERS’ RESPONSES TO DIFFICULTIES WITH THE COMMON SCRIPT

Teachers’ work consists of transforming the minds and perhaps the characters of their students. To succeed in their work they must, at a bare minimum, win the passive acquiescence of their students. Students’ active co-operation will make the task far easier and the teachers’ work more effective.

Consequently, students’ expressions of distance and distaste for the academic undertaking created serious distress and frustration for their teachers. A few determined and skilled individuals were able to reduce or mitigate these patterns through imagination and force of character within the parameters of the common script. Some, equally dedicated, tried hard but were unable to do so. Some teachers simply blamed the difficulty of teaching on students; they considered those they worked with intellectually or morally deficient. They wished they had students “like the old days” or they wished they taught in their idealized conception of a “better” school: a magnet school, a suburban school, or a school in a different kind of suburb where families cared more about education. Many teachers seemed to use such blame to protect their own imperiled sense of craft. Even among teachers who did not

reject students as unworthy, the overwhelming majority did not expect to tailor the institution or the learning to the students, but assumed that they must tailor the students to the institution.

Even where there was incontrovertible evidence that students were not learning well, both students and teachers were frustrated or alienated, and there was an evident lack of connection between students and standard structures and curricula, teachers did not respond by suggesting alternative strategies that would significantly change the common script. A few teachers did speculate about one or another possible change, but they did not seem fully to appreciate the systemic alterations their suggestions might imply.

Teachers did make informal, *de facto* adjustments in the script, however. Much of the difference between the schools in daily curriculum-in-use, in the sense of time, and in relationships resulted from adjustments in the common script that students and teachers created together through informal processes. Sometimes these were conscious adjustments on teachers' part. For example, teachers at one predominantly blue collar school said repeatedly that they had "to be realistic." They made the subject matter simpler and more practical, without departing altogether from the formal curriculum embodied in the common script.

Sometimes adjustments were gradual and formally unrecognized. For example, at some schools, teachers (and administrators) felt forced to put up with tardiness and truancy, as long as these stayed within reasonable limits, because they were too rampant to control. Some teachers simply sought strategies that would win students' attention to the lesson for at least part of the class hour.

In short, teachers were forced to adjust to their students, to change school practices to accommodate students' unwillingness to meet certain demands (e.g., for significant homework) or abide by certain procedures (e.g., consistent prompt appearance in class). They did in fact change the system to meet the students. But they did not, for the most part, do it in formal ways and they did not attempt to challenge the common script. For example, they did not argue for alternative pedagogical approaches, but simply "watered down"

the common curriculum or made it "more practical" or just "did the best I can to cover the material." They did not alter expectations for prompt class attendance; they just started getting the major business of the class going more and more slowly.

If one looks at students' learning simply as a technical problem, it is quite remarkable to see situations where a technical process (or the social structure which frames it) is clearly not effective on a massive scale, but no one in the organization calls for developing alternative technical or structural approaches. Should a company that produced inanimate objects have such difficulties in accomplishing its desired results—if, for example, bicycle wheels produced in a factory were not straight and strong—the company would soon be out of business unless it changed its procedures.

THE PERSISTENCE OF THE COMMON SCRIPT AS A REFLECTION OF SOCIETAL THOUGHT AND VALUES

While it is easy to blame teachers and administrators for being myopic in the production of this state of affairs, it is a grave mistake to do so. On the contrary, school staffs stand squarely in the mainstream of American educational thought in their reluctance to consider alternatives to the common script.

The schools we saw were typical of schools described throughout the literature, in their adherence to the common script, in students' alienation and distance from it in all but schools for the able and ambitious, and in teachers' informal adjustments that accommodated students without altering the script or supporting learning (Boyer, 1983; Cusick, 1983; McNeil, 1986; Powell et al., 1985; Sedlak et al., 1986; Sizer, 1984).

There are reasons for students' resistance to school that, in part, lie beyond the schools' control. There is by now a large literature on the ways that mainstream schools require minority children to learn through cultural patterns that are initially unfamiliar and often distasteful. Insistence on these patterns not only creates cognitive

problems—that many can and do overcome—but problems of identity, of choice between home and school worlds. This choice leads many minority students intentionally to distance themselves from the school (Erickson, 1987; Fordham, 1988).

At the high school level minorities experience a second set of problems. John Ogbu (1978, 1987) has argued that minorities do not learn well because the economic experience of the adults they see around them has taught them that credentials do not yield the rewards for minorities that they do for majority students. They perceive a “job ceiling” that limits the rewards that can be gained from cooperation with the schools. Recently, he has noted that minority students who have just immigrated to this country often do not perceive these limitations, while for others even low end American jobs constitute improvements over their experience in their home countries. These immigrant students (Ogbu, 1987) do better in school than do native minority students.

