ABSTRACT
        The purposes of this study were: (1) to ascertain the
extent to which urban school systems have decentralized the
administration of their schools, (2) to obtain opinions on its
workability in terms of curriculum development, (3) to begin
development of an instrument for clarifying role and function issues
at various echelons of decision-making, (4) to analyze and contrast
avowed purposes of decentralization with actual results in terms of
moving decision-making closer to the levels affected, (5) to obtain
information to help understand more about the change mechanisms now
utilized in urban school systems. A mail survey of some 50 of the
nation's largest school districts was made. It was found that the
trend toward administrative decentralization has accelerated during
the past five years. Only New York and Detroit have adopted a
community control organization model having regional school boards
with policy-making and resource allocation authority. Most urban
curriculum leaders felt there was much need for curriculum
specialists. There was evidence that accountability for curriculum
improvement may not have been substantially strengthened. A strong
leadership role on the part of regional office personnel has not yet
emerged. Considerable effort has been made to obtain citizen
participation at the building level. (Author/JM)

URBAN SCHOOL DECENTRALIZATION
AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

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For many years now urban schools have been under frequent attack by "romantic critics,"
special interest groups, citizens, and students. During several years of social pro-
test, students and parents were often demanding a larger voice in decisions affecting
education in their commur : ¬s. At the same time, there was an increasing contention
that large bureaucratic organizations in the big cities were not responsive to logistical
or instructional problems in individual schools.

The institutional response to these issues of citizen participation and logistical
responsiveness was often administrative decentralization. Regional offices were usually
established with a line officer, designated as Area or Assistant Superintendents, in
charge of a small staff of curriculum specialists and other professionals. This new level
of administrative organization between the central office and building level often came
into being with minimum guidance as to its role or function.

Although there have been several studies to ascertain the extent or nature of the
administrative structures that were evolving, or to analyze the impact of citizen par-
ticipation, only very limited work has been done to determine the impact of decentralization
on curriculum development strategies.

Curriculum development, in the context of this study, is broadly defined as including
such activities as needs assessment and goal setting, selecting and organizing learning
materials and teaching methods, and evaluation. Staff development activities are very
much a part of this process.

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This study is intended as an initial probing of this one aspect of decentralization -

its impact on curriculum development. Respondees were central office curriculum

leaders and no attempt was made to validate their judgment at other levels of

the organization. In addition, no attempt was made to contribute to the

literature on the efficacy of citizen participation in the governance of

public education.

Purposes of Study: (1) to ascertain the extent to which urban school systems have decentralized the administration of their schools, (2) to obtain opinions on its workability in terms of curriculum development, (3) to begin development of an instrument for clarifying role and function issues at various echelons of decision-making, (4) to analyze and contrast avowed purposes of decentralization with actual results in terms of moving decision-making closer to the levels affected, (5) to obtain information to help understand more about the change mechanisms now utilized in urban school systems.

Data Sources: Mail survey of some 50 of the nation's largest school districts (generally those in cities with populations in excess of 250,000).Respondees were Assistant or Associate Superintendents for Instruction. Some data included in describing the types of decentralization were taken from an earlier study by Allan Ornstein.*

RESULTS

Nature of Administrative Organizations Reported

	City	Enroll-ment	Schools	Area-Region Districts	Year
A. Decentralization with regional offices and regional "school boards" with policy making authority. -(2)	New York City Detroit	1,106,000 260,000	950 320	32D 8R	69 71
B. Decentralization with regional office and regional committee acting in advisory capacity (appointed by the central board or chosen through a mechanism set by the board). -(2)	Portland Chicago	69,000 500,000		3A 3A-27D	70 68

* Ornstein, Allan C., "Administrative/Community Organization of. Metropolitan Schools," Phi Delta Kappan, (June, 1973), pp. 668-674.

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	City	Enroll-ment	Schools	Area,Region Districts	Year
C. Decentralization with regional offices but not having regional "school boards." (21)	Philadelphia	276,000	285	8D	*
	New Orleans	95,719	135	4A	54
	Atlanta	86,000	144	4A	56
	Dade Co.	240,000		6A	65
	Nashville	85,000		3D	66
	Indianapolis	92,000		3R,10A	69
	San Antonio	73,000		3A	69
	Pittsburgh	70,000		3A	69
	Seattle	69,025		2R	69
	St. Louis	93,000	165	5D	70
	Los Angeles	727,681	662	4Z,12A	71
	Houston	213,000	225	6A	71
	Oakland	55,000	91	3R	71
	Memphis	139,115		4A	71
	San Francisco	76,000		7 Zones	71
	El Paso	62,580		3A	72
	Greenville	57,000	96	5A	72
	Minneapolis	59,000	86	3A	73
	Cincinnati	79,000		4 el.D/2 sec.D	73
	Baltimore	184,000	204	9R	73
	Washington	130,000		6R	74

* many years ago

	City	Enroll-ment	Schools	Area,Region Districts	Year
D. Decentralization but not reporting area or regional offices or "school boards." (1)	Louisville	44,675	67	NA	70

No. adopting prior to 1960 - 3
No. adopting 1960 - 1964   - 0
No. adopting 1965 - 1969   - 7
No. adopting 1970 - 1974   - 15

E. Districts reporting not to have regional, area or district offices or school boards.

(20)

Wichita, Denver, Columbus, San Diego, Jacksonville, Toledo, Tucson, Long Beach, Charlotte-Mecklenberg, Norfolk, Phoenix, Boston, Fort Worth, Tulsa, Omaha, Oklahoma City, Kansas City, Cleveland. (Dallas has regional service offices for elementary schools; Milwaukee has a "cluster" plan.)

