

delegate more authority and flexibility to school staff (e.g., Kanter 1983). Under school-based management, professional responsibility replaces bureaucratic regulation; districts increase school autonomy in exchange for the staff's assuming responsibility for results (Cohen 1988). Two specific accountability mechanisms often accompany school-based management proposals and practices. One is an annual school performance report. The other is some form of parent choice or open enrollment; schools that do not produce results lose enrollment (Garms et al. 1978, Raywid 1988).

Delegating authority to all schools in a district distinguishes school-based management practices from school improvement programs. Both approaches share a school-based, schoolwide orientation to improvement and, usually, a mechanism for shared decision making (David and Peterson 1984). But school-based management has a broader scope; it represents a change in how the district operates—how authority and responsibility are shared between the district and its schools. It not only changes roles and responsibilities within schools but has implications for how the central office is organized and the size and roles of its staff (Elmore 1988). School improvement programs, on the other hand, usually have no special authority, do not have a separate budget, and involve only a small

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number of schools (although they can be districtwide).

Once school-based management is understood in the context of empowering school staff to improve education practice through fundamental change in district management functions, the relevant research topics are easy to identify. They include school improvement programs, organizational change, efforts to stimulate innovation, participatory decision making, and effective practices in many areas, from teacher selection to staff development. Next I draw on the literature on these topics, as well as the handful of studies of school-based management itself, to describe (1) how school-based management works in theory and in practice, and (2) the connections between changing man-

agement structures and achieving improvement goals.

School-Based Management = Autonomy + Shared Decision Making

The rationale for school-based management rests on two well-established propositions:

1. The school is the primary decision-making unit; and, its corollary, decisions should be made at the lowest possible level (e.g., Smith and Purkey 1985).

2. Change requires ownership that comes from the opportunity to participate in defining change and the flexibility to adapt it to individual circumstances; the corollary is that change does not result from externally imposed procedures (e.g., Fullan 1982).

In practice, these propositions translate into two policies that define the essence of school-based management: (1) increasing school autonomy through some combination of site budgetary control and relief from constraining rules and regulations; and (2) sharing the authority to make decisions with teachers, and sometimes parents, students, and other community members (e.g., Garms et al. 1978).

School Autonomy

The backbone of school-based management is delegation of authority from district to schools; without autonomy, shared decision making within schools has little meaning. Analysts of school-based management describe autonomy as decision-making authority in three critical arenas: budget, staffing, and curriculum (Garms et al. 1978, Clune and White 1988). In practice, these distinctions blur because (1) staffing is by far the largest part of a school's budget, and (2) decision-making authority is a matter of degree, constrained by district, union contract, state, and even federal rules and regulations (as well as historical practice).

Budget. Under school-based management, schools receive either a lump-sum budget or some portion of the budget, usually for equipment, materials, supplies, and sometimes other categories such as staff development. Because money usually equals

Key Elements of Site-Based Management

Gordon Cawelti

A large number of districts across the country are experimenting with site-based management, usually by selected schools responsive to the idea of having their authority and responsibility increased in an attempt to improve accountability and productivity. Here are some key elements emerging from their work:

- Various degrees of site-based budgeting affording alternative uses of resources
- A team operation affording groups to expand the basis of decision making
- School-site advisory committees with key roles for parents and students at the high school level
- Increased authority for selecting personnel who are assigned to the school
- Ability to modify the school's curriculum to better serve their students
- Clear processes for seeking waivers from local or state regulations that restrict the flexibility of local staffs
- An expectation for an annual report on progress and school improvement

Gordon Cawelti is Executive Director, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1250 North Pitt St., Alexandria, VA 22314-1403.

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