

Synthesis of Research on School-Based Management

Although school-based management has a chameleon-like appearance, we can learn about it by listening to practitioner testimony and by examining the research on relevant topics such as school improvement and organizational change.

Dade County, Florida, has made front-page headlines with its pilot School-Based Management/Shared Decision Making Program. The Montgomery County School Board in Maryland has approved a similar plan for spring 1989. In Baton Rouge, Louisiana, school-based management is coupled with parental choice as part of an unusual desegregation strategy. Santa Fe, New Mexico, is implementing school-based management with teacher-led school improvement teams. The list goes on.

"School-based management" is rapidly becoming the centerpiece of the current wave of reform. The growing number of districts "restructuring" their schools, as well as commentary from the National Governors' Association, both national teachers' unions, and corporate leaders—all make reference to some form of increased school autonomy.

Yet there is surprisingly little empirical research on the topic. Searches of education indexes yield numerous references for school-based management, but virtually all are conceptual arguments, how-to guides, and testimonials from practitioners. There is, nevertheless, an abundance of rele-

vant research. Topics ranging from school improvement to corporate innovation bear directly on school-based management. Their relevance can be seen when we look at why districts are turning to school-based management today.

Under school-based management, professional responsibility replaces bureaucratic regulation.

School-Based Management Today

In the 1960s and 1970s, certain forms of school-based management, usually called *decentralization* and *school-site budgeting*, had a wave of popularity. These were adopted in order to give political power to local communities, increase administrative efficiency, or offset state authority (e.g., Wissler and Ortiz 1986). In the late 1980s, however, school-based management is a focus of attention for quite different reasons. Districts are implementing school-based management today to bring about significant change in educational practice: to empower school staff to create conditions in schools that facilitate improvement, innovation, and continuous professional growth (e.g., Goodlad 1984, Carnegie Forum 1986). Current interest is a response to evidence that our education system is not working, and, in particular, that strong central control actually diminishes teachers' morale and, correspondingly, their level of effort (Meier 1987, Corcoran et al. 1988).

Bolstered by analogous research findings in corporations, districts are turning to management structures that

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

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authority, budgetary authority sounds like the most important manifestation of granting authority to schools. But this is misleading because whether or not school-site budgeting equals autonomy depends on how much freedom from restrictions is allowed. For example, a school can receive a lump-sum budget for all expenditures including staff, yet have no decision-making authority because of rules governing class size, tenure, hiring, firing, assignment, curriculum objectives, and textbooks.

Beyond allotments for staffing (see below), the budgets that districts delegate to schools are typically discretionary funds based on a per-pupil allocation (Clune and White 1988). With staffing, building repairs, and textbook costs removed, each school's budget is the small amount left for materials and supplies, sometimes augmented by district funds for staff development and related categories. Exceptions are found in districts with a large number of federal and state programs that can be passed on to schools without restrictions (David 1989).

Staffing. Typically, schools receive budgets for staffing in terms of "staffing units," which are based on the average cost of a teacher, including benefits. There are two very different types of decision making about staff: defining positions and selecting people to fill them. Once the number of certificated teachers is determined on the basis of enrollment, school staff can choose to spend residual dollars (usually very few) on another teacher, several part-time specialists, instructional aides, or clerical support. Some districts achieve the same effect by allocating one full-time equivalent to each school to be used at the school's discretion (David 1989).

The second area of discretion lies in filling vacancies due to retirements, transfers, or increasing enrollment. Under school-based management, the principal and the teachers select from among applicants, often from a pool screened by the district (Clune and White 1988). Officially, the principal makes a recommendation with advice from teachers; the district still does the hiring. This practice, however, is not

To Shift to School-Based Management, Districts Should:

- Build strong alliances with the teachers' union
- Delegate authority to schools to define new roles, select staff, and create new learning environments
- Demonstrate and promote shared decision making
- Communicate goals, guiding images, and information
- Create direct communication links between school staff and top leaders
- Encourage experimentation and risk taking
- Provide for waivers from restrictive rules
- Motivate principals to involve teachers in school-site decisions
- Promote creation of new roles in schools and central office
- Create new forms of accountability with school staff
- Provide broad range of opportunities for professional development
- Provide time for staff to assume new roles and responsibilities
- Reduce size of central office
- Promote role of central office as facilitator and coordinator of school change
- Match salaries to increased responsibilities

limited to districts with school-based management, and is, in fact, a characteristic of effective teacher selection practices (Wise et al. 1987).