Twenty-six of the 46 districts included in this study (57%) reported they were administratively decentralized and 20 reported they were not. Although some districts reported regional or area intermediate units for attendance or service purposes, they were not classified as decentralized in a regional sense if they did not have a line officer such as an Area or Assistant Superintendent in that office. Fifteen of the 26 decentralized districts have made the change in the last five years.

Availability of Curriculum Specialists

About half the respondees from decentralized school systems reported fewer curriculum specialists are now available than before decentralization. Three reported no change in the number of specialists available and two indicated more were available. Several comments indicated that as more curriculum improvement activities were undertaken, there was a recognition of greater need for specialists and that principals rarely had time to perform this function.

Responsibility for Initiating New Instructional Programs

The most common response was that this was a joint responsibility. That is, initiative could come from either the building level, regional office or central office. There was a slight tendency to respond that the initiative normally came from regional or central office persons.

Purposes of Decentralization

"Responsiveness" was the concept which appeared most often when the respondees were asked about the purposes of decentralization in their city. In classifying these responses, the purposes were grouped into four categories and they produced no surprises insofar as the literature on decentralization is concerned:

1. to promote community involvement - help base the program on the communities' needs, provide for community participation.

2. to promote administrative effectiveness - reduce size of administrative unit, move decision-making closer to implementation site, respond to need for social services, improve planning and problem solving ability on local school level, etc.

3. to promote administrative efficiency - reduce overlap of services; engage schools in priority setting and resource allocation, and encourage program budgeting.

4. to provide for greater curriculum and instructional improvement - greater responsiveness to student needs, promote interdisciplinary and inter-level coordination, improve K-12 articulation, improve instructional quality, increase teacher participation in curriculum development, and respond to needs of a particular geographic area.

Because all decentralized systems did not provide data on their purposes and since it was difficult to sense priorities for any of these purposes, no attempt was made to quantify or rate these responses in importance.

No rationale or policy statement was located that came to grips with the problem of a "standardized" instructional program and variations bound to develop with autonomous regions or buildings.

Judging from the data reported elsewhere in the study, and from earlier research, it would appear that considerable refinement and improvement is needed before these decentralized organizations can be said to be fulfilling the purposes expressed for them. On the other hand, if a sense of participation or "ownership" in the school system can be demonstrated (not a part of this study), that alone may well justify having adopted the decentralized administrative structures.

Decision Making Echelons

The data below are the responses of persons from 17 cities reporting to be decentralized. The rankings under each of three categories indicate wherein the most and least influences resides with respect to several different issues.

Issue or Task	Echelon	Most Influence #1	Some Influence #2	Least Influence #3	Finding
1. Ordinarily makes decisions on assigning new teachers to a particular building.	Central Regional Building	11 4 2	3 4 9	3 5 6	Most-Central Office Least-Building
2. Makes the decision in selecting which basic materials to purchase for an elementary school reading program.	Central Regional Building	4 2 12	5 7 3	8 5 2	Most-Building Least-Central Office
3. Make the basic determination as to how given amounts of Title I funds are to be spent.	Central Regional Building	9 1 7	4 7 3	4 4 7	Most-Central Office Least-Building
4. Has the responsibility and resources for carrying out a program of in-service education for teachers	Central Regional Building	10 4 3	1 6 8	6 3 6	Most-Central Office Least-Building
5. Selection of building principal.	Central Regional Building	8 8 1	5 6 4	4 0 10	Most-Central Office Least Building
6. Determine final plans for the modification of a school's physical plant such as removing halls for an Instructional Materials Center.	Central Regional Building	9 1 7	3 9 5	5 3 6	Most-Central Office Least-Building
7. Would make the decision to install differentiated staffing plans in a building.	Central Regional Building	4 7 6	5 6 5	7 1 5	Most-Regional Least-Central Office
8. Deciding to alter the existing social studies program to include a sizeable unit on environmental education.	Central Regional Building	7 1 10	3 11 2	7 1 5	Most-Building Least-Central Office

Issue or Task	Echelon	Most Influence #1	Some Influence #2	Least Influence #3	Finding
9. Determine particular goals and objectives for a certain school.	Central	1	3	12	Most-Building
	Regional	1	12	2	Least-Central Office
	Building	15	2	0	
10. Develops a plan for reporting to patrons in the community on the extent to which an individual school is meeting its goals.	Central	4	2	13	Most-Building
	Regional	2	11	0	Least-Central Office
	Building	11	3	3	

Central Office

Most Influence

1. teacher assignment
3. Title I
4. in-service
5. principal selection
6. building modification

