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## ABSTRACT

In Victoria, Australia, every government school in the state is a self-managing school. The Victorian system of school-based management is called "Schools of the Future." This paper presents findings of a study that sought opinions of the school community toward various aspects of the Schools of the Future program and its outcomes. A questionnaire received responses from a total of over 400 parents, teachers, and school councillors. The data suggest that respondents were generally happy with the decisions being made at the local level, particularly with their involvement in determining the direction the school should take; however, they felt that some decisions were out of their control (e.g., staffing and those made at the Directorate of School Education). The twin goals of increasing quality and decreasing funding has resulted in increased workloads for educators and parents. Respondents also expressed concern that the reduced level of resources given to Schools of the Future from the government greatly increased school responsibility to raise funds. Some schools were more capable than others at raising funds, which means that some students had access to a higher quality education than others (on the basis of per-pupil funds available). Thus, some schools may not succeed in their quest to become more effective, raising concerns about equity and resources. Five tables are included. (Contains 14 references.) (LMI)

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# COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS OF SELF-MANAGING SCHOOLS

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## Community Perceptions of the Self-managing School

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### Introduction

Over the past decade, the issue of restructuring education has occurred in many countries, both developed and developing, although different interpretations of what restructuring meant were considered from country to country. One form of restructuring has been the rapid devolution of some powers to the school site, although this seems to have been accompanied by the centralisation of other powers simultaneously. This phenomenon has been called different things, school-site management, local management of schools and the self-managing school. Victoria, Australia, over the past four years has implemented this form of management system-wide, that is, every government school in the state is now a self-managing school. Similar models exist in Canada, some of the United States, the United Kingdom and New Zealand. The Victorian system has been labelled *Schools of the Future*.

### Victoria's *Schools of the Future* program

Ever since the Karmel Report into *Schools in Australia* in 1973, when the issues of equality of educational opportunity and local involvement in schools was canvassed for the first time, Victoria has been the flagship for many of the moves towards a fully decentralised system of education and, as such, is the focus of the current paper. The tentative first steps proposed by the 1975 School Councils Amendment to the 1958 Education Act, where school councils advised the principal on issues of school policy, to later moves which included school council responsibility for determining school policy and selection of the school principal in the 1980s, have now developed into the *Schools of the Future* program, which has similarities to various models from the UK, the USA, New Zealand and Canada as blueprints for its development, but perhaps pushes the boundaries of school self-management even further.

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The underlying rationale for this new structure comes from the 'commitment to the view that quality outcomes of schooling can only be assured when decision making takes place at the local level' (DSE, 1993:1). In some ways it could be seen as a response to the concerns expressed by Fullan (1993: 37-38), who argued:

[W]e have known for decades that top-down change doesn't work (you can't mandate what matters)...[but] decentralised solutions like site-based management also fail because groups get preoccupied with governance and frequently flounder when left on their own...Put differently, the center and local units *need each other*...What is required is a different two-way relationship because of pressure, support and continuous negotiation. It amounts to simultaneous top-down and bottom-up influence.

The *Schools of the Future* program is not a meaningless slogan, but a complex and comprehensive view of school management from both the systemic and local viewpoints. Just as it would be inappropriate to make judgements about an octopus on the basis of one of its tentacles, it is also inappropriate to look at the various dimensions of the *Schools of the Future* program in isolation from the others. Thus a brief review of the program as a whole is necessary to understand where the various parts fit.

The *Schools of the Future* program commenced when a new Liberal government was elected in October, 1992 and the subsequent changes to the system and the way in which schools operate within the system have been and are being monitored and adapted on an ongoing basis. Peck (1996: 3) outlines the key elements of the program:

- The school charter is the school's vision for the future. It is also the key planning and accountability document which serves as the formal understanding between the school community and the DSE. High levels of autonomy and accountability for each school are expressed through the school charter.
- To complement the charter, the authority of school councils as governing bodies has been expanded to include responsibility for the selection of principals, the employment of non-teaching staff, and the use of teachers on short-term contracts for particular projects.
- Each school council reports to the community through a comprehensive annual report focusing on educational achievements.
- An independent school review process that reconsiders and renews charters takes place every three years. This process assists schools to monitor and improve the performance of their students.
- Each school principal selects a teaching team.
- The principal has the responsibility to foster the professional development and personal growth of teachers.

