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LEADING for LEARNING

As states and the federal government have come to play a larger role in education policy, school boards have been largely overlooked. That's a mistake, some expert say.

A special report funded by The Wallace Foundation

Evelyn Murrin, a volunteer for a good-governance initiative called Board Watch, keeps an eye on the Pittsburgh school board at a meeting last month.

An Overlooked Institution Struggles to Remain Relevant

School boards are an American tradition, but whether they're up to the task of governing local districts in an era of increasing federal and state control is a matter of debate.

By **Lesli A. Maxwell**

They oversee millions of dollars in public money. They hire and fire superintendents, and decide which textbooks teachers will use in their classrooms. They can even dictate whether students go on a field trip.

Yet local school boards remain mostly overlooked in national discussions of K-12 policy, even as the quality of leadership in public education has become a priority among policymakers, philanthropists, and education researchers.

In a nation with more than 14,500 local school boards—most of them composed of unpaid members with widely varying levels of knowledge about education—such neglect has led to a governance system that is too often ineffective, if not dysfunctional, some scholars and other experts contend.

And it's not a problem that has just surfaced, they say. "We've had all these reform policies over the years, from standards to charter schools and choice, and in instituting those, state authority was strengthened and some attention was given to the administrative side of things," says Lorraine M. McDonnell, a political science professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and the immediate past president of the American Educational Research Association.

"But nobody who created these policies seemed to think about the implications for the school boards that must govern and deal with a much, much more complex system," she says. "There are some real capacity issues, and no one has paid enough attention to that."

Chester E. Finn Jr., the president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, a Washington think tank, puts the state of school governance in even more dire terms: "It's totally obsolete."

"We've got this whole layer cake of schools and districts, the state, and the federal [levels], each of which ends up functioning as a veto over the others," he says. "We need to reinvent it."

Others argue that district school boards are a vital piece of the democratic process and help ensure a community voice in important decisions about educating children. The focus, they argue, should be on changing the way boards behave.

"School boards matter," says Mary L. Delagardelle, the deputy executive director of the Iowa Association of School Boards. "The policy-level leadership of a board is critical to district improvement if we want the change to not just be pockets of excellence, but systemic excellence. Our focus should be on electing the best people and training them on what their roles should be."

Pressure continues to build on school districts to close achievement gaps, increase high school graduation rates, and prepare more students for college and careers. Now, with unprecedented amounts of federal dollars flowing to schools to achieve those goals, governance has never been more important, but questions about school boards' capacity to fulfill their roles are mounting.

Education Week's sixth annual "Leading for Learning" report delves into governance issues at both the local and state levels to illuminate the challenges and the possible remedies.

It examines a citizens' group in Pittsburgh that is striving to make the work of the elected school board more transparent, efficient, and accountable. It profiles a national program's specialized training to teach urban school boards how to craft policies that increase student achievement.

The report explores political struggles between some governors and state education leaders over who should be in charge of K-12 education policy. And it includes a special focus on the growing interest of mayors in running, or involving themselves deeply in, their cities' public schools.

The Editorial Projects in Education Research Center commissioned a "Research Perspective" from Kenneth K. Wong, the chairman of the education department at Brown University, and Francis X. Shen, a postdoctoral fellow at the University of California, Santa Barbara, on mayoral control and its outcomes.

Finally, three current or former journalists who are now school board members in their communities share insights on what it's like to serve on those panels.

'Duties Without Limits'

Elected school boards began appearing across the United States more than a century ago. The idea was that lay governance would be a more democratic, effective way to oversee public education than leaving it to corruption-prone municipal governments.

As school boards took hold, states legislators wrote laws mandating their duties, which, some experts say, helped create the micromanaging tendencies that today plague so many boards.

"Basically, over time, school boards have been given duties without limits," says Paul T. Hill, the director of the Center for Reinventing Public Education, at the University of Washington Bothell. "And that has continued up until now. Every time the legislature wants something done on education, the school board is delegated to do it."

In Louisiana, school boards hire and fire all district employees, from superintendents to janitors and bus drivers. Coupled with a culture in which many board members have served for decades, the arrangement has made managing for results an impossibility, says Paul G. Pastorek, the state superintendent of education.

"I would argue that the rules we've created for our school boards to operate by are what cause the bad behaviors to repeat," Pastorek says. "Once you intentionally inject school board members into the hiring and firing process, they begin to believe that they should somehow control the outcomes of all of this. If everybody is in the middle of hiring and firing, there's no accountability in the system."

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Cover Photo by Christopher Powers/Education Week

ABOUT THIS REPORT



This special section is the sixth annual *Education Week* report examining leadership in education, an important topic in an era of high-stakes accountability for public schools. It includes research findings and an analysis commissioned from Kenneth K. Wong, the chairman of the education department at Brown University, and Francis X. Shen, a postdoctoral fellow at the University of California, Santa Barbara, by the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center. Christopher B. Swanson, EPE's vice president for research and development, provided oversight for the research appearing in the report.

The project is underwritten by a grant from The Wallace Foundation, which seeks to support and share effective

ideas and practices that expand learning and enrichment opportunities for all people. Its three current objectives are:

- Strengthening education leadership to improve student achievement;
- Enhancing out-of-school learning opportunities; and
- Expanding participation in arts and culture.

For more information and research on these and related topics, please visit the Knowledge Center at

www.wallacefoundation.org.

For copies of last year's special report, go to www.edweek.org/go/wallace.

In Pittsburgh, Monitors Hold School Board Accountable

Board Watch volunteers attend every school board meeting, grading members on good-governance practices and reminding them that the public has high expectations.

By **Lesli A. Maxwell**

Pittsburgh

Heather Sprague smiled when she spotted the neon-orange sign taped to the entrance of the headquarters of the Pittsburgh public school district. It directed people seeking the July 15 meeting of the school board to the committee room on the second floor. Just inside the building's double doors, a security guard was posted at a desk to give further directions if anyone needed them.

Until recently, parents and residents who came to observe or participate in the board's open meetings had to enter an unmarked door and find their own way to the meeting room, says Sprague, who volunteers in a new effort here to raise the public's interest in the school board and improve its performance.

"For meetings that were supposed to be public, it was pretty difficult for the public to even find where they [were]," says Sprague, a

bankruptcy lawyer for the U.S. Department of Justice.

The orange signs represent a small victory in a much larger campaign under way in Pittsburgh to make the school board—which until a few years ago was notorious for personal feuds among its members and constant clashes with the former superintendent—one of the most transparent, productive, and accountable governing bodies in public education.

A nonprofit group called A+ Schools: Pittsburgh's Community Alliance for Public Education, which works for improvement in the 28,000-student district, launched the governance initiative in January.

Known as Board Watch, the program recruits and trains volunteers like Sprague to evaluate the performance of the school board on five good-governance practices—focus and mission, transparency, conduct, role clarity, and competency—during its public meetings. Every three or four months, Board Watch issues a report card that grades the board on those measures, as well as its overall performance. Board Watch

also makes a series of recommendations on how the board can improve.

Since its launch, more than 50 volunteers have signed on to Board Watch. Such an organized watchdog effort focused on the functions of a school board appears to be unique in the nation, observers say.

"This program is as much about holding the board accountable as it is about engaging the public," says Carey Harris, the executive director of A+ Schools and the founder of Board Watch.

"The board works for the public," she says, "and if the public doesn't have clear and high expectations for board members, then it becomes nothing short of a miracle that [members] will do the job that they need to do."

In the two report cards Board Watch has issued so far, the panel has received mostly mediocre marks. Its strongest point: transparency. Its weakest: role clarity.

"I'm not sure that the report card outcomes always capture what the majority of us are doing, which is killing ourselves to do the right thing," says Theresa Colaizzi, the president of the school board, who has served on the board since 2001. "But we have nothing to hide, and they have every right to judge us. I welcome the feedback."

"I think that anybody would be concerned that this could bring us negative publicity, but I think we are getting what we deserve based on our performance," says William Isler, a member of the board since 1999. "I think in the long run, this program will help improve the image of the school board in the public's eye."

'Splendid Isolation'

Most of the nation's roughly 14,500 district school boards conduct their meetings before very few people. The local education reporter probably attends, along with a few diehards who show up faithfully to complain or cajole. But to draw parents and a broader swath of community members to a school board meet-

Carey Harris, center, the executive director of the nonprofit group A+ Schools, observes the Pittsburgh school board's Sept. 29 meeting. The organization's Board Watch program keeps tabs on school governance.



Photos by Christopher Powers/Education Week

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As part of a broader effort to improve public school performance, Pastorek tried, but failed, to get state legislation passed this year that would have limited the tenure of board members and taken the hiring and firing of school personnel out of their hands.

'Doing the Wrong Thing'

Too often, board members misunderstand the difference between policymaking and administration, says McDonnell, the UC-Santa Barbara political scientist.

"A lot of these boards are doing the wrong thing," she says. "They spend time on whether Johnny should be suspended or not. So what looks like micromanagement to a superintendent or to those of us outside a district looks to school board members like constituent service or representation."

At their worst, boards can wreak havoc on the districts they govern.

A cautionary tale is Clayton County, Ga., a suburban district near Atlanta that lost its accreditation more than a year ago from

the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools because of breaches of ethics rules and state laws. Board members there were investigated for violating open-meetings laws and voting to give spouses jobs and pay raises. The crisis in Clayton County sparked a move for state legislation that would allow the governor to oust school board members in districts on the verge of losing accreditation. The measure was not enacted into law, but the proposal could be revived early next year when the new legislative session begins. (Gov. Sonny Perdue removed the four board members who violated ethics rules, and in May, the district regained its accreditation on a probationary basis.)

When they are at their best, though, school boards set specific goals in partnership with the district's leadership team and make policies that help steer the district toward them.

"In highly functioning districts, the board and the superintendent figure out who needs to do what to meet their goals; they look at the budget together to make sure it's aligned with the goals," says Anne L.

Bryant, the executive director of the National School Boards Association, based in Alexandria, Va.

Pinpointing why some boards perform well, while others don't, has been a priority for the Iowa Association of School Boards for the past nine years. Delagardelle, the deputy executive director, has overseen several phases of an ongoing study, called the Lighthouse Project, that has sought to identify what characteristics and belief systems are present in both high- and low-achieving districts. In its first phase, using data from Georgia, the Lighthouse Project identified the 15 highest- and 15 lowest-performing districts in the state, and sent researchers there to gather more data and conduct interviews.

In the high-achieving districts, board members said that "they feel part of something bigger than themselves and have a connection to the improvement work" in their districts, Delagardelle says. That feeling trickled down through all levels of the school system. Those districts also had boards with a very "elevating" sense of belief about what was possible.

But in the low-achieving districts, the belief systems were starkly different.

"We heard excuse after excuse after excuse for kids' not achieving at the levels they wanted," says Delagardelle, "and they sounded like they were totally helpless to effect change."

'Reactive' Roles

Even with positive belief systems and a firm grasp of their policymaking role, school boards must grapple with a crush of complex issues, many created by state and federal education mandates. The advent of charter schools, for example, brought a new set of responsibilities to school boards, which, in some cases, must review and approve or reject charters to run those largely autonomous public schools. Then the boards oversee the schools to make sure they are fiscally healthy and are operating within the law.