Native minority students may often resist the common script of high school because embracing it signifies betrayal of the peer group (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986) and of ethnic identity, on the one hand, and promises little tangible reward, on the other. It is difficult for teachers, especially individual teachers, to break through such patterns of resistance.

Similar problems exist in the apparently increasing resistance of blue collar white students to the schools and the common script. A number of external social processes have undercut the claims to authority of the schools and their individual staff members over the last twenty years (Hurn, 1985). Probably more important, as Sedlak and his colleagues (1986) argue, a high school diploma has decreasing value for young people hoping to use it as their major ticket to a place in the labor market. Children of blue collar and even lower white collar families have been watching the economic prospects of adults and older siblings in their communities contract during the last ten years. For these students, the most minimal cooperation with the school needed to obtain a diploma often seems a fair bargain for the minimal benefits bestowed by its receipt.

In short, students’ alienation from schooling has significant roots outside the schools that teachers and administrators can do little about. Nonetheless, in all of our schools there were some students making a visible effort to co-operate and do well. In all there were some teachers who were quite successful in drawing large parts of their classes into the academic enterprise, at least during class time. And some schools succeeded better than others at this task, despite roughly equivalent student bodies.

Students’ resistance to school, then, must be understood as the result of a mixture of influences. A very important part of that mixture lies in economic and social processes beyond the schools’ control—though not beyond the reach of intentional social change. Still, school practice and the practice of individual teachers, as well as the perspectives of individual students, also have important effects.

Given the erosion of extrinsic rewards for schooling that increasing numbers of blue collar white students, as well as minority students, are experiencing, it would seem logical to try to increase the intrinsic rewards of schooling. Since teachers are most aware of the students’ resistance to the common script, why are teachers not pushing for education that will use their students’ interests, experiences, and intellectual strengths to draw them into the enterprise? Why do they not press for a more flexible, adaptable, and less monotonous rhythm of activity?

One important reason is that teachers work within larger organizations that mandate much of the common script in non-negotiable terms. In most of our schools teachers had curriculum guides that outlined their formal curriculum, though they might be able to make a fairly broad range of choices within a given framework. The schedule of the school day was decided by the central district administration. State laws and Carnegie units for college admissions froze the larger outlines of the formal curriculum even beyond the district level. Architecture and union contracts shaped class size. In most cases district policy determined homogeneous or heterogeneous ability grouping. In other words, teachers were hemmed in

by state laws, district directives, union contracts, and college admissions pressures—as well as societal expectations—all of which presumed or required that they follow the common script.

We have, then, to look beyond individual schools or the occupations of teaching and school administration to find the most important sources for the common script. It has deep historical roots. Several historical works (e.g., Callahan, 1962; Katz, 1971; Tyack, 1974) have traced the development of the forms we take as “natural” today. They stress the dominance of the factory model of organization at the time that compulsory schooling was being taken seriously, so that schools were increasing in number and public saliency, and being given what was to become their common form. Managers and bosses expected to have almost total control over subordinates. Schools were a mechanism for quick Americanization of diverse immigrants and efficient training of a labor force, most of whom were headed for menial jobs where bosses and managers intended to be the brains while they were simply hands. Such a system was not designed to be responsive to individual or cultural diversity. If it failed to develop sophisticated literacy and numeracy in poorer children or those who were culturally different, then they simply would be channeled into work where sophisticated skills were not required or even desired. The common script is, in some ways, a historical residue.

David Cohen (1987) has recently argued that the roots of the common script are historically deeper yet; they go far into European history. He focuses on schools’ attachment to teaching through a corpus of revered written works and through telling. Western society learned to revere the few surviving written works of earlier great civilizations through the years of the middle ages when a few precious copies of these works were carefully preserved and laboriously copied. Protestant attachment to the Bible furthered this attitude. At the same time, he says, folk patterns of informal teaching in everyday life consist in telling, in instruction through didactic means. When the schools resist innovations that would make children more active learners or adjust the curriculum to the child, they are only following

deeply engrained cultural patterns of revering great books and of instruction by lecture.

While history may have shaped the form of the common script, it is important to seek the reasons that it is so widely embraced by contemporary actors. If the common script has not been able to produce good results with large proportions of students in recent years, it would seem reasonable to try altering the script. It requires explanation that neither teachers, nor other education professionals, nor policymakers, nor parent groups often consider such a possibility. Why, then, is the common script so persistent?