- The school community decides on the best use of its resources through a one-line global budget which allows for local flexibility.

Four separate intakes commencing in January 1994, and occurring every six months, have seen over 99% of the 1717 government schools joining the program. Much of the Directorate of School Education's role is to support schools to utilise these features in the best possible way. This support structure has included a variety of features, including:

- six month induction programs, including in-service activities for principals, school councillors, teachers and administrative staff for every school joining the program. These activities focussed upon:
  - curriculum development
  - leadership training for principals
  - administrative support
  - professional development for teachers
  - leadership training for school councillors.
- the development of a common Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF) for each of the 8 key learning areas - mathematics, Science, English, The Arts, LOTE, Technology, Studies of Society and Environment, and Health and Physical Education.
- the introduction of a standardised testing program for grades 3, 5 and 12.
- The development of a Professional Recognition Program to encourage and reward skilled teachers.
- The introduction of a School Global Budget where the resources for the work of the school are allocated in a single line item budget based on the number and characteristics of the children in the school. Through this means 90% of the total government resources allocated to school education in the state go directly to schools.
- The Office of Schools Review was established to assist schools in the preparation of reports and to assist in the review and development of each school's charter on a three yearly basis.

As has been indicated earlier, the central feature of the *Schools of the Future* program is the School Charter, and a number of documents have been produced to assist schools to develop, review and report upon school operations. The responsibility for developing the school charter lies with the school council, but it is intended that substantial discussion between school staff, parents and the local community will take place during the construction of the charter. The final document must be acceptable to the Victorian Directorate of School Education as

well to ensure that government policies and priorities are contained within the charter. A school charter is organised around five key sections:

1. School profile
2. Core purpose statements
  - goals
3. Planning for improvement
  - priorities
  - curriculum, budget, accountability
4. Codes of practice
  - school council, principal class, staff, community
5. Code of conduct for students

(DSE, 1995a: 1)

The school profile considers the ethos of the school and sets the framework for the rest of the charter. It contains a description of the school, its guiding principles and an overview of the curriculum, facilities and future plans. Schools must develop goals for each of the areas of curriculum, environment, accountability, management and resources, and for each of the goals listed both achievement strategies and achievement measures are to be listed. Priorities are designed to focus on longer term developments related to improved learning outcomes for students. For each of the priorities identified, schools are to:

- clearly and concisely describe the task
- provide a description of the current situation
- identify the student learning outcomes expected in three years
- provide a detailed three-year plan which identifies strategies, annual indicators of progress, resource allocation and measurable student outcomes

(DSE, 1995a: 18)

The school charter thus becomes the central focus of any self-review or accountability exercise undertaken by the school. The document *School Annual Report Guidelines* (DSE, 1995b: 4) indicates that 'the school charter, school annual reports and triennial reviews are the mechanisms by which schools can both monitor their performance and focus on improving it.' The document identifies strategies for schools to report to their local community for the charter goals related to curriculum (including student learning achievement, the time allocated for each curriculum area per week, and how the curriculum is delivered), to the school environment (including student attendance, perceptions of the