The federal No Child Left Behind Act's accountability requirements and sanctions for schools and districts not demonstrating improvement have further dictated local education policy, observers say. This year, the

ing usually takes a major controversy, like the closing of a school or the firing of a popular teacher or coach.

Such inattention can contribute to the micromanagement, mischief, and malfunctioning that some school boards fall into when no one is watching them do their work, one governance expert says.

“Too often, school boards operate in splendid isolation,” says Michael D. Usdan, a senior fellow at the Washington-based Institute for Educational Leadership. “If no one is paying attention, it makes it much easier for a board to get into the weeds, where it’s not usually fruitful for them to spend their time.”

Pittsburgh’s problem wasn’t necessarily that nobody was watching: The board’s antics had become a major attraction on a local television channel that aired its meetings. But seven years ago, the board’s behavior helped drive the district to a low point, when three of the city’s leading philanthropies publicly announced they would cease making new investments in the school system. The decision was motivated, in large part, by an ongoing feud that members of the elected, nine-person board were having with one another, as well as with then-Superintendent John Thompson.

That withdrawal by leaders of the Grable Foundation, the Heinz Endowments, and the Pittsburgh Foundation was a multimillion-dollar blow to the public schools. It prompted Tom Murphy, the city’s mayor at the time, to form a special commission to make recommendations on how to stem the crisis in district governance and leadership.

One recommendation from the commission was the need to form a community-based organization to provide leadership and advocacy for school reform. That became A+ Schools, which was organized in 2004.

Harris, the group’s executive director, says governance was a major concern from the beginning, but it wasn’t until a community meeting was held during a school board election cycle two years ago that the idea for Board Watch was conceived.

Though the school board had come a long way—it hired Mark Roosevelt as superintendent in 2006 and has mostly supported his aggressive reform efforts, which have yielded substantive gains—the public still held largely negative views of the board.

“What we heard from people is that they

infusion of federal stimulus aid under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act comes with strings that are seen as further stretching some board members’ skills.

In such an environment, McDonnell says, board members are “basically reactive. This all lands in their laps, and all they can really do is react to it.”

“I think in many ways, our districts and school boards lack the capacity to do what’s expected of them,” she says, “and those who are designing these policies and putting them in place are not thinking about the need to pay attention to the institutional design as well.”

That’s why McDonnell, in her keynote speech to the AERA annual meeting in Washington last spring, called on her fellow scholars to conduct more research on school governance.

“Most of my colleagues are concerned with classrooms and teaching and learning,” she says. “They see these governance issues as stuff that gets in the way of teaching and learning, and I think it ought to be seen as the stuff that could be fixed to enhance teaching and learning.” ■

Staying on Task

Volunteers who attend meetings of the Pittsburgh school board take notes on these goals.

Tally the number of discussion topics that you hear that relate to one of the following goals:		Tally	Total
GOAL 1	Maximum achievement for all students		
GOAL 2	A safe and orderly environment for all students and employees		
GOAL 3	Efficient and effective support operations for all students, families, and administrators		
GOAL 4	Efficient and equitable distribution of resources to address the needs of all students, to the maximum extent feasible		
GOAL 5	Improved public confidence and strong parent/community engagement		
Topics unrelated to the Board’s goals listed above			

SOURCE: A+ Schools: Pittsburgh’s Community Alliance for Public Education

At one time, the antics of the Pittsburgh school board drew an audience on the local television channel that aired its meetings. The panel has settled down, but still receives mediocre marks from residents who monitor its meetings.



were frustrated with the board, but that they didn’t really know what the board should have been doing,” Harris says. “This was an opportunity to set the community’s expectations for the board.”

A big obstacle to keeping the board focused on debating and approving strategies for achieving the district’s goals is the Pennsylvania school code, observers here say. The state law spells out that local school boards are to deliberate and vote on matters such as school field trips, acceptance of donations, and the awarding and renewal of contracts of any size, Harris says.

At the board’s July 15 meeting, members worked their way through an inch-thick agenda that included contracts as small as \$7,000.

Five Board Watch volunteers showed up for that night’s “agenda review,” and observed quietly while the board discussed a range of issues. The volunteers—who wear badges to identify themselves—each filled out a form to rate the board on several measures, including how often they heard members discuss topics related to the board’s own stated goals. Volunteers also grade the board on time management and civility in their comments. At least three Board Watch volunteers attend every meeting. Their paper evaluations are collected after each meeting, and are compiled later with results from other meetings to come up with letter grades.

One of the volunteers is Arita Gilliam, whose daughter graduated from Pittsburgh’s public schools a decade ago. For her, Board Watch became a concrete way to contribute to the district’s improvement. A pregnancy-prevention specialist who works in the city’s schools, she says she was appalled by some of the conditions in which she saw students trying to learn.

“That’s what motivated me more than anything,” Gilliam says.

Sprague, who does not have children, says she gets frustrated at times by the length and lack of focus in the board’s deliberations. At a meeting earlier this year, she says, the board was to vote on clarifying a few words in one sentence in a new edition of the student handbook.

“It turned into a marathon discussion about whether to change the entire truancy policy,” Sprague recalls. “I don’t like seeing the district’s resources being used

Georgia Blotzer, a retired teacher, consults her Board Watch rating sheet. “We evaluate our students and teachers,” she says, “and we should evaluate our school board members.”



like that.”

That sort of behavior has prompted Board Watch to issue its lowest grades on “role clarity,” one of the five good-governance indicators the school board is judged on. In fact, the board earned a C on role clarity on its most recent report card, a drop from a C-plus in the first report card, due mostly to the board’s tendency to dwell on line-item expenditures and individual programs, Harris says.

Isler, the school board member, concedes that the board often spends too much time on picayune matters that have little to do with the district’s main purpose.

“If you watch any school board meeting, whether it’s us or some other board, how often do you hear them actually talk about education?” he says. “Slowly, I think Board Watch is going to help us focus on why we are there.”

The board received its best grade so far, a B-plus, for transparency, a mark that Harris says reflects the improved access the public now has to meetings and the board’s decision to post its agendas on the district’s Web site at least one day before it meets.

Still, there is more work to be done, says Gilliam of Board Watch.

“I think our neutral perspective is greatly needed,” she says. “We really want to see them function better, so hopefully they listen to all of our feedback and apply it.”

Colaizzi, the board president, believes the school board is functioning better now than it has in more than a decade. She points to Superintendent Roosevelt’s hiring as one example. She also notes that the district recently made adequate yearly progress under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, and is one of five finalists for millions of dollars from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to overhaul the recruitment, training, evaluation, and compensation of teachers.

“We’ve done all of that as a board on our own,” Colaizzi says. “What Board Watch can do, and I am hoping that it does do this, is bring really qualified people to run for the positions that become vacant to keep us moving in the right direction.” ■

Governance Project Teaches Value of Policy Framework

In Hartford, Conn., the superintendent and board members are involved in a two-year institute to get on the same page about priorities.



Photos by Christopher Capozziello for Education Week

By **Dakarai I. Aarons**
Hartford, Conn.

Tell school board members in most districts that you want to spend economic-stimulus dollars on reading interventions, and their answer is likely to be: “Sounds great! Approved. Next item.”

But Penny MacCormack, the chief academic officer of the 22,000-student Hartford school district, knew she’d better be ready to answer another question: How does this help us meet our policy goals?

Such questions are common from the nine-person board, whose members have spent the past two years working on a policy framework that lays out expectations for improving academic performance in Connecticut’s largest district. That focus started with the district’s participation in Reform Governance in Action.

Launched in 2004, the program is a two-year institute that brings hand-picked urban school boards and superintendents together to work on creating tools that help them not only govern effectively, but also bring about meaningful results for students.

Three Levers

The program was the brainchild of Donald R. McAdams, a former Houston school board member who formed the Houston-based Center for Reform of School Systems. It is funded by the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, which teamed up with McAdams to run an earlier effort, the now-defunct weeklong Broad Institute for School Boards.

The training is based on the philosophy that school boards

have three major levers: using reform-oriented policy to drive change, building community support for the agenda, and hiring superintendents who can carry out the vision.

“We are school reformers first,” McAdams says, “and we are looking for governance as one of the ways to respond to the challenge of achievement in urban schools.”

Dan Katzir, the managing director of the Los Angeles-based Broad Foundation, says the philanthropy’s founder, Eli Broad, has invested in the program because there were few options available to train urban superintendents and school board members on closing achievement gaps.

“If we are going to change the game in terms of overall results for disadvantaged kids,” Katzir says, “we have to enable a higher level of knowledge and action and ability, frankly, of the governing body.”

In the training, a school board learns to use research to select a “theory of action,” create a policy framework that supports it, and evaluate the superintendent based on how he or she meets the goals aligned with the theory of action.

The Broad Foundation pays most costs associated with the program—more than \$200,000 for each district—but school districts are required to pay the approximately \$60,000 in expenses for the in-district consulting visits.

The school board and administrative team for each participating district meet every other month with a consultant for

Superintendent Steven J. Adamowski, shown in a school science lab, pushed school board members to apply for the training after seeing results elsewhere.

a weekend of planning and working toward putting their ideas into practice. Then, the board, superintendent, and two top administrators meet in four large-group sessions that bring together all of the four or five urban districts in each training cohort. Those meetings take place in a variety of locations across the nation.

“It really teaches you your role as an oversight board,” says Hartford board member Pamela Richmond. “We found there were things we were sticking our hands in that we shouldn’t have.”

By Invitation Only

The school districts take part on an invitation-only basis, and must keep up with the training and policy-crafting to remain in the RGA program. McAdams says the program targets districts that have shown a commitment to reform.

Board-administrative teams use the information learned in sessions to help guide them in crafting policies in a variety of areas, from constituent services to professional development. They get feedback from RGA staffers and board members in other districts.