Least Influence

2. selecting reading materials
7. differentiated staffing
8. other social studies program
9. building goals and objectives
10. reporting to parents

Regional

Most Influence

7. install differentiated staffing

Least Influence

Building

Most Influence

2. selecting elem. reading materials
8. alter existing social studies
9. building goals and objectives
10. reporting to parents

Least Influence

1. teacher assignment
2. Title I expenditures
4. in-service education
5. principal selection
6. building modification

It would appear that there has been only a very limited shifting of decision-making authority to regional offices. Further study is needed on the extent to which this is _intended_, and to validate the central office leaders' (who completed this survey instrument) perception of how much real authority has been shifted to the building level. These findings would tend to conflict with other impressions and discussions of the erosion of principals' authority which has come with the advent of public sector bargaining.

Leadership Provided by Regional Offices

	Avg. Rating	
Curriculum and Instruction	25.7	10 - provides strong leadership
Logistical or Administrative	18.5	20 - provides good leadership
		30 - uncertain, uneven
		40 - poor leadership
		50 - no leadership

Regional offices were rated higher in terms of their leadership contribution in logistical or administrative matters than they were on curriculum and instruction matters.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The trend toward administrative decentralization has not abated but rather
    has accelerated during the past five years, and 25 of the 46 urban districts
    included in this study (52%) reported that they had decentralized. Of the
    25 urban school districts reporting to be decentralized, 15 have accomplished
    this organizational change within the past five years. The trend may be
    leveling off since many of the 20 districts reporting not to be decentralized
    said it was not being considered at this time.

2. Only New York and Detroit have adopted a community control organizational
    model having regional school boards with policy-making and resource allocation
    authority.

3. Although the respondees indicated that in many instances there were now
    fewer curriculum specialists' available to schools since decentralization,
    most urban curriculum leaders felt there was much need for such persons
    now to help disseminate new instructional developments out to classroom
    teachers.

4. There was evidence that accountability for curriculum improvement may not
    have been substantially strengthened since the responsibility for initiating
    new instructional programs was most commonly said to be jointly held between
    central office, regional office and building personnel.

5. It would appear that a strong leadership role on the part of regional office
    personnel has not yet emerged. The most influence on several important
    administrative or instructional tasks remains either in the central office
    or has been delegated to the building level. Only on the issue cited having
    to do with "deciding to initiate differentiated staffing" was the regional
    office rated as "most influential."

6. Regional offices were also rated as providing stronger leadership on
    administrative matters than they were on curriculum and instructional issues.

7. Considerable effort has been made to obtain citizen participation at the
    building level. More than half of the districts reporting to be
    administratively decentralized said they had advisory groups for each
    individual school and almost all of the other said such schools existed
    at some buildings. Whether or not these citizen advisory groups are all
    something other than the traditional PTA or PTSA kinds of groups was not
    ascertained in this study, but in several cities such advisory groups have
    replaced the PTA. Recent policy changes in the PTA makes it possible for them
    to function now as a citizen advisory group more than they traditionally have in
    many communities.

Urban school districts that have decentralized their administrative structure will
help improve their accountability if greater effort is made to clarify the level
at which initiative for curriculum development activity is expected to originate.
Some larger districts now see central office curriculum specialists as product
developers but lack a mechanism for diffusing new instructional programs out to
the schools. Generally, it is a waste of time and money if no change mechanism
exists for helping teachers out in the schools learn what new instructional materials
are available and how their teaching practices need to be changed. A major problem

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in urban districts is finding effective mechanisms for curriculum renewal that can be felt city-wide, and it does not appear that administrative decentralization has helped much thus far. However, there are some indications that community participation in school affairs can be focused on substantive instructional issues to the benefit of a school and its students.

Although not a part of this study, disucssions with a   group of urban curriculum leaders reveal concern for the following problems which are very much in need of additional investigation to determine trend and results:

1. In recent years, it has almost become conventional wisdom that the local building faculty in urban districts should have considerable flexibility, if not autonomy, in developing its reading or mathematics program. The high pupil mobility of many low income pupils in the inner city has made it clear that it is not in the best interests of such pupils to encounter a half dozen different reading programs. As a result there may be a trend back to a more standard, city-wide reading program. In some instances, the competencies needed at each grade level have been identified in a continuous progress type of program with a variety of reading materials then used to help students attain these competencies. .

2. Urban school districts are employing a variety of strategies to help diffuse new instructional practices but need massive help if a city-wide change in learning strategies is to be brought to all teachers in a particular subject area. Only a few districts are seeing the local faculty as the fundamental unit of change. Among the staff development strategies being emphasized to help diffuse new instructional practice are teacher centers, after school faculty meetings, summer employment of teachers, released time for teachers during the school year, and (occassionally) regular planning time during the school week itself. Inflationary times are seeing dwindling rather than increasing recources for curriculum development activities in most urban districts. Rarely does one find urban districts that are able to promulgate a curriculum renewal plan that will be viable over a period of years.

    The urgent need for additional resources to help diffuse improved instructional practice in the nations urban school systems is much more urgently needed than further rhetoric by the "romantic critics."