school and student safety), to school accountability (including reports of student progress, student enrolments, student exit and destination information), to management (including professional development, organisational health and staff health) and to the use of resources (annual receipts and expenditure and final result). Part of the annual report also tracks the priorities the school identified, identifying the progress made in a particular year and the action required in subsequent years. Every three years schools will undertake an external review, using the support and resources of the Office of Schools Review. At the end of 1995 10 schools were involved in a pilot review process, to test strategies of review and to identify an appropriate mechanism that both maintains accountability within the system, but enables flexibility within the school. A further 50 schools will be reviewed in early 1996 with the strategies identified in 1995. By the middle of the year it is expected that a guide to school review will be produced, along the lines of other documentation already identified in this paper. A number of research projects have monitored the progress and development of the *Schools of the Future* program, including a longitudinal study of the principals involved in the change process by the University of Melbourne, in co-operation with the DSE and the state primary and secondary principals' associations (see Thomas *et al.*, 1993, 1994, 1995).

### Community Perceptions of *Schools of the Future*

The current study, conducted by the South Pacific Centre for School and Community Development at the Faculty of Education at Monash University sought school community opinion about various aspects of the *Schools of the Future* program and the changes it has brought. It considered the responses of over 400 teachers, parents and school councillors about their levels of confidence in aspects of *Schools of the Future*, their levels of satisfaction with various components of the *Schools of the Future* program and their levels of involvement in, and influence over, decisions related to the program. The respondents to the questionnaire were from both primary and secondary schools, from both rural and urban regions and were from schools that were part of the first (pilot), second and later intakes of the program.

The study found that more than four out of every five respondents were satisfied with the school goals (91.0%), the school charter (88.9%), the level of communication between the school and the home (87.6%), the level of communication between the classroom and the home (85.0%), the performance of the school principal (83.6%) and teachers (83.3%), the level of reporting of student progress (82.1%), the overall size of the school (81.6%),

the environment and ethos of the school (81.3%), and the performance of the school council (81.3%).

However, at the other end of the spectrum, less than two in five were satisfied with the voluntary contribution system (38.2%), the use of state-wide achievement tests (33.6%), the level of support provided to implement the Schools of the Future program (33.5%), the level of communication between the Ministry and the school (33.4%), the use of private sponsorship to promote school activities (31.9%), and the level of Government money available to the school (21.9%). (See table 1 for details).

Secondly, four out of five of the respondents felt sure that the Schools of the Future program would increase the workload of people at the school level; the school council (88.1%), the principal (88.1%), the administrative staff (85.0%) and the teachers (80.7%), but less than two out of five felt confident that the Schools of the Future program would lead to an overall increase in the quality of education (39.8%), would enable the school to be an education centre for all the community (39.1%), or would promote achievement for students from different backgrounds (38.0%) (See table 2 for details).

This response is in accord with other studies conducted in other parts of the world. Nowhere, it seems, is there any evidence that, in itself, school self-management makes any difference to student achievement. Even Brian Caldwell (1996), internationally known for his work on self-managing schools and seen by many in Victoria as the architect of *Schools on the Future*, in a recent radio interview, argued that:

...when we do look at schools that have improved,...that are so-called effective schools, we've seen that, in all cases, people have taken the initiative to make decisions for themselves, to solve their own problems, to set their own priorities, they've usually been schools that have been able to select their own staff in some way, so the characteristics of improving schools, one can find in a system of self-managing schools. But... then, by giving all schools the capacity for self-management, to expect an improvement in student learning, we haven't had any evidence that is consistent, that that, by itself is sufficient to lead to school improvement.

This has led some to suggest (Smyth, 1993) that school self-management has more to do with other things (perhaps the government saving money or deflecting blame) than it has to do with the quality of student achievement.

More than three out of five respondents felt that they had influence over some decisions, namely the use of resources within the school (69.8%), decisions made at the school level (68.2%), the environment and climate of the school (65.7%) and the future directions of the school (64.0%). However, only a minority felt that they could influence the selection of the principal (46.8%) or the teaching staff (35.5%) and hardly anyone felt

they could have any influence on decisions made at the regional or state level (11.6%). (See table 3 for details).