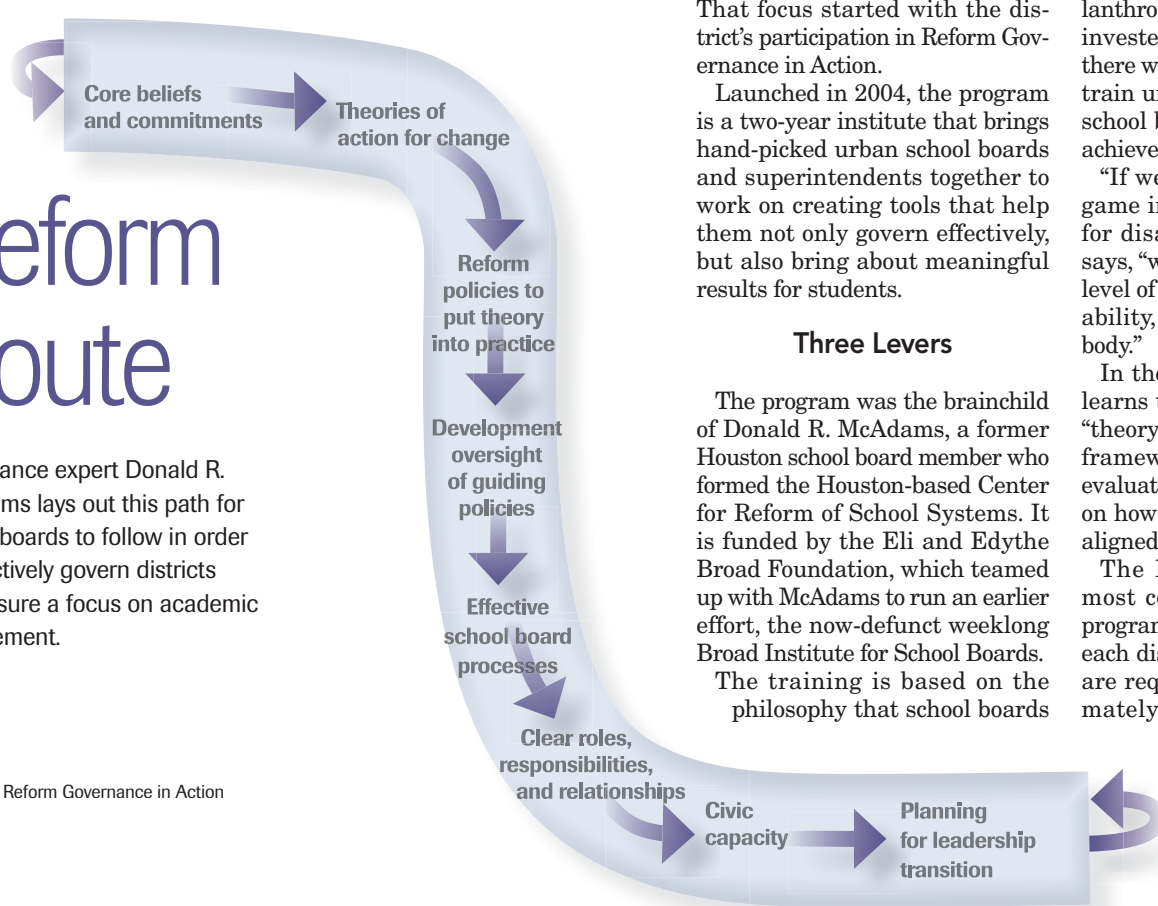
“Our work is really designed for boards that really want to do something and governance teams that get along reasonably well,” McAdams says. “It’s not therapy.”

Boards are taught about theo-

Reform Route

Governance expert Donald R. McAdams lays out this path for school boards to follow in order to effectively govern districts and ensure a focus on academic achievement.

SOURCE: Reform Governance in Action



Goal Number One

The Hartford school district's strategic plan sets these specific targets for the proportion of students scoring at least "proficient" on Connecticut's tests.



Teacher Lorrie Kellogg leads an exercise in a 3rd grade reading class at Breakthrough Magnet School last month.

tem in 1967, says the training sessions helped create a bond among board members.

"One of the values was all of us getting to be together with the superintendent and leadership for three or four days," Noel says of the out-of-town institute sessions.

3RD GRADE
2009 Reading Baseline:
37.3%
2011-12 Reading Target:
49.3%

"You don't get that kind of opportunity when you are home."

Hartford has been the most improved district in Connecticut the past two years, Adamowski notes, a feat that he believes would not have been as easily achieved without the outside help.

Ada M. Miranda, the chairwoman of the board, says the intensive program was like going through a graduate-level class on school governance. The training, and Adamowski's leadership, have transformed the way the district does business, she and other board members say.

"Boards come and go, and so do superintendents. We don't want what has happened to be dropped. So we are focused on sustainability," Miranda says. "What you have in policy, someone will have to get consensus to change. Policy is a key sustainability element."

'Productive and Helpful'

Kriner Cash, the superintendent of the 108,000-student Memphis, Tenn., district, says going through the RGA training has been a boon to his district. Cash and the members of the school board started the program shortly after he took the reins last year; the district is midway through its training.

"I think it has been extraordinarily productive and helpful, in that the board recognizes its primary role, and a key one, in creating policies that focus on reform," he says.

"We have many compliance policies, but we need policy that deals with reform and transformation of the district. That's what [board members] have been focusing on—transforming our culture into a high-performing one of academic

achievement."

McAdams, the founder of Reform Governance in Action, points to the Aldine Independent School District in Texas, which this year won the Broad Prize for Urban Education; the Duval County, Fla., schools; and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg, N.C., district as among the program's success stories.

Some Don't Finish

But he also counts as successes some school district teams that didn't finish the program, but implemented what they learned.

Denver is one example. Bruce Hoyt, a school board member there, says the training members received helped lay the groundwork for the improvement agenda the board pursued with then-Superintendent Michael Bennet, who later left that job to accept an appointment to a U.S. Senate seat.

Hoyt says Denver didn't finish

model, even if we haven't seen the results flow as fast as we'd like," he says. "It's time well spent. The entire training is right on point with what every urban school board member and school team needs to know."

McAdams says the program also was getting "real traction" with school board members in the District of Columbia before Mayor Adrian M. Fenty took over the school system in 2007.

Katzir of the Broad Foundation says the results of the training have been mixed, with some districts showing greater progress in

8TH GRADE
2009 Science Baseline:
35.3%
2011-12 Science Target:
47.3%



Ruvit Jimenez, 13, conducts a lab experiment in an 8th grade science class at Breakthrough Magnet School.

ries of action that other districts have used to great effect. The Long Beach, Calif., school district, for example, uses "managed instruction,"

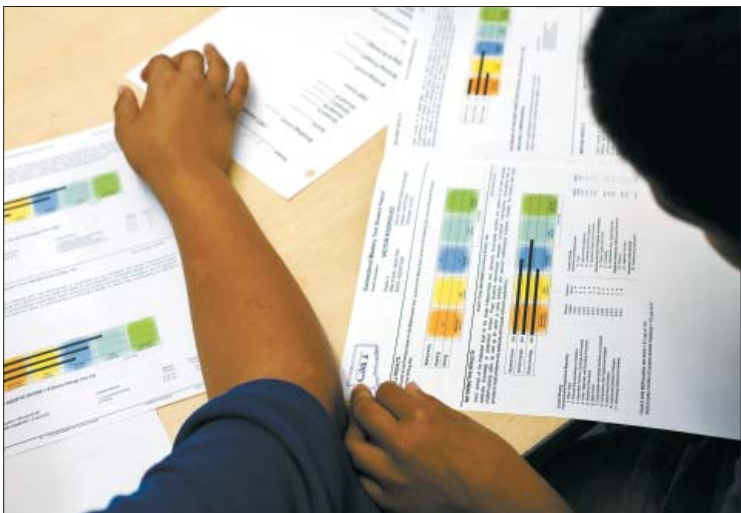
sions are at the school," MacCormack, the chief academic officer, says. The central office views itself as "in service" to the schools, she says, creating the tools and working with school-level staff members to find the professional development that meets their needs.

That philosophy, Superintendent Steven J. Adamowski confirms, is etched into the hearts of each board member.

"Some boards rent the superintendent's theory of action," he says. "Ours owns it."

5TH GRADE
2009 Writing Baseline:
64.8%
2011-12 Writing Target:
76.8%

SOURCE: Hartford Public Schools



Fifth grade students in Aubrey Orenstein's class work on a writing exercise at Breakthrough Magnet School.

under which all schools use the same curriculum. New York City's system, in contrast, uses "performance management," giving principals significant autonomy over how their schools are run.

The theory of action in Hartford is "managed performance empowerment," a blend of the two approaches. The district's relationship with each school depends on its performance. As schools meet targets, their principals gain more autonomy over budget, personnel, and curriculum decisions.

"Our theory of action says the people best able to make the deci-

Hartford Mayor Eddie A. Perez, himself a member of the school board, appoints five of its nine members; the rest are elected. The policies stemming from the Reform Governance in Action training, he says, have created "a measuring stick that is clearer than it has ever been."

"Everybody is on the same page," the mayor says. "It is clear when your school improves or not, and what are the ramifications."

Elizabeth Brad Noel, a board member who's been involved with Hartford's schools since she began her counseling career in the sys-

10TH GRADE
2009 Reading Baseline:
57.8%
2011-12 Reading Target:
69.8%
2009 Writing Baseline:
65.9%
2011-12 Writing Target:
77.9%



Sophomores in an honors American Literature class at Sports and Medical Sciences Academy complete a reading exercise.

At State Level, Power Over Schools a Contentious Issue

Governors have moved steadily to increase their influence over K-12 education, sometimes antagonizing their states' education establishments in the process.

By **Erik W. Robelen**

Shortly after taking office in January, North Carolina Gov. Beverly E. Perdue set in motion plans to restructure governance of the state's K-12 education system. As part of the effort, she pushed for the creation of a chief executive officer to oversee the state department of public instruction, and her hand-picked candidate assumed the job.

The trouble was, North Carolina voters had just elected June Atkinson to a second term as the state schools chief. And while the authority of the elected post had been greatly diminished for years, Atkinson challenged the governor's efforts in court as encroaching on her constitutionally defined role.

This past summer, the state superintendent won her case.

The debate in North Carolina certainly wasn't the first—and won't be the last—tussle over who's in charge of education at the state level. The stakes keep getting higher, as pressure for education improvement continues and as states vie for money that will be distributed by the U.S. Department of Education under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

An August letter from the National Governors Association signaled the tension over state governance of K-12 education. In the NGA's comments on draft guidelines for the federal Education Department's \$4 billion Race to the Top Fund, part of the economic-stimulus law, the group said some governors objected to a requirement that each state's application be endorsed by the president of the state board of education. That could "limit gubernatorial pre-

rogatives," the NGA wrote.

Michael W. Kirst, a professor emeritus of education at Stanford University, says that governors have long sought to wrest greater authority from state superintendents and boards of education.

"It's like a one-way vector force, where there's continual force for governors to gain control of education policy," he says. "The governors are on the offense, and the people supporting traditional arrangements where education should be separately governed ... are on the defense."

Governors Seek Influence

Governors, he notes, have pursued both direct and indirect paths to increase their reach in K-12 schooling and beyond. Over the past several years, some governors have seen their influence grow as a result of their active involvement in state P-16 or P-20 councils, he said. Those panels, now in place in most states, bring together actors from various levels of education, preschool to college to graduate study, and often include representatives from state government, business, and the community.

Last year, Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick strengthened his hand through several changes, most notably the creation of a Cabinet-level position of secretary of education appointed by him.

In Ohio, Gov. Ted Strickland sought legislation in 2008 aimed at enhancing his office's influence and making the roles of the state superintendent and board of education largely advisory. Although his plan was not enacted, the effort was widely seen as leading to the resignation of the state's longtime schools chief.

The lines of authority for education at the state level vary nationwide. Whatever the extent of governors' other executive powers, many state constitutions established separate governance structures for the K-12 school system.

To be sure, analysts say, governors may well have some good reasons to want more authority in the K-12 arena.

"Governors are probably correct when they say people look to them as the leader of a state's education system, ... whether they actually have real power or not," says Paul Manna, an associate professor of government and public policy at the College of William and Mary, in Williamsburg, Va.

On the flip side, having some level of independence in state governance structures is often touted as a way to help depoliticize decisionmaking.

David P. Driscoll, who stepped down in 2007 as the Massachusetts commissioner of education, says he sympathizes with governors' desire for more control, but suggests an independent commissioner or board can foster "positive tension."

"It's good to get things done," he says, "but on the other hand, a little difference of opinion can often be a positive thing."

