

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 401 618

EA 028 051

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 TITLE The Restructured Kentucky Department of Education--Does It Operate Differently?
 PUB DATE Oct 96
 NOTE 28p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, October 2-5, 1996).
 PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS *Administrative Organization; *Bureaucracy; Elementary Secondary Education; Institutional Autonomy; Organizational Communication; *Organizations (Groups); Principals; School Restructuring; *State Regulation; *State School District Relationship; State Surveys
 IDENTIFIERS *Kentucky State Department of Education

ABSTRACT

Before undergoing restructuring in 1991, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) was perceived as a model of bureaucratic inefficiency, an impediment to school reform. This paper presents findings of a study that investigated the typical operating procedures of the new KDE. Surveys were sent to a total of 293 randomly selected Kentucky public school principals. Ninety-seven surveys were received, a 33 percent response rate. The principals reported that the new KDE had made significant improvements in its bureaucratic operations, some of which included increased flexibility; more specific regulations; improved communication with schools; and improved support/resourcefulness to schools. However, findings also indicate that the new KDE created overly burdensome paperwork, pressured schools to conform to the state agenda, and tended to prescribe tasks and processes for schools. The newly reorganized department also appears to have been influenced by political factors, particularly its policies and reform practices, and is reluctant to change and evaluate its own reform practices. In short, the bureaucratic nature of the KDE has been enhanced. Appendices contains survey data. (Contains 37 references.) (LMI)

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ED 401 618

THE RESTRUCTURED KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
--DOES IT OPERATE DIFFERENTLY?

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Paper presented at the annual conference of the Mid-West
Educational Research Association, Chicago, Oct. 2-5, 1996.

EA 028051



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---DOES IT OPERATE DIFFERENTLY?

Abstract

Typical operating behaviors of the restructured Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) were examined through a survey study. The sampled behaviors were measured by a randomly sampled group of school principals (N=97) throughout Kentucky. It was found that the new KDE has made significant improvements in its bureaucratic operations, such as being more flexible, its new regulations being more specific, communicating better with schools, being more resourceful to schools. Results also indicate that the new KDE has created too much paperwork for schools, has given too many directives and mandates to schools, pressures schools hard on its agenda, tends to prescribe tasks for schools and tends to tell schools how to do a job. The new KDE is also found to have been influenced more than ever by political factors, particularly its policies and reform practices, and to have been reluctant to change and evaluate its own reform practices. It appears that the bureaucratic nature of the present KDE in managing and governing has not yet changed, even with the restructuring and the educational reform. In some respects, it has become more bureaucratic.

THE RESTRUCTURED KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
---DOES IT OPERATE DIFFERENTLY?

Educational bureaucracies are viewed by many in the general public as part of the problem in improving public education (Elmore, 1991). Particularly, state education agencies have been plagued by many problems: inefficiency, low salaries, lack of competence and experience, and lack of adequate funding (Murphy, 1982; Steffy, 1992), to name a few.

Before being restructured in 1991, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) had a reputation of being an ineffective bureaucracy heavily populated with political appointees who were perceived to be "inept" and who had long since "retired on the job." KDE was considered as part of the problem to educational reform in Kentucky (Steffy, 1992). All these bureaucracy problems with KDE were assaulted by the most dramatic solution with an attempt to reorganize the Department: This state education agency was totally abolished on June 30, 1991, because of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA). A restructured (or reorganized) state education agency was formed in order for it to continue the successful implementation of KERA. The new Department was restructured to be more creative, more flexible, to be responding to changes, to reduce red tape and paperwork,

to focus on task, to conduct open communication with the schools and within the agency, and to support risk taking behavior (Steffy, 1992).

Research literature on various aspects related to Kentucky's educational reform has been expanding. Responses of various groups towards the education reform movement have been examined: (a) community attitudes towards KERA in rural Kentucky school districts during the first few months the law was in effect (Coe & Kannapel, 1991), (b) students' perception of school changes (Coe, Leopold, Simon, Stowers & Williams (1994), (c) children's attitudes towards school reforms (Pittman & Hinton, 1993), and (d) Kentucky residents' attitudes towards this reform (Hougland, Berger & Kifer, 1994). Positive attitudes of these groups towards the reform are found in these studies.