In general people's involvement in the school had either stayed the same or increased for about 90% of the respondents for each of the areas identified in the survey. It is interesting to note that although a substantial proportion of the respondents indicated an increase in their commitment to the children's education (23.4%), to the school (29.7%), to education generally (29.9%) and their involvement in the school overall (36.7%), that only 16.4% indicated an increase in the recognition given to the work the respondent did. (See table 4). This suggests that although there is an increased workload at the school level, this has not been recognised to any extent by those in charge.

These data suggest that people are generally happy with the decisions being made at the local level, particularly with their involvement in determining the direction the school should take, but they feel that some decisions are out of their control (eg staffing and those made at the DSE level). They feel their influence is limited to certain areas of activity, which suggests that the self-managing concept still has some way to go. There is also an expressed concern at the level of resourcing that Schools of the Future are receiving from the government, with a corresponding concern that there is a far greater responsibility for the school to raise funds (through fees or levies, sponsorships and the like).

This concern appears to be well founded, given the results of a second study (Townsend, 1996) that considered the 1995 Income and Expenditure statements of 25 schools. Although the number of schools in the study was too small to make any overall conclusions, the trends emerging from these financial statements add to the case being made by parents, teachers and school councillors that the level of resourcing of schools, and the ways in which these resources are found is placing heavy responsibilities on people at the school level.

The study found that if the effect of teacher salaries was ignored (since schools with similar numbers and types of students would receive similar funding allocations for staffing), the amount of government funds actually supplied through various grants to the schools was (on average) 77% of the cost of running the school's program. In these 25 schools, the other 23% had to be raised through local initiatives, which included various types of fund raising and utilising savings from previous years (See table 5). In fact schools raised considerably more than this amount, which gave the schools a buffer for subsequent years. However, the study also showed that some schools were far more capable at raising funds than others and the possibility of some students having access to a higher quality education than others (on the basis of per pupil funds available) remains a problem yet to be resolved.

As indicated earlier, the purpose of the *Schools of the Future* program is to increase the quality of education for all students. There is a danger that some schools will not succeed in their quest to become more effective. Reynolds suggests that one of the ways in which we might further our knowledge of school effectiveness is to focus our attention on these ineffective schools 'with the same fervour and purpose that we have attached to the problem of conceptualising and operationalising school effectiveness.' (Reynolds, 1994: 17). He argues that this is particularly urgent now because of the restructuring activities occurring in many parts of the world. What structures and systems are available to schools that might fall below what Reynolds calls 'basic organisational adequacy'? Who does the school in trouble turn to when a market approach to education is being promoted and there are few or no support systems provided by the education system?

Superimposing on schools a range of responsibilities such as managing teacher appraisal, starting school development planning and running ambitious improvement programmes is likely to result in the raising of the educational ceiling by competent persons in competent schools but is also likely to result in the floor of incompetence being left increasingly far behind.

(Reynolds, 1994: 17)

The idea of school self-management will not go away. Politicians have seen it as a way of lessening the cost of education and perhaps deflecting the blame if the system doesn't work well. The Victorian Ministry of Education has made substantial a substantial contribution to freeing up the system, allowing schools greater flexibility and, in doing so, giving them a good chance of searching for that elusive goal of excellence. However, there are still major concerns of equity and resourcing. The argument has been made that it is possible to increase quality and decrease funding at the same time. Maintaining quality in the schools has meant considerable additional efforts by principals, teachers and parents. Workloads have increased dramatically, with no seeming end-point. It is obvious that parents and teachers, more than ever before, must work together as a team as resources diminish to over come any of the difficulties that arise. The self-managing school shows potential for being one way of establishing and developing this partnership. Only time will tell if the system has been stretched too far.