In North Carolina, the governance debate has been going on for decades.

A 2009 report by the Public School Forum of North Carolina, a think tank in Raleigh, says the system is widely seen as "a 'four-headed' monster with unclear and sometimes confusing lines of authority" between the elected state superintendent, the chair of the state board, the governor's office, and the deputy superintendent.

Gov. Perdue, a Democrat, tried to take on the matter this year. She signed legislation allowing an education department employee to also serve on the state board. She appointed to the state board Bill Harrison, a longtime local superintendent. Finally, she successfully pressed the board to both elect Harrison as its chairman and hire him as the CEO of the education department.

Chrissy Pearson, the governor's press secretary, says the existing state structure "made it difficult for the school system to enjoy a clear line of accountability directly to the governor. ... She feels like the buck stops with her when it comes to education."

But in a lawsuit in state superior court, Superintendent Atkinson successfully argued that the role given to the new CEO was one the state constitution reserved for the elected superintendent. Harrison has since resigned as CEO, but remains the chairman of the state board.

Changes in Massachusetts

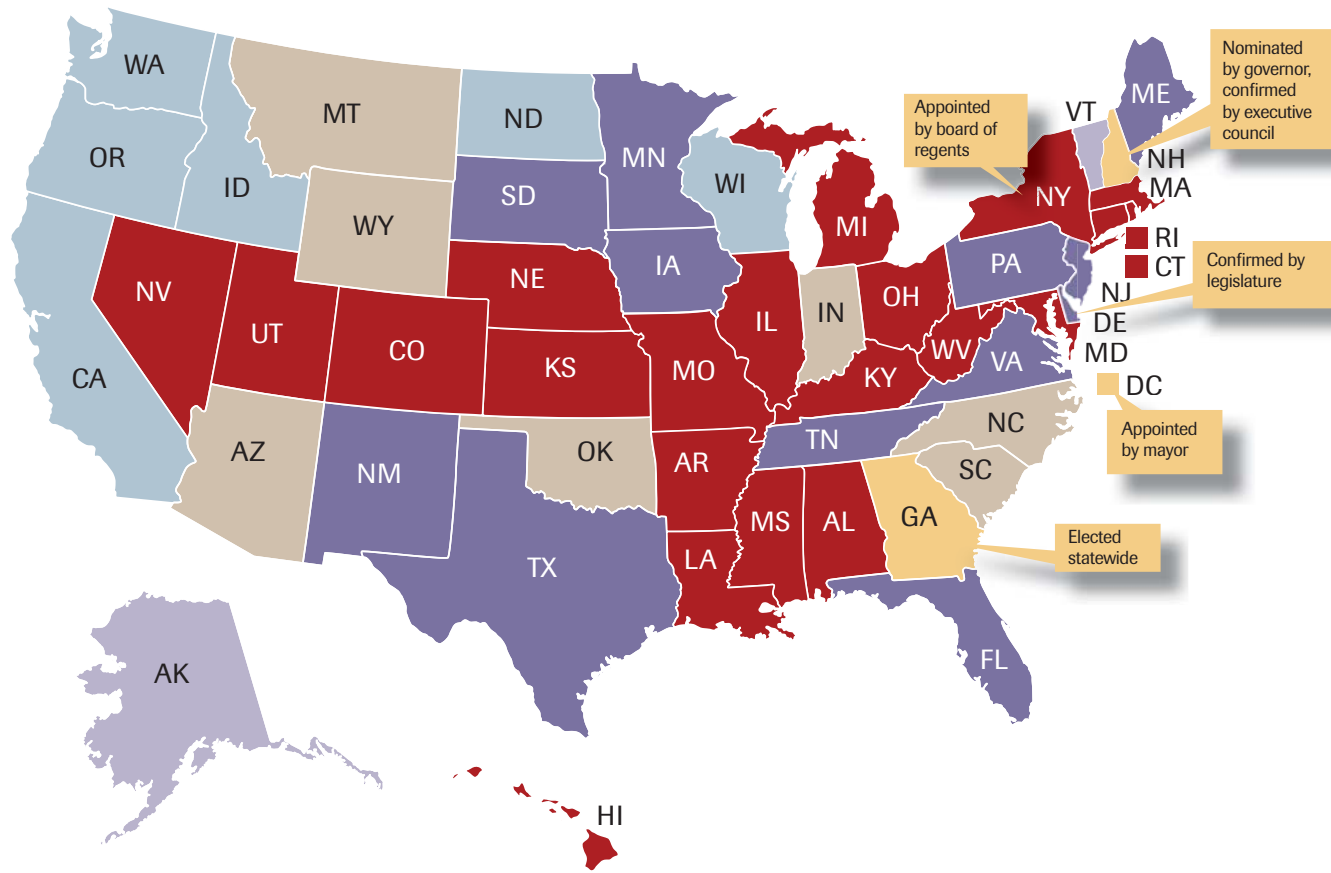
Meanwhile, Gov. Patrick of Massachusetts won strong legislative backing last year for his reorganization plan, which created an executive office of education with a Cabinet-level secretary appointed by the governor to oversee three education departments. The secretary, S. Paul Reville, is a member of the state boards for early education and care, elementary and secondary education, and higher education, and has approval authority over the boards' hiring of commissioners for each agency and of each agency's budget.

Patrick, a Democrat, told legislators in January 2008 that his plans would improve coordination across

Selecting Chief School Officers

The most common method is for state boards of education to appoint the top education official.

- Appointed by state board of education
- Nonpartisan ballot
- Partisan ballot
- Appointed by governor
- Appointed by state board of education, approved by governor
- Other



SOURCE: Council of Chief State School Officers

all sectors of education and create “a single responsible authority within the coordinated system” to serve as a “chief liaison” to his office. “We will be able to take swift, synchronized actions, to meet the rapidly evolving demands of the world and economy,” he said.

Related changes to the makeup of the board of elementary and secondary education, including expanding it from nine to 11 members, accelerated the process of having a majority of board members appointed by the governor, observers say.

Jamie Gass, the director of the center for school reform at the Pioneer Institute, a Boston think tank, argues that the changes have greatly diminished the independence of both the K-12 commissioner and the state board. He also suggests the state board’s influence has waned.

“The board has really become a theater without an audience,” he says. “It’s mostly ceremonial.”

Gass points to a recent controversy over the state’s consideration of an application to open a new charter school as reinforcing his skepticism about the new governance structure.

In an e-mail made public in September by a Massachusetts newspaper, Reville urged the commissioner of elementary and secondary education, Mitchell D. Chester, earlier this year to back the application for what looked to be political reasons.

“What it highlights is precisely the kind of concerns we had about the process being drawn more closely into the governor’s office,” Gass says. “In a way, it’s an example of how governance has been politicized.”

But in an interview, Reville said that the e-mail was taken out of context and that he was by no means suggesting political calculation should trump the merits of the application. More broadly, Reville argues that under the governance changes, the state board continues to have a “powerful influence,” and that Chester is an independent actor.

“The commissioner does not work for me,” he said, “he works for the board.”

‘We Should Have Authority’

In Ohio, Gov. Strickland used his 2008 State of the State address to unveil plans to create a “director” post at the state department of education, appointed by him, with “oversight over all [the agency’s] efforts,” he said. At the same time, the role of the state superintendent and the state board of education would become largely advisory.

“The voters will rightly hold us accountable for the education results we produce,” he told lawmakers at the time. “Therefore, we should have authority over the management of the department of education.”

“Governor Strickland came in, and he had his own agenda and wanted his own people to help push it through,” says Terry Ryan, the vice president for Ohio programs and policy at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, a Washington-based think tank.

The legislature did not adopt the governor’s restructuring plans, but his efforts were widely seen as leading Susan Tave Zelman, who was appointed Ohio’s superintendent by the state education board in 1999, to step down last year. And the board apparently worked with Strickland to name a successor, Deborah S. Delisle, more to his liking.

The governor, a Democrat, has made headway with plans to revamp the K-12 system. He worked with the legislature to overhaul the state’s school funding approach and lay the groundwork for revisions to its standards, assessments, and accountability system.

As for Strickland’s proposed changes to state governance of education, Ryan says the governor appears to have gained enough influence to let the plan drop: “That’s just disappeared off the agenda.” ■

Governance at a Glance

States use a variety of methods for determining who will serve on the state board of education, how many members it will have, and how the leadership of the panel will be selected.

STATE	METHOD OF SELECTION OF STATE BOARD MEMBERS	NUMBER OF VOTING MEMBERS	SELECTION OF STATE BOARD CHAIR/ PRESIDENT
Alabama	Partisan ballot	eight plus governor	Governor is president of board
Alaska	Appointed by governor, confirmed by legislature	seven	Elected by state board of education members
Arizona	Appointed by governor, confirmed by Senate	11, including chief school officer	Elected by state board of education members
Arkansas	Appointed by governor	nine	Elected by state board of education members
California	Appointed by governor	11, including student member	Elected by state board of education members
Colorado	Partisan ballot	eight	Elected by state board of education members
Connecticut	Appointed by governor, confirmed by House and Senate	seven	Appointed by governor
Delaware	Appointed by governor, confirmed by Senate	seven	Appointed by, serves at pleasure of governor
Florida	Appointed by governor	seven	Elected by state board of education members
Georgia	Appointed by governor	13	Elected by state board of education members
Hawaii	Nonpartisan ballot	13	Elected by state board of education members
Idaho	Appointed by governor	eight	Appointed by, serves at pleasure of state board
Illinois	Appointed by governor	nine	Appointed by governor
Indiana	10 members appointed by governor, plus elected state superintendent	11	State superintendent serves as chair
Iowa	Appointed by governor	nine	Elected by state board members (2-year term)
Kansas	Partisan ballot	10	Elected by state board members (2-year term)
Kentucky	Appointed by governor	11	Elected by state board of education members
Louisiana	Eight elected by nonpartisan ballot; three appt. by gov.	11	Elected by state board of education members
Maine	Appointed by governor	nine	Elected by state board of education members
Maryland	Appointed by governor	12, including student member	Elected by state board of education members
Massachusetts	Eight appointed by gov.; four voting ex officio members	12, including student member	Appointed by governor
Michigan	Partisan ballot	eight	Elected by state board of education members
Minnesota	None		
Mississippi	Five appointed by governor; four appt. by legislature	nine	Elected by state board of education members
Missouri	Appointed by governor with consent of Senate	eight	Elected by state board of education members
Montana	Appointed by governor	seven	Elected by state board of education members
Nebraska	Nonpartisan ballot	eight	Elected by state board of education members
Nevada	Nonpartisan ballot	10	Elected by state board of education members
New Hampshire	Appointed by governor	seven	Elected by state board of education members
New Jersey	Appointed by governor	13	Elected by state board of education members
New Mexico	Partisan ballot	10	Elected by state board of education members
New York	Appointed by legislature	16	Elected by state board of education members
North Carolina	Appointed by governor	13, including two voting ex officio members	Elected by state board of education members
North Dakota	Appointed by governor	seven	Elected by state board of education
Ohio	11 elected by nonpartisan ballot; eight appt. by gov.	19	Elected by state board members (2-year terms)
Oklahoma	Appointed by governor	seven	State superintendent serves as chair
Oregon	Appointed by governor	seven	Elected by state board of education members
Pennsylvania	Appointed by governor, confirmed by Senate	21	Appointed by governor
Rhode Island	Appointed by governor	nine	Appointed by governor
South Carolina	Appointed by legislature	17	Elected by state board of education members
South Dakota	Appointed by governor	nine	Elected by state board of education members
Tennessee	Appointed by governor, confirmed by General Assembly	10, including student member	Elected by state board members (4-year term)
Texas	Partisan ballot	15	Appointed by governor (2-year term)
Utah	Nonpartisan ballot	15	Elected by state board of education members
Vermont	Appointed by governor, approved by the Senate	nine, including student member	Elected by state board members (2-year term)
Virginia	Appointed by governor	nine	Elected by state board of education members
Washington	Five elected by local school board members; seven appointed by governor, one elected by private schools; state superintendent	14 limited to two terms (CSSO excepted), two nonvoting students	Elected by state board of education members
West Virginia	Appointed by governor, approved by Senate	nine	Elected by state board of education members
Wisconsin	None		
Wyoming	Appointed by governor	11	Elected by state board of education members

SOURCE: National Association of State Boards of Education

Education Secretary Leads Chorus Calling For Big City-Hall Role

Interest in bringing school districts under the municipal umbrella continues to grow.