Literature also includes studies on the progress of the education reforms in schools: (a) the first and second year progress of schools in implementing state mandated educational reforms (Raths, Katz, Fanning, David, & Roeder, 1992; Raths, Fanning, David, & Roeder, 1993), and (b) the educational reforms in Kentucky rural schools (Appalachia Education Lab., 1992). These researchers investigated the interim progress of schools in implementing the reform activities and found significant progress being made in school reforms.

The impact studies related to Kentucky education reform on various educational aspects contribute a significant amount of knowledge about the reform: (a) the impact of KERA on special education costs and funding (Chambers & Duenas, 1995), (b) the impact of KERA on writing (Harnack, Elias & Whitaker, 1994), (c) the impact of the KERA mandated state testing on educational practices in Kentucky public schools (Din, 1996), (d) the reform versus educator wellness (Schnacke, Martray & Heck, 1994), and (e) the factors influencing teachers' practices (Vitali, 1994). Literature on this issue reveals that the reform has wide and deep impact on many educational aspects and practices in schools. Obviously, with more literature produced, the impact of this reform on other school practices and aspects will be better understood.

Various important issues related to the reform movement have also been studied by researchers: (a) the ability of KERA to address both educational equality and financial equity in Kentucky's public schools (Richardson, Flanigan & Blackbourn, 1991), (b) the implementation of the primary program (Addington & Hinton, 1993; Carney, 1994), (c) school-to-work transition in the systemic reform of education (Kyle, 1995), (d) the relationship of school climate to school reform (Bulach & Malone, 1994), (e) site-based decision

making (David, 1994; Kannapel, Moore, Coe & Aagaad, 1994), (f) role changes of superintendents (Murphy, 1993), and (g) the extent of out-of-school time investment by teachers in education reforms (Appalachia Education Lab. & Kentucky Education Association, 1993). Research on these issues has generated substantial amount of knowledge about the dramatic Kentucky education reform of the 90's.

Studies on the structural changes of KDE (because of the restructuring) reveal that the new state education agency follows a centralized, bureaucratic structure. It was found that for a state agency with diverse functions, no one type of organizational structure is considered best (Van Meter, 1992). According to Steffy (1994), KERA mandated changes may be structural and may benefit system managers more than students and teachers.

With respect to the restructuring of KDE, Steffy (1992) observes, an unprecedented opportunity to de-bureaucratize the state agency, to create a more fluid, less top heavy, "flat" and democratic organizational model was lost. Instead, a bureaucracy was resurrected again, more aligned with the legislative language. The new KDE is the exactly the same "bird" as before. The "restructuring" turned out be the same old process of bureaucratic adjustments practiced by every new administration. Steffy points out that the true enemy of

an efficient state education agency is the structure of the agency itself.

Literature has provided no information on the operating behavior changes of the restructured KDE. How the new KDE typically operates after being restructured remains to be an important issue to be investigated.

From the educational research perspective, it is important to understand the operating behavior changes related to the restructuring of a state educational bureaucracy under the Kentucky education reform movement. The findings of the study will contribute to a better understanding of the impact of the statewide educational reform and the impact of the restructuring upon the operating behaviors of the present KDE. The findings will also contribute to new knowledge on the current status of the Kentucky educational reform.

The purpose of the study is to investigate how the new KDE presently operates. Specifically, it is to investigate the typical operating behaviors of the new KDE after the restructuring.

Method

Typical operating behaviors of the restructured Kentucky Department of Education were examined through a survey study (conducted in March, 1996), five years after

the restructuring of the old KDE under the statewide education reform movement. Specific procedures designed to collect the data are as follows.

Participants

Principals in Kentucky public schools (K-12) were selected randomly to participate in the survey. Approximately 1 in 4 principals were surveyed. Participating principals are assumed to have been in their positions before KERA was passed, in order to make a comparison on the operating behaviors of the old KDE and the new KDE.

Procedures

The selection of the principals was conducted via the Kentucky Schools Directory (1994-95). In this selection, every school district had equal chance to be included, even a district with one or two schools. The selection of each school principal follows this sequential order: elementary--middle--high, across all school districts in Kentucky. For a district with less than five schools, one school was selected. If the school chosen earlier was an elementary school, the next school to be selected would be a middle school. Then a high school would be on the list. For relatively larger districts, approximately 1 in 6 schools was selected, following the same sequence.