REAL SCHOOL AS A SYMBOL OF EQUITY

The symbols and rituals of Real School are important not only for the immediate school communities, but also for a regional, state, and national audience. These audiences want to be able to assume that all schools follow a common template and can be said to be offering the same, commonly understood and commonly valued, high school education. In the current rhetoric of the national reform movement and in the rhetoric of many local and regional commissions, it is axiomatic that high schools should be the same across communities. The reasons for this are so much taken for granted as to be little discussed, but preparation of a capable labor force and equity are the main reasons given where any become explicit.

In the United States we say we do not believe in passing privilege from parent to child; rather we [claim that we] expect individuals to earn favoured slots in society through talent and hard work. Equality of opportunity, mostly through education, is a central tenet of our social and economic system. The schools have been given the task of judging new citizens’ talent and diligence. Consequently, it is important to our national sense of a social system that is fairly ordered that all children have an equal opportunity through education. If we are to say that success in education is a fair and just criterion by which to award each child a slot in an adult

occupational hierarchy based upon individual merit, then the poorest child must have access to as good an education as the richest.

How, then, to guarantee an equal education? By guaranteeing the same education. State legislatures and large school districts standardize in the name of equity. The reform reports, with their bland references to “The American High School,” reflect a strong public consensus on the importance of offering a standard high school experience to all American children. The common script and its enactment with symbols and rituals of Real School in all high schools gives a skeletal reality to the claim of equity through sameness.

But societal perceptions here bear some scrutiny. Just as the rituals of Real School create more social reassurance than technical substance in the daily life of some schools, so do they in the regional and national life of the society. Although the schools we studied served communities that differed widely in privilege and power, since all followed the common script they were similar in most formal respects: in social structure, in the use of time and space, in grouping of students and even in the formal curriculum. But they were very different in one formal respect. They had very different distributions of measures of student achievement. Grades, nationally standardized test scores, dropout rates, and rates of college attendance all varied significantly between schools and all were correlated with the socioeconomic status of the community.

Schools not only teach the young the content of the curriculum and some of the social graces required to be a member in good standing of a school community, they also sort young people into groups labeled as barely employable, possessing moderate skill, capable of much further development, or showing extreme promise. The public schools rank the students who emerge from their doors after thirteen years in ways which are fateful for those young people’s work, their economic fortunes, and their status among other members of society.

Imagine what would happen if the goals that educators and reformers officially seek were actually accomplished. All students would become top

performers. All of them would make perfect scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test, not to mention having perfect A records throughout their schooling. Chaos would ensue. Colleges would not have room for all, but would have little ground on which to accept some and reject others. Employers looking for secretaries, retail salespersons, waiters, bus drivers, and factory workers would have jobs unfilled as every student considered such work beneath his or her accomplishments.

As long as education is used to rank young people and sort them into occupational futures that differ substantially in the money, status, power, and intrinsic rewards they can yield, good education, or students’ success at education, must remain a scarce commodity. Those who do succeed have less competition for access to attractive occupations, if large numbers of others do not.

Families with the resources to affect the quality of their children’s education have strong motivation both to provide a superior education to their children and to keep access to such a superior education limited, so that their children will face less challenge from others.

Consequently, an unspoken principle that opposes equality of opportunity through standardization of education is also at work. The public perceives schools to be in practice very unequal. Middle class parents will make considerable sacrifices to locate their children in schools they perceive to be better than others. Communities of parents with the economic and political means to do so will construct schools with special resources for their own children and will keep access to them exclusive. The social class and race of peers is often used by parents as a rough indicator of school quality.

Separate suburban school districts facilitate residents’ ability to create superior schools based on selected peers, generous material resources, and teaching positions that attract many applicants from which to choose. Ordinances requiring certain sizes for lots, or only single occupancy housing, can keep out lower income families. Fair Housing groups across the country document the continued practice of racial steering by real estate agents; it can be used to keep many suburban

communities all or mostly white. These districts can take advantage of their higher tax base to add the amenities of higher salaries for teachers, smaller class sizes, and richer stores of materials to their “standard” schools.

The six public schools we studied, although chosen to be ordinary and not including any really elite schools, provide eloquent testimony to the differences in public education that economic and racial housing segregation create in this country. In the communities they served, students received very different amounts of economic and educational resources from their parents and enjoyed very different levels of community safety and support. Students from different communities arrived at high school with visibly different skills, attitudes, and future plans. Different levels of funding available from local tax bases were visible in the schools’ architecture, the nonteaching duties expected of their faculties, their extracurricular activities, and their supplies. Not only parents and students but school staff entertained very different visions of students’ futures; these visions shaped the relationships of staff and students and the curricula-in-use (Hemmings & Metz, 1990; Metz, 1990). The differences among these schools remind us that more is hidden than revealed when one speaks in a single phrase of “The American High School.”