By **Lesli A. Maxwell**

The troubles that plague many local school boards prompt some observers to throw up their hands. But when it comes to big-city districts, there's a popular remedy that continues to gain momentum: mayoral control.

This governance arrangement sidelines school boards, for the most part, in favor of a strong chief executive handpicked by the mayor.

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, who for seven years ran Chicago's public schools under Mayor Richard M. Daley, is using his bully pulpit to aggressively promote the approach as a necessity for reversing decades of abysmal academic performance in some cities. In a speech to mayors and school superintendents last spring, in fact, Duncan said he would con-

sider his time as education secretary a "failure" if more mayors didn't take over city school systems by the end of his tenure.

As evidence that mayoral control delivers results that urban school boards can't, Duncan points to Los Angeles, the nation's second-largest school district. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's attempt to take over the schools in 2007 made it through the state legislature, but was stopped by a state judge, who ruled that the law enacted to give him control violated the California Constitution.

"If you look at the big cities that are really moving educationally, Chicago comes to mind, New York comes to mind, and Washington, D.C., comes to mind," says Duncan. "What do they have in common? Mayoral control. Then you have a city like Los Angeles, which frankly, has not come to mind for a number of years. Los Angeles is the outlier."

Boston Goes First

From a historical perspective, mayoral control is nothing new. More than 100 years ago, most mayors were in charge of public education in their cities, and education reformers spearheaded a push to remove schools from the reach of City Hall. They argued that mayors were often too corrupt and focused on providing patronage jobs, and envisioned that elected members of a school board would be more

over the schools.

Now, a growing number of mayors—even those who have not sought outright control over their cities' schools—are interested in playing some role in improvement efforts, says Kenneth K. Wong, a political science professor and the chairman of the education department at Brown University.

"It signals to me that there is a widening recognition among mayors that as the service economy sinks and global competition rises, they have to make sure that their schools are generating high-quality labor to keep their cities competitive," Wong says. "It actually presents a real opportunity for a much broader redesign of how we govern our public schools."

Interest in mayoral control of schools is now running high in several cities. In all, eight major cities now have some form of mayoral control, including New York City, where Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg recently won a high-profile legislative battle to retain his seven-year grip on the city's school system. In the District of Columbia, where Mayor Adrian M. Fenty gained control over the school system in 2007, Schools Chancellor Michelle A. Rhee has made national headlines for a hard-charging approach to school improvement. The District of Columbia Council retains control over the schools' budget, however, and its members have been aggressive about questioning many of the chancellor's decisions.

No Guarantee

In Milwaukee, Mayor Tom Barrett, backed by Wisconsin Gov. James E. Doyle, a fellow Democrat, is making a bid for the power to appoint the school board and hire a superintendent. In Detroit, recently elected Mayor Dave Bing wants to take over the district, despite the city's earlier, unsuccessful experiment with mayoral control. And in Sacramento, Mayor Kevin Johnson has announced plans to create an "education liaison" between City Hall and the school district, and pledged to raise private money to pay for the position.

Mixed academic results from cities like Chicago, and loud strains of discontent from some parents and elected officials in cities like New York and Washington, are just a few reasons to be skeptical about mayoral control, argues Anne L. Bryant, the executive director of the National School Boards Association, based in Alexandria, Va.

"Too much of this depends on who the mayor is," says Bryant. "One mayor will be great, but the next mayor could undo the progress. Or, you end up with an autocratic situation like in New York, where parents honestly feel like they don't know what's going on, and all they get is the cotton-candy spin machine."

Paul T. Hill, the director of the Center on Reinventing Public Education, at the University of Washington Bothell, agrees that putting a mayor in charge doesn't guarantee progress. In other words, it takes the right mayor, working under the right political conditions, he says.

"If the mayor is not going to be in a position to take on the teachers' union, or is not prepared to put up with the complaints and pressure from parents and the neighbors of schools that have had everything go their way in the system, then he or she shouldn't take over the system," Hill says.

More importantly, he says, the mayor must select a strong school district leader. He points to Boston, where Superintendent Thomas W. Payzant oversaw steady improvement in student achievement over his 10-year tenure.

"In that case, you got an exceptional leader who profoundly understood education and knew where to intervene in the schools and was able to sail just enough into the wind. I regard that as a Michael Jordan performance," Hill says. "Frankly, in that case, it was exceptional leadership, but as a prescription for what ails urban education, exceptional leadership is completely hopeless."

While critics will debate whether students in mayorally controlled systems are making greater academic strides than they would under an elected school board's leadership, the arrangement brings benefits that have received less attention than test scores.

In Chicago, Mayor Daley has leveraged the city's parks and recreation and library departments to work with the school system in an extensive after-school program. In New York, donors have contributed more than \$240 million to the city's school system since Mayor Bloomberg took over, and the school district won the Broad Prize for Urban Education in 2007.

Eli Broad, the philanthropist who established the urban education prize in 2002, argues that putting the mayor in charge of schools is the only way to turn around a low-performing district with a history of chaotic school board governance. Mayors, he says, are much better positioned than school boards to challenge the various interest groups and traditions in school districts.

"Most of the nations we compete with have national education systems, and are able to do things with some dispatch and rigor that we are not able to," Broad says. "If we're going to change public education for the better, then we need to do national standards, we need to change the school calendar, we need to foster greater competition, and we need better teacher compensation. I don't think any of this can happen with elected school boards."

Accountability to Voters

With a mayor in charge, accountability for school performance is concentrated on one person, who can be re-elected or tossed out by voters. In Bloomberg's bid this fall to win a third term as mayor of New York, in fact, his education record is one of the central issues. His challenger, city Comptroller William C. Thompson Jr., is a former president of the old board of education and has been a sharp critic of Bloomberg's approach to governing the schools.



William Archer/Detroit Free Press

Robert C. Bobb, left, the emergency financial manager of the Detroit school system, and Mayor Dave Bing visit a 2nd grade class at Hutchinson Elementary School in June.

consider his time as education secretary a "failure" if more mayors didn't take over city school systems by the end of his tenure.

"I absolutely believe that we need more mayors to put their reputations and resources on the line for public education," says Duncan, who emphasized in an interview that mayoral control is "not right for all places." And in an article he wrote for this month's issue of *American School Board Journal*, he also presented a more nuanced take on mayoral control than he did in his remarks earlier this year.

"In the places where you need fundamental, dramatic change and real breakthrough, you have to have a leader who can bring a unified purpose and sense of urgency,"

democratic and better stewards of children's educations.

In 1992, Boston became the first major city in recent times to embrace mayoral control when local voters granted Mayor Thomas M. Menino the authority to appoint the school board and hire a superintendent. They reaffirmed that change in another vote four years later, and Mr. Menino—who is seeking election to a fifth term next month—continues to run the school system.

Chicago came next. After a 1988 law decentralized the district by creating local school councils to run individual schools, financial and managerial problems continued. In 1995, the Illinois legislature gave Mayor Daley authority

In Boston, Mayor Menino is facing his first real challenge in 16 years in office from an opponent who has zeroed in on the quality of public education in the city.

"I think the major advantage is focused accountability," says Michael D. Usdan, a senior fellow at the Institute for Educational Leadership, in Washington. "You've got a highly visible person in charge that people know can be removed if they are not satisfied."

Also, Usdan points out, a mayor has more status, political capital, and community resources to use when advocating for poor children than elected school board members whom many people have never heard of.

"This becomes especially important in communities where the demographics have shifted so much, and the mayors can provide coordinated services to students and their families within the schools," he says. "I just don't think that urban school boards have the political clout anymore, especially in cities that are losing enrollment."

Even when mayors don't directly run school systems, their involvement can leverage new resources for education.

In Nashville, Tenn., Mayor Karl Dean is expending political capital and city resources to improve the public schools. He wooed the New York City-based groups Teach For America and the New Teacher Project to the city and raised the money to pay for their services in helping to staff schools.

'Number-One Issue'

The quality of schools, he says, "is the number-one issue facing our city. We have a lot of great things going on here, with a strong track record of economic development and public safety, but our school system has some real challenges."

Dean came close to gaining control of the 74,000-student system under a state law that allows the governor to change the governance of districts in "corrective action" status for low performance for several years. But Nashville's students

scored well enough that the district narrowly avoided that outcome—one that Dean, who was elected in 2007, has said he would be ready to take on.

In the meantime, Dean has made clear his intention to keep education at the top of his agenda. He estimates spending at least 25 percent of his time on public school matters.

He's traveled to New Orleans to look at the proliferation of charter schools since Hurricane Katrina four years ago, and says he'd like to see a charter-incubator organization, much like New Schools for New Orleans, come to Nashville now that Tennessee has lifted some of its restrictions on charter schools. He hosted an education summit this past summer that featured some of the most high-profile reformers in the nation.

"I see and hear what's been going on in other cities over the last five to 10 years, and I just see how far we have to go to catch up with them," he says. "I think my involvement can help move us along." ■



Charles Rex Abogast/AP

Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley, right, selected Ron Huberman, the president of the transit authority, to replace U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan as the head of Chicago's school system.

Mayors Can Be 'Prime Movers' Of Urban School Improvement

Under this arrangement, districts are no longer insulated from the city's social, civic, and economic sectors.

By **Kenneth K. Wong & Francis X. Shen**

Given the high level of interest at the local, state, and federal levels in mayoral control of public schools, it is important to understand the organizing principles of mayoral accountability, and especially its effects on district performance.

Our 2007 book, *The Education Mayor: Improving America's Schools*, is the most comprehensive study to date of mayoral-appointed school boards. Combining empirical analysis of performance measures from 1999 to 2003 with case studies of mayoral-led school districts, we examined all of the large urban school districts whose city and school district boundaries are coterminous with each other. We used this sample of 104 cities to compare mayoral-led school districts' performance with that of other districts not using this governance approach, allowing us to determine the effects of mayoral accountability relative to the independently elected governance structure that would have been in place otherwise.

Using this comprehensive research design, we found that mayors can improve not only student performance, but management efficiency, financial stability, and public confidence as well. In this research-review article, we present some of the major findings of that study and also provide new information on more-recent trends.