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Table 1:  
Percent 'generally agree' or 'strongly agree' for levels of satisfaction with aspects of Schools of the Future  
Distributed by Respondent type

I am satisfied with the:	Parent	School Councillor	Teacher	Total
school charter for this school	83.3	94.5	88.5	88.9
goals of this school	87.5	97.2	86.8	91.0
breadth of curriculum available to children at this school	77.8	78.3	70.5	76.0
use of satellite technology for teaching certain programs	55.5	58.2	37.4	51.7
increased accountability between schools and the Government	49.7	49.7	35.8	46.0
increased accountability for schools to the local community	55.5	58.5	49.5	55.0
use of state-wide achievement tests	43.8	36.7	15.7	33.6
level of Government money available to this school	26.3	27.1	9.3	21.9
voluntary contribution system	50.4	39.3	20.1	38.2
use of private sponsorship to promote school activities	39.5	35.4	17.0	31.9
level of communication between the classroom and the home	83.3	87.1	84.2	85.0
level of communication between the school and the home	88.8	89.8	83.3	87.6
level of communication between the Ministry and the school	23.9	45.2	29.9	33.4
level of support provided to implement Schools of the Future	28.7	46.6	22.0	33.5
state of school grounds and buildings	68.4	68.7	52.9	68.0
environment and ethos of this school	81.1	87.6	72.9	81.3
average class size in this school	71.8	73.4	52.7	67.3
the overall size of the school	81.7	84.8	76.9	81.6
quality of facilities, equipment and services available	76.4	79.2	46.2	65.7
level of reporting of student progress	81.9	83.7	80.2	82.1
way decisions are made	64.8	81.4	58.5	69.3
performance of the teachers	82.5	87.0	80.8	83.3
performance of the school principal	81.2	91.0	76.7	83.6
performance of the school council	77.8	87.0	78.1	81.3
Schools of the Future program in general	56.7	56.1	33.7	50.3

Table 2:  
Percent 'generally agree' or 'strongly agree' for levels of confidence in aspects of Schools of the Future  
Distributed by Respondent type

Schools of the Future will:	Parent	School Councillor	Teacher	Total
provide an opportunity to deliver a broader education	66.2	76.2	34.6	57.5
provide more control over the future directions of the school	75.7	79.5	62.1	73.4
develop better goals for the school	76.8	77.6	65.4	74.0
provide more control over the school's curriculum	78.0	72.7	47.6	67.8
increase the responsibilities of the school council	83.8	93.1	87.0	88.1
increase the workload of school councillors	68.6	71.9	88.0	82.5
increase the workload of teaching staff	64.6	87.0	93.5	80.7
increase the workload of administrative staff	70.0	91.8	95.3	85.0
in crease the workload of the principal	75.4	95.9	94.5	88.1
increase the accountability of the school to the state	66.5	83.7	74.1	74.8
increase the accountability of the school to its local community	69.7	75.5	71.0	72.2
encourage parent participation in child's education	74.3	70.4	44.5	65.6
be more responsive to the changing needs of its community	64.0	66.4	39.6	68.3
better service the needs of students	59.6	63.2	27.1	52.2
better service the needs of its local community	48.2	53.5	31.8	45.8
promote achievement for students from different backgrounds	43.5	42.7	24.3	38.0
obtain greater control over the use of resources	67.6	77.9	50.5	58.7
raise the school's profile within its community	60.0	58.2	45.7	55.5
encourage school community members to become more involved	64.8	56.6	41.5	55.4
enable different ways of running the school	69.9	74.0	51.4	66.4
lead to an overall increase in the quality of education	49.3	44.9	19.8	39.8
enable the school to be an education centre for all the community	42.6	41.5	31.2	39.1

Table 3:  
Percent 'generally agree' or 'strongly agree' for degree of influence in aspects of Schools of the Future  
Distributed by Respondent type