Political scientist Murray Edelman (1977) argued that our political life is shot through with contradictory ideas that the public entertains simultaneously, but in alternation, so that no sense of inconsistency troubles our individual or collective consciousness. We perceive each side of the contradiction as it suits the context, or our social purposes and self-interests. In this way, Americans seem to live with a contradiction between officially equal education based on the common script for the drama of Real School, on the one hand, and tremendous variety in the quality and content of education resulting from schools’ ties to socially and racially segregated communities, on the other. Middle class parents make sacrifices to buy houses where schools are supposed to be “better” and communities strongly resist moves for school consolidation

with neighboring communities, let alone proposals to desegregate schools or to introduce low income housing into suburbs. Despite continuous strenuous efforts to place children in superior schools and to preserve their exclusiveness, we rarely see, let alone openly acknowledge, the contradiction between these practices and equality of opportunity through the standardization of educational patterns.

Society’s blindness to this contradiction serves the interests of the well-educated middle class. Children in schools with better prepared peers, which are attractive to better prepared teachers, have a considerable advantage in competition with the other products of America’s supposedly standard and equal public schools. But middle class leaders feel no inconsistency in claiming that the young of the society are rewarded according to merit, even while they take care to place their own individual children in contexts that foster merit much more actively than those to which other children find themselves consigned.

The formal regulations and informal expectations that create the common script for high schools, and that lead school staffs to use that script to create some form of a Real School, reinforce the apparent equity of American education. The common script for a Real School thus becomes a guarantor of equity across schools. It has important symbolic value in this way to an outside audience of citizens and educational policymakers, as well as to participants. Thus not only do the staffs and parents of Drew and of Grant want to be reassured that these are Real Schools; so also do district administrators, state legislators, and leading citizens with an interest in educational equity—apparent or real.

CONCLUSION

The common script for high school practice with its standard social structure, technical routines, and curricular scope and sequence has taken on a deep cultural value in this country. Its enactment assures both participants and outsiders of the equity of public schooling in the nation as a

whole, while it certifies teachers and students who follow it as legitimate and worthy participants in the academic and social life of the broader society. To follow the script is to accomplish these ends more clearly and surely than it is to effect students' mastery of geometry, chemistry, grammar, and clear written expression. The script serves as a symbol of unity and equity in American education. Participation in the drama it sketches out is participation in a ritual that affirms membership in mainstream American life.

The symbolic and ritual aspects of the play called "The American High School" are most visible where its routines are least technically effective in teaching geometry, chemistry, and English. We reached our insights into the symbolic and ritual aspects of the common script as we puzzled over its persistence in schools where it was manifestly not technically effective. Our conviction of the importance of symbol and ritual in maintaining Real School grew as we considered the outpouring of writing already cited which indicates that in recent years, not only in our schools for the poor and the working class, but in most American public high schools for students not headed for selective colleges, the script is no more than minimally effective while student alienation and even student failure are endemic.

This is not to say that the common script that we have developed for high school structure and instruction is irrelevant to its technical ends. It works with reasonable technical effectiveness in schools where certain unstated preconditions are met. In our study, it worked where students came to high school with strong literacy, numeracy, and writing skills and a rudimentary knowledge of history and science. Its effective operation also seemed to depend on students' having realistic hopes of at least modestly successful economic futures to give them extrinsic motivation to compete with each other and to accept the staff's agenda as worthwhile. These conditions apply to the majority of students in a decreasing number of schools, in only two of the six public schools we visited, and only three of the total eight. In our study, they applied where the majority of students expected to attend colleges

with admissions standards that would eliminate some high school graduates.

Persons who are in a position to influence district, state, and national agendas for education are usually persons who were reasonably successful in learning through the patterns of Real School themselves. Most will expect it to work well for their own children, and for most it will indeed do so. These children will come to school from home prepared with relevant skills and a cultural style matched to school discourse. They will be able to expect later rewards for effort and good performance. They will be in schools with peers with similar advantages who will allow teachers to proceed with planned agendas and will stimulate one another to competition.

Many persons in policy-making positions have little direct experience from which to reflect on schooling processes and student reactions other than their own schooling and that of their children. Many have had little or no firsthand experience with schools for blue collar, let alone really poor or minority children, and little or no firsthand experience with the families or the life experience of students in such schools. If their images of what happens inside these schools are not clear and their diagnosis for the students and the schools not well-suited to the realities of their lives, no one should be surprised. Lacking this knowledge, they can easily believe that poor and minority and even blue collar children do not learn well in school because of defects in their characters that can be remedied with stronger demands and coercive pressures, with a sterner imposition of Real School. They can see differences between schools for poor children and the schools their own children attend in terms of talent and its lack, or effort and sloth, not in terms of advantages in their children's school experience. The system seems to them to offer equality of opportunity through the common script, while dramatic differences in patterns of student accomplishment between schools can be attributed to merit and fault in the individuals who attend them.