Governance Features of Mayoral Accountability

Mayoral accountability as a governance strategy recognizes that for many big-city school districts, the fragmented power structure of traditional school board governance has been a barrier to systemwide reform. By placing control of the school district squarely in the mayor's hands, the mayor's electoral fate becomes tied to public school performance. Within this integrated governance framework, the buck stops in the mayor's office when it comes to district performance.

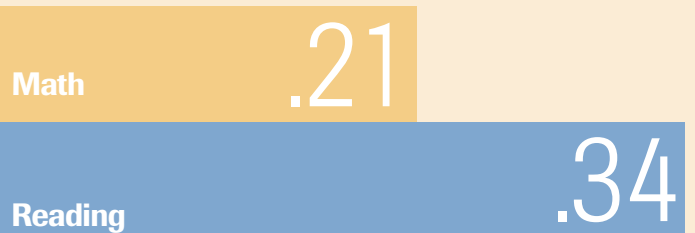
In this new institutional arrangement, districts are no longer insulated from the city's social, civic, and economic sectors. The "education mayor" bridges those sectors, and public education is seen as a core component in improving the city's quality of life as well as its long-term economic growth. By bridging multiple sectors within the city, an education mayor can leverage its cultural and civic organizations to expand learning opportunities for students. Shielded from political pressures now directed at the mayor, the superintendent and district leadership can pursue a sustained, long-term reform agenda.

Several big-city districts employ a mayoral-accountability governance structure. These include Boston; Chicago; Cleveland; the District of Columbia; Harrisburg, Pa.; New Haven, Conn.; New York City; and Providence, R.I. Baltimore and Philadelphia are jointly governed by the mayor and the governor. Suggesting a trend toward more may-

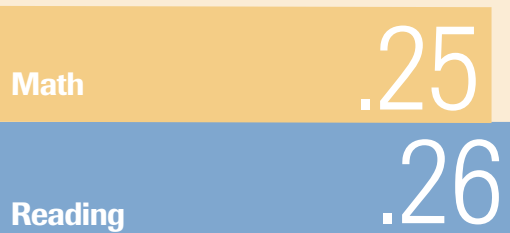
Real Gains

Cities with a strong form of mayoral control—an "education mayor" with the authority to appoint a majority of school board members—show consistently stronger gains in student achievement on state assessments relative to other large urban school systems. Improvements in student proficiency associated with strong mayoral leadership of public schools range from one-fifth to one-third of a standard deviation, in high school mathematics and reading respectively.

HIGH SCHOOL



ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



Notes: This analysis is drawn from a national database of 104 large urban school districts from 40 states, each of which has a unique state assessment system. In order to gauge the impact of mayoral control across states, it was necessary to convert test scores to a common metric—standard deviations—that indicates how much a given district is improving relative to other districts within its state. The results presented above are the real gains the authors attribute *specifically to mayoral control*, after taking into account a large number of other factors that also influence student achievement, such as previous student performance, poverty levels, district size, and expenditure levels. See *The Education Mayor*, Chapters 3 and 4, for more details on the data and methods employed.

SOURCE: Kenneth K. Wong and Francis X. Shen

RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE

This essay and the accompanying charts and graphs were commissioned for this report from Kenneth K. Wong, who holds the Walter and Leonore Annenberg chair for education policy and is chairman of the education department at Brown University, and Francis X. Shen, a postdoctoral fellow at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

SPECIAL FOCUS: MAYORAL CONTROL

oral involvement, the mayor of Indianapolis and several mayors in Rhode Island now have the authority to create new charter schools; and the mayor of Los Angeles has been given control over a small network of schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District.

When examining this set of districts more closely, it is evident that the implementation of mayoral accountability varies significantly by state and city. This is in keeping with the notion that a mayoral-leadership strategy is best when tailored to the unique context of a particular city. Variations can include, for instance, whether a nominating committee is utilized, whether “sunset” provisions are included, and whether a citywide referendum will be held to vote on retaining the governance structure. Fine-tuning mayoral control through collaborative dialogue with community groups can improve both performance and public perception. In these ways, additional democratic safeguards—over and above the electoral lever—can be included in the integrated governance design. Thus, the question is not simply “Mayoral accountability or not?” but rather “What type of mayoral involvement?”

Mayoral accountability is most prominently visible in the regular municipal electoral cycle. Because more voters go to the polls to vote in mayoral elections as compared to traditional school board contests, the school system is held accountable by a wider swath of the city’s electorate. These voters, in turn, assess school performance not in isolation, but as part of an integrated program of municipal service delivery.

With formal authority over the school system, how do mayors perform? Rather than look at each district individually, we decided to conduct a national analysis aimed at making generalizations about the governance structure itself, not just the effects of a single mayor. Our research design, in which we standardized and analyzed data from more than 100 large urban districts across 40 states for the period 1999 to 2003, allows us to estimate the average effects of mayoral control.

Mayors and Achievement

Our analysis found that mayor-led school systems post systematically higher test scores in reading and mathematics at the elementary and secondary levels, even after statistically controlling for previous achievement and many demographic-background variables. Our results suggest that the intervention of education-mayor leadership, combined with giving the mayor formal authority to appoint at least a majority of the school board, will produce a one-quarter standard-deviation increase in the percentage of the district’s students scoring proficient or above in elementary reading and math. A larger impact is found at the high school level.

While the magnitude of this change will not likely move the district above the state mean immediately, these improvements are nonetheless significant. It is especially important to keep in mind that these are systemwide improvements. For instance, in a school district like Chicago, with roughly 240,000 elementary students, a 2 percent increase in district pro-

iciency can only be achieved by a net gain of 4,800 students improving their proficiency.

Moreover, these gains are not found only among a city’s strongest schools. A promising effect of mayoral accountability lies in the academic improvement of the district’s lowest-performing schools, such as the lowest-quartile schools. These schools serve higher concentrations of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunches, and typically enroll greater percentages of African-American students than the overall district average.

Despite these structural challenges, lowest-quartile schools in mayor-controlled districts show steady progress in the percentage of students who tested as proficient on state assessments from 1999 to 2003. For example, the lowest-25th percentile schools in Baltimore improved in 3rd grade reading from 5.6 percent proficient to 32.7 percent. In Chicago, 5th grade math performance improved from 10.4 percent to 27.5 percent proficient in the lowest-performing schools.

Our analysis suggests that mayoral control is less effective in narrowing the achievement gap between schools in the top and bottom achievement quartiles. Further, an absence of checks and balances (such as the lack of a school board nominating commission) was found to have mixed effects on student performance between 1999 and 2003. These cautionary findings, however, should be revisited as current data become available. We are in the process of beginning a follow-up study by updating the 100-district database.

At the same time, we believe that an in-depth analysis of a sample of mayoral-control

Mayoral Control at a Glance

City	Start	End	Features of Mayoral Governance
Boston	1992	-	Mayor appoints the seven members of school committee from a list of candidates recommended by a 13-member citizens’ nominating panel
Chicago	1995	-	Mayor appoints CEO, and the seven members of the board of education
Baltimore	1997	-	Mayor and governor jointly appoint the nine members of school board from a list of qualified individuals submitted by the state board of education
Cleveland	1998	-	Mayor appoints the nine members of school board from a slate of nominees selected by a local nominating panel
Detroit ¹	1999	2004	For four years, mayor appointed six of seven school board members (7th was state superintendent of public instruction)
Oakland, Calif. ²	2000	2004	For four years, school board was expanded from seven to 10, with three new board members appointed by the mayor
Harrisburg, Pa.	2000	2010	Mayor appoints the five members of the board of control
District of Columbia	2007	2012	Mayor has governance authority previously held by D.C. board of education, but city council retains budgetary oversight
Philadelphia	2001	-	Mayor appoints two of the five members of the School Reform Commission (governor appoints the other three)
Indianapolis	2001	-	Mayor has authority to create charter schools
New York City	2002	2015	Mayor appoints schools chancellor, and eight of 13 members of the Panel for Educational Policy (borough presidents appoint the rest)
Hartford, Conn.	2005	-	Mayor appoints five of nine board of education members, including president of the board (other four are elected)
Los Angeles	2008	2013	Memo of understanding with LAUSD allows mayor-led Partnership for Los Angeles Schools to directly and independently manage 10 schools in LAUSD
New Haven, Conn.	Pre-1990	-	Mayor serves on board of education, and appoints the seven additional members of the board
Providence, R.I.	Pre-1990	-	Mayor appoints the nine-member school board, from a slate of candidates developed by the Providence School Board Nominating Commission
State of Rhode Island	2008	-	Mayors, acting by or through a nonprofit organization, can create “mayoral academy” charter schools
Trenton, N.J.	Pre-1990	-	Mayor appoints the nine-member board of education
Yonkers, N.Y.	Pre-1990	-	Mayor appoints the nine-member board of education

- Indicates the city’s active mayoral-control arrangement does not have a predefined end date.

Notes: In addition to the districts listed here, the St. Louis Public Schools are under the oversight of a three-member Special Administrative Board, with one member appointed by the mayor, one by the governor, and one by the president of the St. Louis Board of Aldermen. In Jackson, Miss., the mayor appoints the five-member board of trustees, but must have city council confirmation. There are also a few smaller districts where the school board has for many years been appointed by local governing bodies such as the county commission, city council, and in some cases mayor.

¹ Detroit residents voted in a 2004 referendum to return to an elected school board. The state superintendent was, by law, to serve on the school board for five years, and then the mayor would appoint all seven members.

² The amendment to the Oakland City Charter that introduced this governance change expired in 2004.

SOURCE: Kenneth K. Wong and Francis X. Shen

districts will provide descriptively rich evidence on what works under what governing circumstances.

Resource Allocation

Our research suggests that two of the factors leading to mayoral success are improvements in financial management and resource allocation. Mayors, conscious of the need to spend taxpayer dollars as efficiently as possible, have strengthened school district bottom lines. Analysis of over 10 years of district-level financial data, again using our multidistrict database to isolate the effects of mayoral control, suggests that mayoral-led districts are not spending more, but are spending differently than their peers do. More resources are being deployed to instructional services, and fewer to central-office administration. Districts under mayoral control have seen improvement in their bond ratings over time, maintained labor peace, and streamlined central bureaucracy by shifting staffing resources to the subdistrict or school-cluster levels.

Mayoral control also broadens the human-capital pipeline at both the system and the school levels. In the central office, administrators in budgeting, operations, facilities, and management are drawn from multiple sectors. For example, 40 percent of the newly recruited managerial staff in Chicago during the first two years of mayoral control came from state and local governmental agencies and nonprofit sectors outside of education. Even chief executive officers often have been drawn from non-traditional leadership ranks, including New York City Schools Chancellor Joel I. Klein (a private-sector lawyer), Paul G. Vallas in Chicago (a former city budget director), District of Columbia Schools Chancellor Michelle A. Rhee (the head of the New Teacher Project), and Arne Duncan (head of a nonprofit education foundation), who succeeded Vallas in Chicago and is now the U.S. secretary of education.

Often mayors have turned to a diverse set of educational service providers at the operational level—for instance, contracting out the lowest-performing schools to education management organizations. To improve principal and teacher quality, mayors actively partner with alternative programs, including New Leaders for New Schools, Teach For America, and the New Teacher Project.