Curriculum. Under school-based management, teachers are encouraged to develop curriculum and select or create instructional materials, usually within a framework of goals or core curriculum established by the district or the state (David 1989). Clearly, this cannot occur in districts with highly prescribed curriculums, required textbooks, and mandated testing. On the other hand, because students move

from school to school, some degree of coordination across schools is required. Districts with a history of decentralization have established effective lines of communication among schools and between schools and the district, and they tend to reflect an ebb and flow regarding control of curriculum. Delegating control of curriculum to schools stimulates the creation of new ideas and materials, which in turn requires new lines of communication and districtwide committees of teachers to coordinate curriculum (David 1989, Wissler and Ortiz 1988).

Most teachers have neither the desire nor the time to create or adapt curriculum beyond what they normally do within their classrooms. Nor does typical participation require formal school-based management. Many districts have committees of teachers who play an active role in choosing textbooks and defining curriculum; more comprehensive curriculum development usually occurs over the summer by paid staff (e.g., David 1989, Sickler 1988). Under school-based management and other forms of decentralization, the primary difference is that school staff, instead of district staff, initiate and lead the efforts (Guthrie 1986). For example, one highly decentralized district, which does not characterize its practices as school-based management, has for-

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mally transferred control of curriculum to teachers. The district funds 10 districtwide subject area committees, with representatives from each school, and a Curriculum Master Plan Council composed of the elected heads of each committee. The Curriculum Council makes final decisions on new curriculums subject to the school board's approval (Sickler 1988).

Beyond Budget, Staffing, and Curriculum

Authority to make decisions about budget, staffing, and curriculum goes only part way toward school-based management's goal of empowering staff to create more productive workplaces and learning environments. The images guiding today's reforms and the rhetoric of school-based management include, for example, schools characterized by teacher collegiality and collaboration, schools within schools, ungraded classes, and creative uses of technology. These images require changes beyond staffing and curriculum, such as the school calendar, scheduling, criteria for pupil assignment and promotion, the allocation and use of space, and the roles of staff—what Cuban (1988) calls "second-order" changes.¹

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Under school-based management, authority to make changes in areas beyond those explicitly designated is typically granted by some type of waiver process. Districts vary in the complexity of the process and the scope covered by waivers (e.g., Casner-Lotto 1988). Usually, a waiver process is the result of

agreements between the district and teachers' union that expand the scope beyond what a district can allow on its own. In a few cases, districts may also have agreements with their states that permit waivers from state rules as well (David 1989).

Shared Decision Making

In the context of school-based management, "shared decision making" refers generally to the involvement of teachers in determining how the budget is spent, who is hired, and whatever other authority has been delegated to the school. The phrase can also refer to students, their parents, and other community members; in fact, in many proposals for school-based management, parents are the primary focus—but in an advisory capacity only (e.g., Garms et al. 1978).

Typically, a school forms a school-site council with representatives of each constituency. How participants are selected and what their responsibilities are varies considerably, across and within districts (Clune and White 1988). Some councils are composed of teachers elected schoolwide, or by grade level or department; others are composed of representatives from pre-existing committees. In some schools, the entire faculty is the council. In others, the budget is simply divided among teachers (David 1989).

Highlights of Research on School-Based Management

Varieties of school-based management—decentralization and school-site budgeting—were used in the '60s and '70s to achieve political and administrative goals. In contrast, school-based management today is viewed as a way to transform schools into effective learning environments by providing school staff with the authority, flexibility, and resources they need to implement change.