With the above sampling method, 293 school

principals of all three grade levels were sampled. Each grade level (group) includes approximately 1/3 of the 293 sampled principals.

Behaviors and factors sampled

The operating behaviors and related factors were sampled based on conceptual rationale (CR) from literature and interviews of professionals in the educational administration field.

- 1) generation of paperwork by the new KDE for the schools;

CR: Educational bureaucracies tend to generate too much paperwork for schools (Steffy, 1992).

- 2) the amount of unnecessary paperwork created by the new KDE;

CR: Much of the bureaucratic paper work is unnecessary (Campbell, Cunningham, Nystrand & Usdan, 1980, p. 255).

- 3) giving directions to the schools;

CR: Educational bureaucracies tend to over-rely directive control and to impose requirements on schools at will (Hill, 1995, p. 37-38).

- 4) bureaucratic-pressuring upon schools on the new KDE's agenda;

CR: Educational bureaucracies have created a huge number of initiatives to increase pressure on schools for high performance (Hill, 1995, p. 51).

5) tendency to prescribe tasks for schools;

CR: State education bureaucracy is one of the sources of prescribing tasks to schools (Hill, 1995, p.38).

6) tendency to tell schools how to do a job;

CR: Bureaucracies are dominated by a command and control orientation (Hesselbein, 1992); bureaucracies have an inherently authoritarian management style (Scarr, 1992).

7) level of flexibility in allowing variations in operating regulations;

CR: The old KDE was inflexible in operating regulations (Steffy, 1992).

8) level of specificity in new KDE's regulations;

CR: Interview data indicate that the regulations of the old KDE tend to be more general and ambiguous.

9) the communication status between the new KDE and the schools;

CR: The lines of communication are often closed because of hierarchial divisions (Thom, 1993, p. 36).

- 10) possible political influence on the new KDE's policies;

CR: Many decisions are made or influenced through political processes (Hill, 1995, p. 38); the dominant characteristic of educational policy-making is "hyperpoliticalization" (Holt, 1993); political influences abound (English, 1994); systemic reform does nothing to eliminate the political influences and constraints (Hill, 1995, p. 37).

- 11) possible political influence on the new KDE's reform activities;

CR: Same as the CR for Question 10.

- 12) resourcefulness of the new KDE to the schools;

CR: A state education agency was unable to shift from its regulatory role to one that provided technical support to the schools (Madsen, 1994).

- 13) tendency to listen to school personnel;

CR: State education bureaucrats do not solicit suggestions from their subordinates (Madsen, 1994).

- 14) improvement in service attitude;
CR: State education bureaucrats do not help their subordinates make the job more meaningful (Madsen, 1994).
- 15) the operational approach taken in reform activities--quick fix or incremental;
CR: Bureaucracies and organizations chronically pursue short-term goals (Ambrose, 1995).
- 16) willingness in changing its own ineffective reform practices;
CR: Bureaucracies lack incentive for change (Payne et al, 1992); public management of education has created a governance system incapable of renewing itself (Hill, 1995, p. 37-38); all bureaucracies including education one appear to be resistant to change and innovation (Thom, 1993, p. 41).
- 17) willingness in evaluating its own educational reform practices;
CR: Same as the CR for Question 16 above.
- 18) the most significant change(s) in its operations;
CR: Factor identified based on interview data.
- 19) the most helpful and the least helpful areas of the new KDE to the schools;
CR: Factors identified based on interview data.

- 20) areas that reflect flexibility of the
new KDE in operating regulations;
CR: Factor identified based on interview data.
- 21) areas that reflect the new KDE's
inflexibility in operating regulations.
CR: Factor identified based on interview data.

Questionnaire

These sampled behaviors and the related factors were addressed respectively in the 21 questions on the survey questionnaire. The first 14 questions on the questionnaire utilized a Richter type of rating scale with six levels. Questions 15 to 17 used similar scale but a different coding system (see Appendix A). The last four questions (questions 18-21) measuring the related factors are open-response type questions.

Results

293 surveys were sent out to the randomly selected Kentucky public school principals; 97 surveys were returned, with a return rate of 33 percent. One principal returned the questionnaire without answering the questions because the person was hired in 1995. For details on means and standard deviations for the responses to the first 17 questions, see Appendix B.