The lack of search for alternatives to the common script is a striking feature of current high

school life—though some individual teachers do have successful alternative practices in place. But the many experiments that were tried in the 1960s and '70s, producing at least some anecdotal evidence of success, were rarely visible in the schools we studied. Some were still remembered. For example ethnic studies classes, like Afro-American history at Drew, had been discontinued within recent memory at some schools. This lack of alternatives feeds on itself, as schools that offer unconventional courses or teachers who follow unconventional practices become increasingly exceptional.

The pressures of the reform movement on the schools we studied strengthened the grip of Real School. Rising graduation requirements, increased standardized testing, and increased monitoring of drop-out rates and grading practices pushed teachers not only to use the script, but to follow it more slavishly and improvise less than they otherwise might have.

Once in place, the common script and the practice of Real School are reinforced by an interacting set of influences that overdetermine a conformist outcome. Broad societal support for these standardized patterns is frozen into bricks and mortar and into legal language. Thus school buildings, union contracts, and curriculum guides at the district level all support its patterns and are difficult to alter. Nationally distributed textbooks, college entrance requirements, state policies and laws, and nationally visible tests such as the ACT and college board achievement tests also play their parts.

These structural conditions and the less explicit expectations for curriculum and pedagogy that accompany them constrain teachers' practice directly but also set invisible boundaries around the content and style that teachers can easily claim to be legitimate. They significantly limit the range of teachers' ways of working. By legitimating, even certifying as required, a particular, apparently effective technical approach, they make teachers responsible both to use this approach and to make it successful. If teachers' practice is not then effective, the explanation seems evidently to lie in the actors within the school, in defects either

in teachers' own performance of the script or in students' application of themselves to their parts. Teachers must blame themselves or blame the students—as will outsiders.

The institutionalization of Real School is embraced not only by powerful, well educated families for whom it usually works well, but by powerless and minimally educated families and their children as well. Even where students are not learning well, parents can be very insistent on the importance of traditional, Real, patterns of schooling (Joffe, 1977; Lubeck, 1985; Ogbu, 1974). Even the students who skip classes or refuse to do the written work when they come, may accept only the most traditional activities of Real School as authentic. James Herndon's (1969) description of his experience of teaching poor black children in junior high school in the late 1950s gives vivid evidence of this attitude. He describes how the children celebrated when a substitute teacher gave them grade level books, which they embraced, but never worked in. They wanted the books; so they could "not-do" them, as Herndon says. In our terms, the books gave them symbolic status as Real Students, but were not something they wanted to involve themselves in learning.

Nonetheless, there is some technical wisdom in the reluctance of school administrators and parents alike to open the flood gates of experimentation in poor areas. Standard curricular materials cut down the amount of work that teachers must do to present students a lesson that has at least minimal substance. Experimentation with genuinely alternative educational processes in an attempt to elicit students' intrinsic interest requires much more work from teachers. Many, perhaps most teachers, are likely to find the rewards unequal to the efforts such teaching requires. A good deal of skill and imagination is probably also required to succeed in such efforts, and not all teachers possess these requisites. Curriculum guides and texts support the efforts of the less than gifted. Poor and minority parents, who have been exposed to the low end of American schooling, are well aware of the effects of despair or malfeasance among teachers; they have experienced some of them in action despite the protections of

the common script. They are probably not wrong in seeing some guarantee and insurance of education for their children in the patterns and rituals of Real School.

Alternatives to Real School exist; they have a history that extends well back into the nineteenth century (Cremin, 1964). Many have met with great success in particular situations. A few, like the Montessori method for young children, have become well-codified and have gained considerable social recognition. Especially at the elementary level, but also at the high school level, similar ideas keep being reinvented by teachers or founders of schools. They fade away, only to reappear again in a new guise a few years later in another place. But few have become fully institutionalized and widely recognized. Hence, when the obvious policy question “What method is better than Real School?” is raised, there is no systematic loyal opposition waiting to take over control, no alternative “one best system” (Tyack, 1974) standing in the wings.

A reason for the lack of [a] codified substitute plan for schooling system[s] lies in the emphasis of many alternative patterns upon responsiveness to students’ prior experience and current interests. Such educational approaches must be relatively unstructured; they will take variable forms in varied settings. They also do not lend themselves to mass production with textbooks, standardized tests, and comparable credentials—all features that mass schooling and mass credentialing of students demand.