Research on school-based management and related practices points to these conclusions:

- School faculties make different decisions about elements of staffing, schedules, and curriculum when they are given actual control over their budgets and relief from restrictions.
- Teachers report increased job satisfaction and feelings of professionalism when the extra time and energy demanded by planning and decision making are balanced by real authority; conversely, marginal authority coupled with requirements for site councils, plans, and reports results in frustration.
- School-based management affects the roles of district as well as school staff; to change their roles and relationships, teachers and administrators need extra time and a range of opportunities to acquire new knowledge and skills.
- The leadership, culture, and support of the district have a far greater impact on the success of school-based management than its operational details.
- Implementing school-based management involves a lot of pieces and takes a long time, from 5 to 10 years; it is premature to pass final judgment on districts in the early stages.

—Jane L. David

Findings from School-Based Management Studies

School-based management encompasses a wide variety of practices. Most manifestations have one or more of the following: some marginal choices about staffing; a small discretionary budget for materials or staff development; a mechanism for teachers to be involved in certain decisions; an annual performance report; and a role for parents, either through an advisory group, membership on a decision-making group, or through some form of parent choice.

Although school-based management takes many forms, the essence is school-level autonomy plus participatory decision making. In districts that practice school-based management essentials, research studies find a range of positive effects, from increased

teacher satisfaction and professionalism to new arrangements and practices within schools. These findings apply to districts with decentralized systems whether or not they carry the "school-based management" label (e.g., David 1989, Sickler 1988).

When the extra time and energy demanded by planning and decision making are balanced by real authority, teachers report increased satisfaction, even exuberance (Clune and White 1988, David 1989, Raywid 1988). There is evidence that there are greater differences among schools under a system of school-based management than under one of centralized management. For example, schools make different choices about staff (choosing a part-time music teacher instead of a full-time aide), curriculum (selecting a different textbook), and discretionary funds (spending more on supplies and less on field trips or vice versa) (Garms et al. 1978, Casner-Lotto 1988).

There are a few examples of second-order change, schools that have altered the daily schedule to allow more time for teachers to work together or to increase time devoted to reading (Clune and White 1988, Casner-Lotto 1988). This is not surprising, since studies of school improvement find that school councils rarely tackle even instructional issues, let alone second-order change; dealing with such issues is much more difficult than creating a new discipline policy or decorating the entranceway (David and Peterson 1984, Berman and Gjelten 1984).

That there are few examples of second-order change, and, indeed, of districts that have implemented the essential elements of school-based management, can be explained in part by the paucity of empirical research and the fact that many efforts are quite new. However, studies of successful school-based management and the much larger literature on school improvement and organizational change identify two related pitfalls, each of which can undermine school-based management practices: (1) substituting shared decision making for authority, and (2) delegating authority without strong leadership and support.



A real shift in management responsibility from the district to the school requires everyone to change roles, routines, and relationships.

Substituting Participation for Authority

Shared decision making does not necessarily bring benefits to those involved. It depends on what the decision concerns and who participates, in what capacity, for what reason, and at what stage (Miles 1981). When schools are given only marginal authority (e.g., a small discretionary budget) and are asked to form site councils, develop annual plans, and prepare annual reports, teachers perceive these requests as yet another set of top-down demands. This perception is intensified when districts retain tight control over accountability (Corcoran et al. 1988).

In practice, teacher input in decision making often substitutes for delegated authority, which contributes to the blurring of labels between school improvement programs, shared decision making, and school-based management (Kolderie 1988). When the authority and resources to act are not provided, district efforts can actually backfire (Meier 1987). Asking people to participate in decisions about which they have no information is frustrating, not empowering; participating in planning committees, in contrast to action committees with specific agendas, increases alienation because it uses up

time and energy with no visible results (Kanter 1983).

The Need for Leadership and Support

A real shift in management responsibility from the district to the school requires everyone to change roles, routines, and relationships. Research on school improvement and organizational change is strong on this point: such change does not happen without leadership and support (Fullan 1982, Smith and Purkey 1985). Studies of successful school-based management practices reach the same conclusion. Successful practices have less to do with management details—size of budget, type of decision-making body, amount of control over staffing or curriculum—and more to do with the leadership and culture of the district and the moral and material support it offers school staff (David 1989, Sickler 1988). Hence, some of the most striking examples of second-order change are in districts without formal school-based management that have facilitated the development of schools within schools through leadership and extensive professional development opportunities (David 1989).