Under Schools of the Future I will be able to influence:	Parent	School Councillor	Teacher	Total
decisions made at the classroom level	40.8	49.7	66.4	53.7
decisions made at the school level	53.6	87.0	62.3	68.2
decisions made at the regional or state level	12.0	14.3	7.5	11.6
the development of a broader curriculum	50.4	60.3	37.2	50.5
the future directions of the school	53.9	81.0	54.2	64.0
the environment and climate of the school	53.6	73.0	57.7	65.7
the use of resources within the school	61.3	81.6	64.8	69.8
the selection of the principal	39.2	69.6	33.6	46.8
the selection of the teaching staff	33.6	39.5	32.7	35.5
parents to participate in their child's education	43.9	64.8	46.2	52.3
the school's responsiveness to the needs of its community	48.5	66.4	50.9	55.8

Table 4:  
Per cent scores for levels of involvement in aspects of Schools of the Future  
Distributed by Respondent Type

My involvement in the following areas has decreased, increased or is the same:	Parent		School Councillor		Teacher		Total	
	-ve	+ve	-ve	+ve	-ve	+ve	-ve	+ve
recognition is given to the work I do	3.5	82.3	2.8	75.5	22.6	64.2	8.5	74.9
levels of communication in the school	3.5	68.1	2.8	59.0	19.4	53.4	7.4	60.9
access to professional development	4.3	63.8	6.9	57.2	28.0	34.6	11.8	53.3
interaction with others in the school	4.9	72.9	2.7	67.3	13.2	57.5	6.3	66.8
commitment to the children's education	1.4	63.9	1.4	58.5	1.9	74.8	1.5	64.8
commitment to the school	4.9	72.2	4.1	55.1	8.5	67.9	5.5	64.7
commitment to education generally	3.5	68.1	5.4	57.1	10.3	68.2	6.0	64.1
involvement in the school overall	11.8	66.7	4.1	44.9	7.5	55.1	7.8	55.5
				21.5		37.4		36.7
				51.0				

Table 5:  
Analysis of School Income and Expenditure 1995  
(not including Teacher salaries)

SCHOOL NUMBER	SCHOOL TYPE	SCHOOL POPULATION	PROGRAM EXPENDITURE PER STUDENT	LOCALLY RAISED FUNDS PER STUDENT	LOCALLY RAISED FUNDS AS % OF PROGRAM COSTS	GOVT PROGRAM GRANTS PER STUDENT	GOVT GRANTS AS % OF PROGRAM COSTS
1	Primary	53	\$905.90	\$122.90	14%	\$768.60	85%
2	Primary	680	\$1,105.07	\$273.62	25%	\$800.38	72%
3	Primary	560	\$570.98	\$213.76	37%	\$418.77	73%
4	Primary	108	\$845.37	\$178.80	21%	\$585.56	69%
5	Primary	85	\$1,793.14	\$199.02	11%	\$1,157.24	65%
6	Primary	66	\$1,147.51	\$326.92	28%	\$1,170.49	102%
7	Primary	515	\$813.72	\$219.53	27%	\$558.05	69%
8	Primary	328	\$704.61	\$239.07	34%	\$681.13	97%
9	Primary	119	\$924.31	\$348.52	38%	\$644.08	70%
10	Primary	523	\$781.44	\$154.64	20%	\$500.54	64%
11	Primary	69	\$1,261.01	\$175.61	14%	\$896.20	71%
12	Primary	31	\$1,713.66	\$186.11	11%	\$1,207.59	70%
13	Primary	145	\$876.10	\$388.30	44%	\$608.79	69%
14	Primary	60	\$816.94	\$310.70	38%	\$751.74	92%
15	Primary	522	\$972.22	\$466.86	48%	\$519.71	53%
16	Primary	90	\$933.43	\$236.97	25%	\$705.75	76%
17	Primary	276	\$862.79	\$304.16	35%	\$632.99	73%
18	Special	24	\$5,610.94	\$326.09	6%	\$4,657.91	83%
19	Secondary	457	\$1,086.80	\$206.75	19%	\$967.98	89%
20	Secondary	324	\$1,206.83	\$363.82	30%	\$776.46	64%
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