A concatenation of influences thus support the dominance of Real School and make its patterns extremely difficult to dislodge, even when their technical effectiveness falters and is clearly vulnerable to criticism. However ironic it may be, many dispossessed parents and students, together with their teachers, see in Real School a chance to maintain their pride and their sense of membership in the mainstream of American education, and so in American society. At the same time, precisely because Real School is not very effective in improving learning for more than small numbers of children from poor, minority, or even established blue collar families, the

relatively privileged educational decision makers who determine its content can support offering it to all students, and even intensifying its requirements for all, without fear that they will increase competition for the children of more educationally privileged parents like themselves. Offering the same education to all appears to be the essence of fairness—unless one has a sense of the interactive processes that transform the same structures and formal procedures into the diverse daily lives of schools in differing communities.

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READING 21

WHY PUBLIC SCHOOLS NEED DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

Diane Ravitch

As noted in the reading by Maeroff in this chapter, local public schools are most often governed by local school boards representing their communities, resulting in locally controlled schools. However, especially in some larger cities, the business model operates—city schools run by a business model with mayoral control and some degree of privatization, such as charter schools. Diane Ravitch considers the issues surrounding these two approaches and takes a strong stand in support of locally controlled schools. In her argument she points out that schools should be local institutions with local control. By removing control from local school boards, we take away that democratic institution—but for what? She argues that we do not know if privately run schools or “open market forces” will lead to better education. However, she argues that in the process of changing the authority structure of schools we are taking risks with children’s lives. Ravitch points to the case of New York City, which is controlled by the mayor and is adding many new private charter schools, just as Cleveland and Chicago have done. Yet according to test scores, some of the higher performing school districts, such as Charlotte and Austin, are run by school boards. Thus, her argument is that we should not jump to new forms of school governance when the problems of schools are economic and demographic. No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, federal government educational initiatives, advocate for more federal control in setting standards, teacher pay for performance, teacher tenure guidelines, and some privatization of schools through charters and choice. Beware the “crisis talkers” and the “latest fads” is Ravitch’s advice.

Questions to consider for this reading:

1. What concerns does Ravitch have about the federal mandates discussed in the Borman and Cotner reading in Chapter 3?
2. Why does Ravitch argue that local control is necessary for democracy as opposed to mayoral or federal control of schools?
3. How does the business model affect democratic governance?
4. Based on articles by Maeroff and Ravitch, should school board structures be changed? If so, how?

Every time some expert, public official, or advocate declares that our public schools are in crisis, stop, listen, and see what he or she is selling. In the history of American education, crisis talk is cheap. Those

who talk crisis usually have a cure that they want to promote, and they prefer to keep us focused on the dimensions of the “crisis” without looking too closely at their proposed cure.

From “Why Public Schools Need Democratic Governance,” by D. Ravitch, 2010, *Phi Delta Kappan*, 91(6), pp. 24–27. Copyright 2010 by Phi Delta Kappa International. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.

The crisis talkers today want to diminish the role of local school boards and increase the privatization of public education. They recite the familiar statistics about mediocre student performance on international tests, and they conclude that bold action is needed and there is no time to delay or ponder. Local school boards insist on deliberation; they give parents and teachers a place to speak out and perhaps oppose whatever bold actions are on the table. So, in the eyes of some of our current crop of school reformers, local school boards are the problem that is blocking the reforms we need. The “reformers” want action, not deliberation.

Local school boards have not been enthusiastic, for example, about privatization of public schools. More often than not, they’re skeptical that private entrepreneurs will be more successful running schools than experienced educators. Nor are they eager to open charter schools, which drain away resources and students from the regular schools and have the freedom to remove the students who are most difficult to educate. Local school boards have also been an obstacle to those who want to replace experienced principals and teachers with enthusiastic neophytes.

Local school boards are right to be wary of the latest fad. Our education system tends to embrace “reforms” too quickly, without adequate evidence of their value. Here’s just one example from the many I could cite. In 1959, James Conant, the president of Harvard University, led a campaign against small high schools. He said they were inefficient and unable to supply a full curriculum. He called for consolidation of small districts and small high schools, so we could have the advantages of scale. Conant was featured on the cover of *Time*, and suddenly large high schools were the leading edge of reform. In our own time, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation poured \$2 billion into breaking up large high schools and turning them into small high schools. Now, the Gates Foundation has decided that wasn’t such a good idea, and it’s off on another tangent, offering rewards to districts that evaluate teachers by their students’ test scores.