Districts that have successfully delegated substantial authority to their schools are characterized by leadership that empowers others, a small central administration, support for experimentation, communication channels, and opportunities for continuous professional growth for principals and teachers (David 1989, Sickler 1988, Casner-Lotto 1988). Similarly, studies of school improvement programs find that when changes occur, they are the result of district support, site leadership, and opportunities for staff development (David and Peterson 1984, Berman and Gjelten 1984). This conclusion is also supported by studies of Australia's school decentralization, which find the absence of understanding and training to be major roadblocks (Chapman and Boyd 1986).

When districts delegate authority to schools, four elements are important. The first is access to new knowledge and skills. Real authority comes from knowledge as well as from delegated authority and waiver provisions; his-

torical practices, myths about requirements, and the absence of known alternatives block change as much as actual requirements (Wissler and Ortiz 1986).

Second, school-based management intensifies the need for leadership from the principal, who functions like a chief executive officer (Guthrie 1986). Ultimately, the degree to which school-level authority is shared and how it is shared are in the hands of the principal. Districts with a history of successfully decentralizing authority are characterized by strong superintendents who use training, hiring and evaluation criteria, and incentives to develop strong site managers (David 1989). These superintendents send clear signals to principals that they value and reward those who involve teachers in decision making.

Third, school staff need time to acquire new knowledge and skills and, equally important, time to put them to use. Successful district practices incorporate plans for reducing teachers' workloads; providing extra time for professional development; and, at the school level, reorganizing schedules to free teachers to participate in decision making and other collegial activities (David 1989, Johnson 1988). Finally, salary levels communicate the value attached to the new roles and responsibilities (Guthrie 1986).

The Future of School-Based Management

School-based management is not a fixed set of rules. It is the opposite of prescription; in fact, by definition it operates differently from one district to the next and from one school to the next and from one year to the next. And that is the point—the goal is to empower school staff by providing authority, flexibility, and resources to solve the educational problems particular to their schools.

The goal of school-based management is to empower school staff by providing authority, flexibility, and resources to solve the educational problems particular to their schools.

Research on school-based management, school improvement, and organizational change tells us that schools are unlikely to change without increased autonomy. But research also tells us that, in the absence of district leadership and support for change, school-based management is not enough. Autonomy can be increased in many ways—through granting control over budgets, through allowing policy-setting authority, through providing waivers—but it is primarily increased by the norms and culture established by district leaders, including the superintendent, the school board, and the teachers' union.

From the research we also know that school-based management takes a long time to implement; districts that have successfully decentralized have done so over a period of 5 to 10 years (Wissler and Ortiz 1986, Casner-Lotto

1988, Sickler 1988, David 1989). School-based management also raises some complicated issues that research has not addressed; for example: the relationship between parent choice and school-based management; the tension between school autonomy and collective bargaining and alternative models; issues regarding the legal authority of the district versus the school; and the role of the state. Although theory can inform some of these issues, most of the unanswered questions will be answered as districts experiment with new structures. We will all learn from their mistakes and their successes. □

1. Cuban (1988) calls these "second-order" change. "First-order" change is like an engineer's quality control solution; it accepts existing goals and structures and aims to correct deficiencies. Examples of first-order change include recruiting better teachers, selecting better texts, and marginal changes to the curriculum. Second-order change is more complex and of wider scope, akin to redesigning a system; it alters roles, routines, and relationships within an organization.

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For Information

To obtain copies of *Resource Materials on School-Based Management* (September 1988) by Paula A. White, contact: Center for Policy Research in Education, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick, NJ 08901; attention: Publications. Phone: (201) 828-3872. Also available is *School-Based Management: Institutional Variation, Implementation, and Issues for Further Research* (September 1988) by William H. Clune and Paula A. White.

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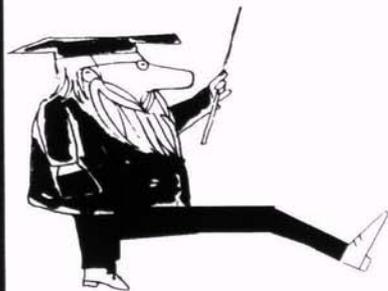
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