Improving Public Confidence

Another gauge of mayoral success is public confidence in the city school system. While data limitations prevent us from conducting the same sort of cross-district analysis we did for achievement, the Quinnipiac University Polling Institute provides us with a unique perspective on public-opinion trends on the subject of education and mayoral control for an urban area.

Specifically, we can examine the trend in voter satisfaction with the schools, as compared to achievement trends in the New York City public schools. Although the data are only correlational, they certainly suggest that New Yorkers' positive views of the city schools have tracked improved performance following mayoral control. As district performance on the state 4th grade math assessment has improved since the start of mayoral control, satisfaction levels with the schools have doubled, from 14 percent to more than 28 percent.

In New York, where the state legislature first gave Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg control over the city's schools in 2002, satisfaction levels with mayoral control have shown gains. Responding to the question "Do you think Mayor Bloomberg's takeover of the public schools has been a success or failure?," voters have shown increasing support. When the question was first asked in March 2007,

39 percent of voters felt it had been a success and 34 percent a failure. In July 2008, 54 percent of voters viewed the governance as a success, and only 26 percent saw it as a failure. The trend, consistent with anecdotal evidence from other mayoral-led districts, suggests that city residents are increasingly supportive of mayoral accountability.

The Future of Mayoral Accountability

The Obama administration's enthusiastic support of mayoral control, combined with growing momentum for mayoral involvement at the city and state levels, suggests that we may well be entering a nationwide paradigm shift for the governance of urban education.

In the past 15 years, a new breed of education mayor has emerged to challenge the traditional governance model of school districts insulated from the rest of municipal service delivery. Unwilling to sit on the sidelines as their cities' schools continue to fail, these mayors have set an example that President Barack Obama and Secretary Duncan hope others will follow.

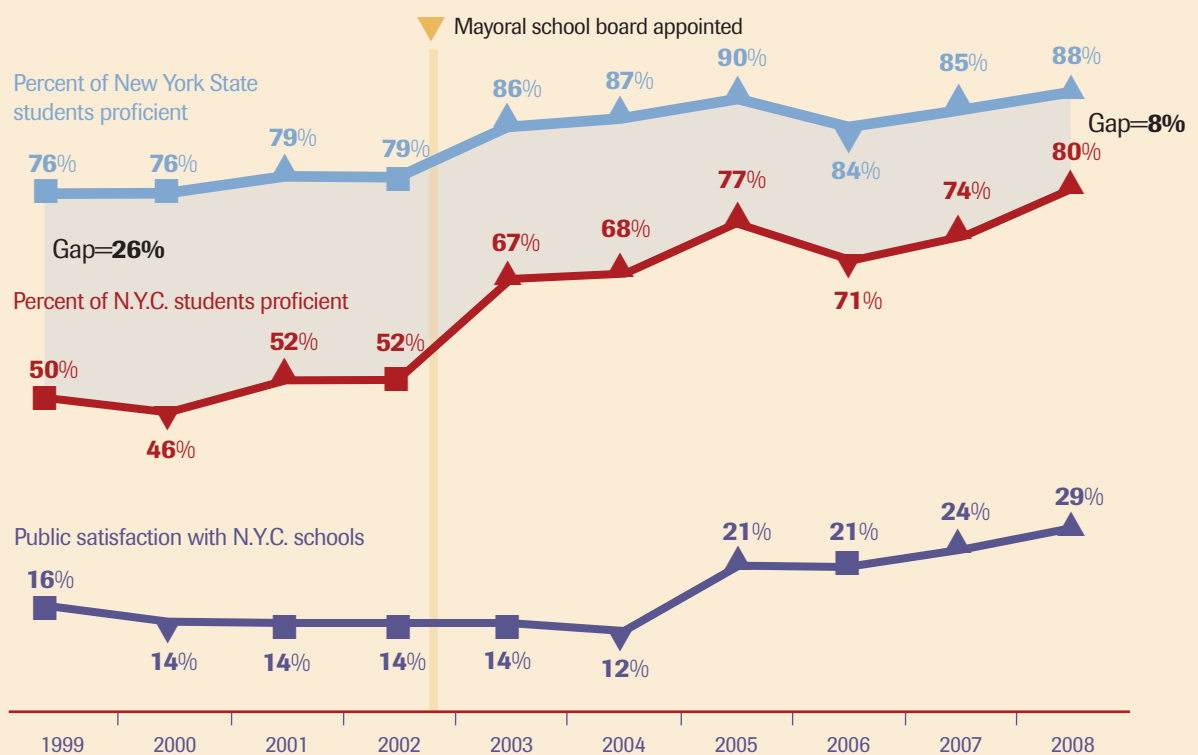
The Education Mayor and other recent studies suggest that the president's advocacy of increased mayoral accountability is on the right track. Districts successfully governed by mayors can expect improved student performance and better management. But research also suggests that successful governance will

require mayors to partner with state and local officials, as well as community organizations, employees' unions, and civic organizations.

Mayors cannot do it alone. But mayors can be the prime movers in developing a citywide partnership to turn around urban school performance. ■

Mayors and Public Confidence

Public satisfaction with the New York City public schools has doubled since the introduction of mayoral control. Student performance on state assessments has also risen during that period.



Note: Proficiency is defined here as scoring at level 3 or 4 on New York's 4th grade mathematics assessment.

SOURCE: Kenneth K. Wong and Francis X. Shen

Achievement data: New York State Education Department

Public-opinion data: Various years of the Quinnipiac University Poll, in which registered voters were asked, "Are you generally satisfied with the quality of the public schools in New York City, or are you not satisfied?"

For Further Reading:

Wong, Kenneth K., Francis X. Shen, Dorothea Anagnostopoulos, & Stacey Rutledge. *The Education Mayor: Improving America's Schools*. Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2007.

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Meetings Are Just Tip of Iceberg

By **Gene I. Maeroff**

I have spent a career scrutinizing and analyzing events and topics in education, writing literally millions of words about my observations in books and articles. I confess that I took school boards for granted, regarding them as appendages to the process of teaching and learning. Then, in 2008, driven by a sense of curiosity and public service, I got elected to my local school board in central New Jersey, providing me with a box-seat view that even the most informed observer cannot obtain.

No one but board members, top administrators, and legal counsel participates in the closed sessions at which we discuss personnel, lawsuits, and other confidential matters. Committee meetings are another venue in which board members carry

superintendent. Needless to say, I've not become an insider and I am not privy to some behind-the-scenes maneuvering.

One author, Robert W. Flinchbaugh, wrote in his 1999 book, *The 21st Century Board of Education*, that the prevailing culture does not readily change, even when new members join a school board. They may intend to bring change, but, he said, they may be excluded from the power source or may simply capitulate to the status quo. It is difficult, in other words, to alter board culture—and, in turn, to change the tone of a district.

Decisionmaking. From the outside, it appears that school boards have enormous power. Boards devote meetings to voting on page after page of items. The decisions involve personnel, curriculum, textbooks, special education placements, and various financial matters. Yet, this

which curricula or books to use.

Teacher Power. It was no surprise to learn that teachers can exert power over school boards. I knew and wrote about Albert Shanker, the longtime president of the American Federation of Teachers. But you can be awestruck to watch teacher power in its rawest form from the inside. I wrote a book titled *The Empowerment of Teachers*, and on a bookshelf near the computer on which I am writing this article sits an award I got from the New York State United Teachers. So, I have “street cred” in this regard, and I believe in the abiding worth of fine teachers.

Yet, the New Jersey Education Association and its local affiliates have the upper hand in almost all matters. The situation resembles President Ronald Reagan's war against Grenada. Teachers endorse school board

The public doesn't see much of the real work of school boards, which wield far less power than voters might expect.

out their work, largely out of sight. Finally, the actual board meetings—while open to the public—involve give-and-take that, like an iceberg, shows only part of the deliberation that precedes formal votes. I have many impressions of what I have seen, heard, and done. Where to start?

Board Culture. A school board is a living organism made up of the beliefs, values, and collective wisdom—and sometimes lack of such—of its members. I mentioned an iceberg. Well, like an ocean liner trying to avert disaster, school boards sometimes dodge and finesse issues that could spell disaster. We scheduled a construction-referendum vote on a religious holiday, and even though we thought the chance to cast absentee ballots would assuage critics, it did not and we had to reschedule the vote.

One joins a school board hoping to steer the ship in the best direction, but there are many helmsmen and helmswomen (four of our nine members are women). Probably each member, like a teenager on a scavenger hunt, has his or her own idea about the path to take. Unlike Congress, school boards emphasize consensus. It doesn't always work. We had an annual budget that divided us.

I ran as a critic of a board that had ousted the superintendent in the midst of her contract, compelling residents to pay about a half-million dollars for her to stay home for the next 2½ years, not to mention the salary and benefits for an acting

ostensible power is limited.

Consider personnel decisions. Typically, they pertain to resignations, leaves of absence, appointments, reassignments, and tenure. This sounds like heady stuff, but language in bargaining agreements sets the terms, for instance, for leaves and reassignments. All of the appointments come on recommendation of the superintendent, and the board appoints no one but the superintendent. It may only accept or reject his or her appointees. Tenure, of course, is important, but it's automatic in our state after three years and one day. The board applies a rubber stamp.

Then, there are votes on curriculum and textbooks. Again, the board's role is largely perfunctory. Every now and then, some school board bans a book, but this occurs about as often as a solar eclipse. The fact is that panels of educators develop curriculum guides and sort through potential textbooks long before these matters reach the board, and approval is almost guaranteed. This is not to say that it should be otherwise. How much does the average board member know about a physics curriculum or materials for teaching Hindi (which we really do offer)?

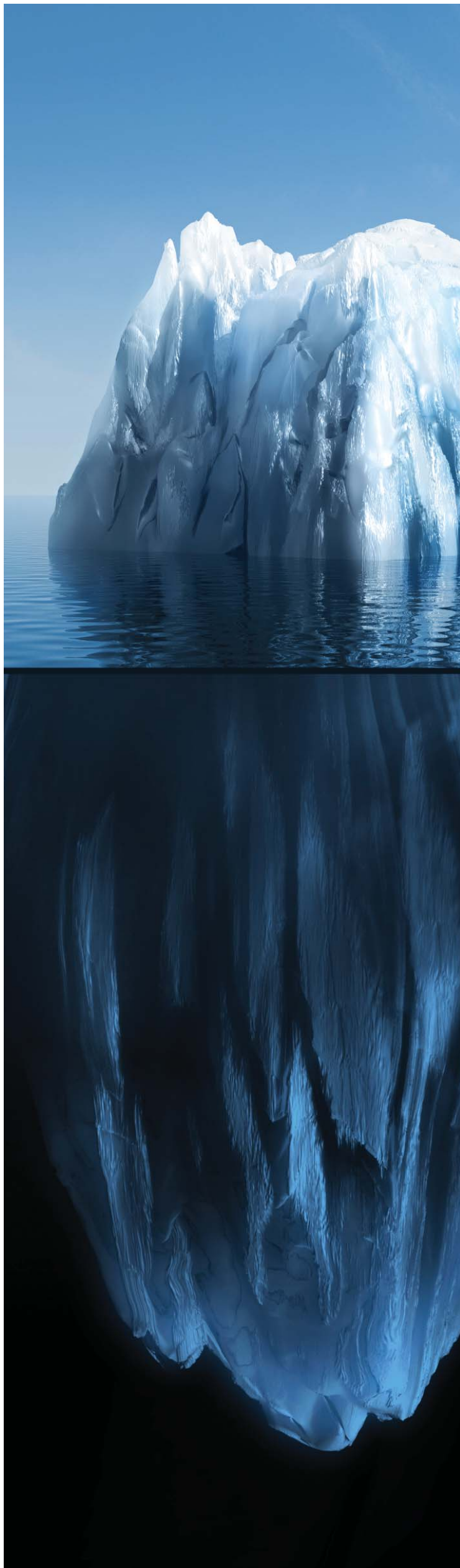
The superintendent, not the board, operates the district. The board's greatest power stems from its ability to select a superintendent. It must then depend on his or her judgment on almost everything else. It can't force the superintendent to hire anyone (unless the board is ethically challenged), and it can't dictate

candidates, and woe to those who run without their backing. They invest money and time, and the votes of every member of every union they can muster in support of their endorsees. More than money is at stake. This imbalance of power affects working conditions and a host of issues.