Today, the public schools once again have a plethora of critics. Some say that public education itself is obsolete. There is a large and growing movement to dismantle public education. Some critics want to get rid of public education and replace it with a completely choice-based system of vouchers and charter schools. Proponents of this view say the market and choice are the only mechanisms that will produce high achievement. Government, they say, has failed. They believe—naively, I think—that in an open market, good schools would thrive and bad ones would die. Personally, I think this is a ludicrous analysis to apply to public education, which is a public good, not a private good or a commodity. As a society, we have a legal, moral, and social responsibility to provide a good public school in every neighborhood and not to leave this vital task to the free market and not to take unconscionable risks with the lives of vulnerable children.

FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE

The local school boards are the first line of defense for public education. Critics know this. In 2008, an article in *The Atlantic* was titled “First, Kill All the School Boards.” It was written not by a right-wing extremist or a libertarian, but by Matt Miller of the Center for American Progress, whose president, John Podesta, led the Obama transition team. Miller argued that local control and local school boards are the basic cause of poor student performance. He said the federal government should take control of the nation’s schools, set national standards, eliminate teacher tenure, and tie teacher pay to student performance. In an ideal world, he wrote, we would scrap local boards and replace them with mayoral control, especially in urban districts. This one act of removing all democratic governance, he claimed, would lead to better education.

This argument lacks logic and evidence. Some localities have high achievement, some have low, and the difference is economics and demography, not democracy. There is not a shred of evidence in Miller’s article or in the research

literature that schools improve when democratic governance ends.

In a similar vein, *Tough Choices or Tough Times*, a report prepared by the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, proposed turning over all public schools to private managers. The role of school boards would be limited to approving performance contracts with these independent managers, monitoring their performance, and closing schools that didn't meet their goals. Under this proposal, signed by many of our most eminent leaders, local government would get out of the business of running public schools. In effect, every school would be a privately managed school.

Why would schools get better if they're managed by private companies? What secret do private sector organizations have that hasn't been shared with state and local education leaders? What's the logical connection between privatization and quality education? Why are they so certain that any privately managed school will be better than any regular public school?

The recommendation for universal privatization is irresponsible. You don't rip apart a vital part of the nation's social fabric—its public schools—because it sounds like a good idea. You don't destroy democratic governance of public education because of a hunch.

NEW YORK EXPERIENCE

As it happens, New York City has already created a test case of what happens when the local school board is rendered toothless. In 2002, the state legislature turned over control of the school system to the city's newly elected mayor, Michael Bloomberg. The legislation continued a central board, but abolished the city's 32 local school boards. The central board, however, consisted only of appointees who serve at the pleasure of the person who appointed them. Of its 13 members, eight serve at the pleasure of the mayor, and the remaining five serve at the pleasure of the borough presidents who appointed them.

The mayor immediately demonstrated that the new central board was of no importance. He

renamed it the Panel for Educational Policy. When he introduced its members at a press conference, he made clear that they would not be speaking out on anything. He said, "They don't have to speak, and they don't have to serve. That's what 'serving at the pleasure' means" (Hernandez, 2009, [p. A1]). On a rare occasion, when two of his appointees planned to vote against his plan to end social promotion for 3rd graders, he fired them and replaced them on the same day. This central board, which was supposed to provide oversight and a check on the mayor's extraordinary power over the schools, was reduced to a rubber stamp.

Only one borough president appointed a representative who dared to ask questions. Patrick J. Sullivan, a business executive, was appointed to the central board in 2007 as a parent member. Before his term began, he sat in on a meeting and watched the board approve a \$17 billion budget, a major labor contract, and a new database costing \$80 million, all in less than an hour. He observed that, "The Panel for Educational Policy seemed more a misplaced relic of the Brezhnev-era Soviet Union than a functioning board of directors overseeing the education of 1.1 million children" ([Sullivan,] 2009).

The board exists to do whatever the mayor and chancellor want, not to exercise independent judgment. Sullivan reported that board members seldom had presentation materials in advance. Votes are cast before hearing public comments, not after, as is typical of other public boards. Although the law specified that the board would meet at least once a year in executive session, no such meeting was held in Sullivan's first two years on the board. Time and again, when controversial issues came up, Sullivan was the only dissenting voice on the panel.

When mayoral control of the schools came up for reauthorization before the New York state legislature in 2009, the mayor waged a heavily financed campaign to maintain his complete control of the school system. His advocacy group received millions of dollars from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Broad Foundation, and other foundations. On one point, the mayor drew a line: He did not want any board members

to serve for a fixed term, even if he appointed them. They must continue to serve at his pleasure. When Citizens Union, a respected civic organization, was considering the possibility of issuing a statement on behalf of fixed terms, it received a personal letter from U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, opposing fixed terms for any appointees and insisting that the mayor could be effective only if he had complete control.