The data collected show mixed results. Positive

changes were indicated by the majority (see Appendix A for details) of the surveyees: The restructured KDE is more flexible in allowing variations in operating regulations; the new KDE's regulations are more specific now; there is a remarkable improvement in the communication between the new KDE and the schools; the new KDE has become more resourceful to schools; there is a noticeable improvement of the new KDE in listening more to school personnel on reform practices; a positive service attitude change of the new KDE has also been found.

On the other side, the majority (see Appendix A for details) of the principals indicate that: there has been too much paperwork created and mandated by the new KDE, too much of the mandated paperwork is unnecessary; the new KDE pressures hard on schools about its agenda; the new KDE readily prescribes tasks for schools; the new KDE tends to tell schools how to do a job; the new KDE's reform activities and policies have been more influenced than ever by political factors; the statewide educational reform led by the new KDE takes more of a quick-fix approach; and the KDE has been reluctant in changing its own ineffective practices and in evaluating its own reform practices.

The most significant changes (responses to the last four open-response questions) in the new KDE's operations

are specified by the majority of the principals:

Positive changes: the establishment of regional service centers, providing more professional development opportunities, supporting local decision making, adopting new technology, taking more of an advisory position, keeping the principals more informed through direct mailing, the inclusion of practitioners on state committees for direct input, providing schools more access to state resource personnel, the Department being more actively involved in educating children and being more positive in awarding high school credit for "experimental" courses, etc.

Negative indicators: assigning too much paperwork to schools, setting too many state mandates, taking much more of a top-down approach, being least effective in use of funds, being least helpful in correcting all the flaws in state testing and in assisting change in an efficient pace, putting all the responsibility on teachers but not students, expecting too much too soon, being least flexible in technology regulations and assessment, still making the process too difficult and time consuming, keeping the site-based councils and the ungraded primary program, and over-emphasizing portfolios, etc.

Discussion

The findings suggest that as a restructured educational bureaucracy, the present KDE does demonstrate

noticeable positive behavior changes in the ways it operates. All these positive changes as reported above suggest that the new KDE has been doing just what it was made (restructured) to do: to focus on tasks, to communicate better with the schools, to be more resourceful, to be more responding to changes, to be supportive to risk taking. With respect to the purposes of the restructuring, the new KDE has been a success. It seems that in essence, these behaviors are secondary behaviors of an educational bureaucracy.

Even though the communication of the new KDE with the schools has been improved noticeably, evidence shows that a considerable number of schools (1/4) still find it very difficult to get any help from the state agency, which suggests that the access to the agency has not been available to too many schools. It appears that there is plenty room for the new KDE to improve communication with the schools. It also appears that the bureaucratic nature of the present KDE, as shown by the ways it operates in controlling, managing and governing has not yet fundamentally changed, even with the total restructuring and the educational reform movement. In some respects, it has become more bureaucratic: It has become more top-down in governing; it has been more influenced than ever before by political factors in its new policies and practices; it has generated much more red tape and paper-work for the schools. As usually seen in bureaucracies, the state

agency has been reluctant in evaluating its own practices and policies. In some principals' words, the state agency still makes the process too difficult and time consuming. A negative connotation is that this type of governing style makes it difficult, if not impossible, for schools to efficiently do their work, which eventually would affect the educational quality of the schools. It seems to be ironic: On the one side, the state agency has been trying to succeed in the education reform, on the other side, it has been making the job for the schools more difficult to do. This contradictory phenomenon may be explained by the very nature of bureaucracy: Bureaucracy lives in politics and plays political logic.

The flexibility shown by the new KDE in operating regulations is hardly consistent: The agency does not allow any flexibility in technology regulations, as the data indicate. Although considerable flexibility has been shown by the agency in operating other regulations, it would be misleading to say that the new KDE has been more flexible in operating all its regulations.

The operating behaviors sampled for this study are typical but not necessarily exclusive behaviors of an educational bureaucracy, or these are not exclusively shown by an educational bureaucracy. Many of the behaviors are shared by other types of institutions, such as "subject to political influences, poor communications in the hierarchy" etc. However, educational bureaucracies do

demonstrate these behaviors as literature shows.

The survey did not include superintendents because they were considered to be more of bureaucrats themselves or mid level bureaucrats. However, school principals were considered to be the people who know about administrative matters, have the personal experiences working under the state educational bureaucracy, and they are the right people for this survey study.