Once upon a time, teachers received abysmal salaries. School boards compensated by boosting health coverage, benefits, and pensions. Now, about half the certificated personnel in our district make more than \$80,000 a year. They don't pay toward their health-care premiums, and their spouses, too, get this coverage no matter how much they earn, courtesy of the taxpayers. Next year, for the first time, there may be a small change if the increase in premiums exceeds 10 percent. It is school boards like ours that have negotiated such generous agreements.

Service on a school board is a largely thankless task that consumes hours of one's time and for most of us pays zilch. The power of school boards has been ebbing for decades. New governance models are on the horizon, but for the foreseeable future, school boards will be the only game in town, and if they don't get it right, the nation's students will pay the consequences. ■

Gene I. Maeroff, a member of the school board in Edison, N.J., is the author of 12 books on education topics and a senior fellow at Teachers College, Columbia University. He may be reached at info@genemaeroff.com.



Keeping an Eye on the Big Picture—From a Small Town

By **Lonnie Harp**

I watch my 15-year-old's thumbs bounce over the tiny number keys of his cellphone, composing a message to a friend. I like to imagine it's an actual sentence. I ask how he knows what it will take for him to be a success in the future. "Just a second," he says. He stops texting. I repeat the question. "Get a good education?" he answers tentatively. "Is that right?"

The truth is, it's my job as a school board member to know the answer to that question. We have to make sure our 1,800-student school district is providing what it takes for all students to be equipped for a successful future beyond high school. Grasping the big picture is a huge challenge, especially when your small-town school system and its surrounding counties lack a shopping mall, a Target, or a white-collar office park.

Far from anybody's research triangle, where we're still cheering for our remaining manufacturing jobs to stay and grow, seizing the reins of the future takes some imagination. Popular books like *Disrupting Class*, *The World Is Flat*, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, *The Global Achievement Gap*, and *Shop Class as Soulcraft* stir important issues. The world is changing, and

it seems obvious that smart school board members, like the managers of corporations, need to make sure our local education systems are positioned to produce students groomed for their times—not these times or our times.

It's easy for me to marvel at today's world. I tell quaint stories about the smell of Liquid Paper back in the days before cut-and-paste commands. I remember my grandfather—a slide-rule guy—wondering who'd ever learn math if they let kids carry calculators to class.

Beloit College in Wisconsin publishes an annual list to jolt professors into reality about the world of college freshmen. From this year's list: "Members of the class of 2013 won't be surprised when they can charge a latte on their cellphone and curl up in the corner to read a textbook on an electronic screen. ... Carter and Reagan are as distant to them as Truman and Eisenhower were to their parents. Tattoos, once thought 'lower class,' are, to them, quite chic. ..."

That list is a wake-up call for people working with college students. The imagination of those working with even younger students must stretch much further. In other words, I need to be thinking about the demands of 2013 to do right by today's high school

freshmen. I need to consider what 2021 will hold to do what's best for this year's 1st graders.

Finding those bearings is hard to keep on the school board radar. The agenda is rightly filled with pressing work, from putting together budgets that meet as many needs as possible to ensuring safe buildings that get academic results while meeting legal and policy requirements.

The list of priority issues is long, but sizing up the future needs to be near the top. Arranging a first-hand look can be a good start.

The sprawling Naval Training Center in San Diego is a long way from small-town central Kentucky. The massive former military complex is being redeveloped as "an urban village" complete with condos, cafes, and a Trader Joe's. My scouting expedition involved an extra day tacked on to a trip to the National School Boards Association's annual conference last spring. I spent a day and a half at High Tech High School, a campus of schools built on the ideas of strong student engagement with both content and teachers, real-world learning experiences, and a requirement that all students will be able to describe what they've learned.

A freshman science student explained how an alternator gener-

ates electricity as she pedaled a stationary bicycle that she and classmates built to power a light bulb. In a senior literature class, groups of students created videos set to music to capture the genre of a chosen short story.

Example after example at the high school and middle school took student work and rigor in impressive new directions. The up-close look at the strategy and results—and the chance to talk to the students and adults—confirmed the value of really understanding new approaches to ramping up challenge and engagement in schools.

Nothing about current times makes preparing for the future any more part of the school board's role than it's always been. The difference is recognizing that changing dynamics in education and the economy mean we can't follow routine to deliver the kind of performance that's necessary.

I'm eager to seek out schools designed to transform student learning, especially when their approach is a response to preparing students for a sophisticated world.

The harder part is keeping up with the facets of change in the world that awaits after high school commencement. The criteria for college admissions, in many places, are open to creative new thinking. College-entrance exams are ex-

panding. Military careers and assignments are increasingly high-tech. Impressive computer-based learning opportunities continue to grow.

Where do all these signs lead? If school board members are committed to creating the best possible schools, we need to find the answers and keep that big-picture vision front and center. As the link between communities and schools, we must connect our expectations to reality and think long-term. Board members can bring the focus back to big ideas, cutting through the daily details and complications school leaders must juggle. We need to be the finders and the keepers of the tea leaves that will make school a path to the world that awaits.

I'm keeping my notebook handy, as my thumbs don't move fast enough to plug my thoughts into a phone. I don't have the answers yet, but I am intrigued with what our board and school leadership have come up with so far and the promise it holds for our children, our schools, and our community. ■

Lonnie Harp is a member of the Danville, Ky., school board. He is a freelance writer and editor and previously covered state politics and school finance at Education Week.

For Better Schools and for Civic Life, Boards Must Assert Power

By **Peter Meyer**

I remember sitting in my first executive session as a school board member, in 1999, and thinking to myself, "This is like getting into Fort Knox."

I had been a general-interest journalist for some 25 years at that point, and had always had the hardest time cracking institutions that took care of children. They almost always denied journalists access, arguing that it was not in the best interests of the child.

Now, here I was, on "the inside," on the school board, discussing intimate details about children, parents, teachers, aides, maintenance workers—and I was seeing what I had always suspected. The organization's leaders were not so much protecting (or caring for or even educating) children as they were caught up trying to manage a bumbling and relatively incompetent bureaucracy.

I am not much more than an interested student of school board history. But my sense of things, after two stints on my local school board—for six months in 1999-2000 and since 2007 to today—is that school boards have been overtaken by the "educatocracy," by powerful trade unions, certified specialists, certification agencies, state and federal rule-makers and legislators, grants with strings, billion-dollar-contractor lobbyists,

textbook mega-companies, professional associations, and lawyers—the list could go on.

Under these circumstances, it doesn't surprise me that many people think school boards are irrelevant. They are. Boards do a lot of moving the chairs around on the deck, but they're not really steering the boat. Ask board members anywhere what their biggest problems are and they are likely to say: state and federal regulation. Mandates.

I recall a Nigerian immigrant who had several children in our district trying to explain to someone who was complaining about a school why America was so great. "Here," he said in halting English, "if you don't like something, you vote no." I didn't have the heart to tell him that, in fact, a no vote on a school budget didn't really mean no. Because of state law, if voters rejected a school budget, all that happened was the district had to operate with the same budget as the previous year, plus inflation.

And if state and federal regulation ties one hand behind your back, the unions take care of the other by protecting teachers who really should be dismissed.

Then there's the mind-numbing minutiae. At least twice a month, just before a school board meeting, I receive a packet from the superintendent. It contains the agenda—usually three to four

pages long, each item numbered, with subcategories with numbers like 13.1.7—and sometimes hundreds of pages of documentation to go with them. At any given meeting, there also can be several dozen detailed resolutions.

It's no wonder that "experts" have to be called in to explain it to us board members. "A superintendent's primary job," I was once told by one of them, "is to manage the board." And that's the problem. School boards have been taught impotence in the face of information, a problem that causes them to act—and fight—like children. I recall one evening being called in to a special meeting to approve \$25 million in construction contracts. "I'd like to see the contracts," I said. My colleagues, so lacking in confidence in their own responsibility, voted 6-1 *not* to see the contracts.

One year, I had a debate with a board member in a newspaper's letters column on the question of whether the board should have a curriculum committee. He was certain that it was the school board's only job to hire a superintendent and then sit back and let him or her run the district. The board shouldn't be "meddling" with curriculum. It was a view shared by the five other board members, even after someone unearthed for me Board Policy #4200, which clearly stated the "board is committed to

establishing and maintaining a coordinated curriculum management process."

Indeed, in the blizzard of paperwork that buries board members, there are many dozens of rules and regulations that are honored only in the breach. Each year, before I was on the board, I would make a pilgrimage to a board meeting and read from a section of the state-mandated code of conduct that required annual staff training on implementing the code. "Was it done?" I asked each time. And each time, I got the same answer: Of course it was. And each time, after the meeting, several members of the staff would tell me it was not done.

For all their problems, though, I believe school boards are vital institutions. It is the country's gradual neutering of school boards that has helped cripple our education system.

Instead of seeing school boards' apparent irrelevance as evidence of the need to hurry them out the door, we need to wonder whether such irrelevance is, like the disappearance of the frog, a sign of broader environmental stress.

We have to clean the polluted ecosystem, not kill off the frog. But we also have to recognize that, unlike the poor frog, we have multiple adaptive strategies. School boards must see themselves for what they are—the only relevant link be-

tween communities and schools—and take responsibility for their role in governing districts.

True, the abundance of federal and state regulation has complicated the life of school districts. All the more reason for boards to be proactive.

As a former economics teacher in my district once put it to me, "As teachers, one of our jobs is simply to avoid the 600-pound gorilla." By that he meant that he and his colleagues had become expert at doing what they wanted to do, despite the multitude of federal and state rules and regulations.

School boards still have enormous power—we could have voted no to the \$25 million in contracts and could easily adopt a rigorous curriculum—especially on the local level.

My own battle is to get my board to acknowledge that power, and to re-engage itself in the task of educating children, to revive a sense of the relevancy of democracy itself. It's a win-win. Not only do we get a better education for our children, but we also get a community that begins to feel that it can deliver that education. ■

Peter Meyer is a former news editor for Life magazine and a contributing editor at Education Next. He is a member of the school board in the Hudson City School District in Hudson, N.Y.