Because New York City no longer has an independent board of education, it no longer has democratic control of its public education system. There is no forum in which parents and other members of the public can ask questions and get timely answers. Major decisions about the school system are made in private, behind closed doors, with no public review and no public discussion.

Because New York City no longer has an independent board of education, there are no checks or balances, no questioning of executive authority. A contract was awarded for nearly \$16 million to the business consulting firm of Alvarez & Marsal to review operations and cut spending. This firm rearranged the city's complex school bus routes and stranded thousands of young children on one of the coldest days of the year without any means of getting to school. Some of the chaos they created might have been averted had there been public review and discussion of their plans. No one was held accountable for their mistakes; they were not chastised, and their contract was not terminated.

Similarly, the Department of Education imposed a grading system on every school in the city. In the name of accountability, each school is given a single letter grade from A to F, not a report card. The grade depends mainly on improvement, not on performance. Some outstanding schools, where more than 90% of the students meet state standards, got an F because they didn't make progress, while some really low-performing schools, even persistently dangerous ones, got an A because they saw a one-year gain in their scores. This approach was imposed without public discussion or review. The result was a very bad policy that stigmatizes some very good schools and helps none. The lesson is, or should be, that public discussion can prevent or mitigate policy errors.

In the absence of an independent board, there is no transparency of budget. There is no public forum in which questions are asked and answered about how the public's money is spent. Consequently, the number and size of no-bid contracts for consultants and vendors have soared into the hundreds of millions of dollars, with no public review or oversight. The education budget has grown from \$12 billion annually to nearly \$22 billion.

In the absence of a school board to oversee the actions of the executive, there is no accountability. The mayor can do as he wishes in the schools. The chancellor can adopt any policies he wishes; he serves at the pleasure of the mayor and answers to no one else. When a school fails or many schools fail, only the principal is held accountable. Those at headquarters who impose policies and programs are never held accountable.

All this unchecked authority has been used to turn New York City's public schools into a demonstration of choice and free markets in education. Children may choose among 400 or so high schools. They may choose from among 100 charter schools. If the school is successful or popular, students must enter a lottery or go onto a waiting list. In many of the poorest neighborhoods, the number of charter schools has increased, and many have been given space in neighborhood public schools. New York City might be the only district in the nation that places charter schools in public school buildings, taking away space previously allocated to art rooms, music rooms, computer rooms, and other activities. Parents and teachers have protested, but the mayor continues to place charters in public school buildings. By the end of the mayor's third term, there may be neighborhoods that have no public schools, just charters to which students seek entry.

The mayor has promised to open yet another 100 charter schools because he believes that schools should function like a marketplace, with choice and competition. Parents must struggle to get their child into the right high school, the right middle school, or the right charter school. Sustaining and improving regular public schools, neighborhood public

schools, has low priority in the new world of the business model in education.

This business model has impressed the Obama Administration. Secretary Duncan has strongly endorsed mayoral control as a means to improve achievement, even though the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress suggest caution: Two of the three lowest-performing districts in the nation (Cleveland and Chicago) are controlled by their mayors, while the highest performing districts (Charlotte and Austin) are managed by school boards. The Obama Administration has also required states to remove their caps on charter schools to be eligible for its \$4.3 billion “Race to the Top” fund. In this time of budget cutting, every district wants new funding. But the price may be too high if public education is placed in jeopardy.

The business model assumes that democratic governance is a hindrance to effective education. It assumes that competition among schools and teachers produces better results than collaboration.

It treats local school boards as a nuisance and an obstacle rather than as the public’s representatives in shaping education policy. It assumes that schools can be closed and opened as if they were chain stores rather than vital community institutions.

By endorsing mayoral control and privatization, the Obama Administration is making a risky bet.

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Projects for Further Exploration

1. To gain a better understanding of schools as organizations in the United States, select indicators from the reading by Barr and Dreeben, or from others in this chapter. Using the Web pages in the Appendix, go to your state website and find school report card data. Locate a data set that allows you to compare schools in your areas using at least two of these indicators. There may also be information about schools on your state Web page.
2. The reading by Bryk in this chapter discusses ways to improve schools. Find a case study of a school that has improved its achievement levels on tests and graduation rates and describe what factors have made the difference. Compare this with the information provided by Bryk. Case examples can be found in Chicago, Anapolis, and other cities.
3. Replicate the study by Harry Gracey on the organization of the kindergarten classroom. Observe a nursery school or kindergarten class and keep notes on your observations. Write a summary that describes the lessons taught by the organization and the teacher, plus activities and interactions in the classroom.
4. Look for information on the number of charter schools in your state and in major cities. What can you learn about the structure and organization of these schools?