A return rate of 33 percent for a survey study is not considered high. The findings of the study were summarized with 90 percent (returned in March) of the data which were collected first. The additional 10 percent data (returned in April) did not necessitate any changes to the findings. The surveyees were randomly sampled and the responses to the survey questions indicate wide variations as Appendix A & B shows. In addition, a thorough check on the reply mail indicates that the returned mail came from 20 areas with different 3-digit zip codes covering most of the state. All these suggest that the data collected are representative. It is postulated that over 60 percent of surveyees did not respond because they were too busy and this survey was not important enough to be their priority. One principal responded to only half of the survey questions and wrote: Sorry, I only have this much time for this. I have to go now.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that the majority of the principals surveyed consider the restructured KDE has made significant improvements in some of its bureaucratic operations, such as being more flexible in allowing variations in operating some regulations, its new regulations being more specific, communicating better with the schools, and the service attitude being noticeably improved. The results also show that most of the principals surveyed note: The new KDE has created too much paperwork, has been giving too many directives to schools, pressures schools hard on its agenda, tends to prescribe tasks for schools, and tends to tell schools how to do a job. In addition, the new KDE has been more influenced by political factors in its operations; it is regarded to have taken a quick-fix approach in its reform activities; and the new KDE is deemed to have been reluctant in changing and evaluating its own reform practices. In summary, although the new KDE has shown some positive changes in its operating behaviors, the nature of the bureaucratic agency as shown by its typical operating behaviors has been enhanced.

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Appendix A

Response Percentage Indexes for Each Question

| Question | <u>Percentages</u> | | | | | |
|----------|--------------------|----|----|----|----|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| | <u>(scales)</u> | | | | | |
| 1 | 65 | 24 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 |
| 2 | 26 | 41 | 18 | 8 | 4 | 3 |
| 3 | 15 | 27 | 27 | 15 | 12 | 3 |
| 4 | 28 | 28 | 25 | 14 | 3 | 2 |
| 5 | 29 | 33 | 22 | 8 | 8 | |
| 6 | 12 | 15 | 29 | 19 | 23 | 1 |
| 7 | 10 | 23 | 29 | 17 | 20 | |
| 8 | 24 | 18 | 19 | 23 | 22 | 4 |
| 9 | 9 | 23 | 24 | 20 | 19 | 4 |
| 10 | 40 | 26 | 11 | 10 | 7 | 6 |
| 11 | 41 | 23 | 11 | 14 | 6 | 5 |
| 12 | 12 | 23 | 24 | 26 | 14 | 1 |
| 13 | 3 | 16 | 11 | 14 | 49 | 6 |
| 14 | 6 | 13 | 33 | 19 | 24 | 5 |
| 15 | 23 | 23 | 14 | 15 | 23 | 1 |
| 16 | 33 | 20 | 21 | 11 | 8 | 6 |
| 17 | 31 | 26 | 22 | 7 | 11 | 3 |

Codes for Questions 1-14:

- 1 = A great deal more
- 2 = A lot more
- 3 = A little more
- 4 = About the same amount
- 5 = Less
- 6 = Can not tell

Codes for Questions 15-17:

- 1 = Strongly agree
- 2 = Agree
- 3 = Somewhat agree
- 4 = Somewhat disagree
- 5 = Disagree
- 6 = Can not tell

Appendix B

Means and Standard Deviations for Responses

| Question | Mean | SD | N* |
|----------|------|------|----|
| 1 | 1.52 | .96 | 91 |
| 2 | 2.22 | 1.07 | 87 |
| 3 | 2.81 | 1.24 | 89 |
| 4 | 2.35 | 1.14 | 91 |
| 5 | 2.34 | 1.21 | 86 |
| 6 | 3.28 | 1.32 | 83 |
| 7 | 3.16 | 1.27 | 82 |
| 8 | 3.20 | 1.38 | 80 |
| 9 | 3.16 | 1.28 | 86 |
| 10 | 2.12 | 1.27 | 84 |
| 11 | 2.18 | 1.32 | 88 |
| 12 | 3.07 | 1.25 | 92 |
| 13 | 3.94 | 1.29 | 85 |
| 14 | 3.44 | 1.19 | 84 |
| 15 | 2.92 | 1.51 | 85 |
| 16 | 2.37 | 1.31 | 79 |
| 17 | 2.40 | 1.32 | 85 |

* "Can not tell" responses not included



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