

School-based management

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Brian J. Caldwell

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The background features a blue-tinted image of a chalkboard with the letters 'Ya Bb Cc Dd' written on it. In the foreground, there is a colorful wireframe globe with several children interacting with it. The text 'Education policy series' is written in white, following the curve of the globe.

Education policy series



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International Institute for Educational Planning

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Preface

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The International Academy of Education and the International Institute for Educational Planning are jointly publishing the Education Policy Booklet Series. The purpose of the series is to summarize what is known, based on research, about selected policy issues in the field of education.

The series was designed for rapid consultation “on the run” by busy senior decision-makers in Ministries of Education. These people rarely have time to read lengthy research reports, to attend conferences and seminars, or to become engaged in extended scholarly debates with educational policy research specialists.

The booklets have been (a) focused on policy topics that the Academy considers to be of high priority across many Ministries of Education – in both developed and developing countries, (b) structured for clarity – containing an introductory overview, a research-based discussion of around ten key issues considered to be critical to the topic of the booklet, and references that provide supporting evidence and further reading related to the discussion of issues, (c) restricted in length – requiring around 30-45 minutes of reading time; and (d) sized to fit easily into a jacket pocket – providing opportunities for readily accessible consultation inside or outside the office.

The authors of the series were selected by the International Academy of Education because of their expertise concerning the booklet topics, and also because of their recognized ability to communicate complex research findings in a manner that can be readily understood and used for policy purposes.

The booklets will appear first in English, and shortly afterwards in French and Spanish. Plans are being made for translations into other languages.

Four booklets will be published each year and made freely available for download from the web site of the International Institute for Educational Planning. A limited printed edition will also be prepared shortly after electronic publication.

This booklet

This booklet is about «school-based management» – a field that has become a very popular movement over the past decade. But what exactly is school-based management? Where has it been implemented – and with what success? How is it connected with decentralization, and to what extent is it embedded within certain political and/or ideological preferences and orientations? What contextual conditions and capacity building programmes are required in order for it to be implemented successfully? Is there any evidence that it has a positive impact upon student learning – in either developed or developing countries? These are some of the important policy questions that have been addressed by this issue of the Education Policy Booklet Series.

The booklet addresses these questions by bringing forward a set of propositions about school-based management – and then seeking to clarify these on the basis of research and accumulated professional experience. The main objective of the discussion has been to provide senior-decision makers with sound foundation knowledge about the key concepts and related research in this area so that they can engage in informed debate on whether or not school-based management has been a “success” – or whether it is just another passing fashion in the field of educational administration.

The initial applications of school-based management occurred in Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand. Many governments and agencies associated with developing countries have also become increasingly interested in this management approach as they seek to explore alternatives for placing educational resources, decision-making, and responsibilities “closer to the action” – and at a distance from the control of centralized authorities.

One of the important messages in this booklet is that school-based management is not a “silver bullet” that is capable of solving all problems in the management of school systems. However, when implemented under the appropriate capacity building conditions, and in the context of an allocation of responsibilities among school-system levels that is sensitive to local contexts, it does offer one of several strategies that appear to have a positive and measurable impact upon student learning outcomes.

Brian J. Caldwell

was Professor and Dean of Education at the University of Melbourne for over a decade. He initially graduated in science from the University of Melbourne and then pursued doctoral studies in educational administration at the University of Alberta. He is a Fellow of the Australian College of Education, and in 1994 he was awarded the Gold Medal of the Australian Council of Educational Administration for his contributions to research and teaching. He has undertaken research projects in many countries and for a variety of agencies including OECD, UNESCO, the World Bank, and the Asian Development Bank. His extensive writings in the field of educational administration have helped guide major educational reforms in a number of countries.

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Jointly published by:

*The International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP)
7-9 rue Eugène Delacroix
75116 Paris
France*

and:

*The International Academy of Education (IAE)
Palais des Académies
1, rue Ducale
1000 Brussels
Belgium*

Design and layout by: Sabine Lebeau

Printed by: Stedi Média

© UNESCO 2005

ISBN: 92-803-1278-2

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What is school based management?

School-based management is the systematic decentralization to the school level of authority and responsibility to make decisions on significant matters related to school operations within a centrally determined framework of goals, policies, curriculum, standards, and accountability.

It seems that the governments of every nation want to see the transformation of schools. Transformation has been achieved when significant, systematic, and sustained change has occurred, resulting in improved outcomes for all students in all settings, thus making a contribution to the social and economic well-being of a nation. School-based management is invariably proposed as one strategy to achieve the transformation of schools.

School-based management has been institutionalized in places like England, where more than 25,000 schools have had experience with the practice for more than a decade; or like New Zealand or Victoria, Australia or in several large school systems in Canada and the United States, where there has been experience for similar lengths of time. The practice seems irreversible in these settings. An indication of the scale and scope of interest in school-based management was provided at the 3rd APEC Education Ministerial Meeting in Santiago, Chile in April 2004. APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation) is a network of 21 economies that together contain about one-third of the

world's population. The theme of the meeting was "quality in education" and governance was one of four sub-themes. Particular attention was given to decentralization. Ministers endorsed school-based management as a strategy in educational reform but also endorsed aspects of centralization, such as frameworks for accountability. They acknowledged that arrangements in different economies should vary, reflecting the uniqueness of each setting.

School-based management has many shades of meaning. It has been implemented in different ways and for different reasons and at different rates in different settings. Even the more fundamental concepts of "school" and "management" are different, as are the cultures and values that underpin the efforts of policy makers and practitioners. However, the common ground in all places where school-based management has been implemented is that there has been an increase in authority and responsibility at the school level, but within a centrally-determined framework that ensures that a sense of system is sustained.

An important implication is that school leaders should have the capacity to make decisions on significant matters related to school operations and acknowledge and take account of the elements in a centrally-determined framework that applies to all schools in the system.

Emergence of three major reforms

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- ***Systems differ in the kinds of decisions that have been decentralized and in the scope and specificity of the centrally-determined frameworks within which they shall operate.***
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School-based management has been evident in policy and practice for more than three decades to the point that there are now few nations that have not moved down this track. Indeed, by the start of the 21st century, there seemed to be three major tracks for change in systems of education: the building of systems of self-managing schools (school-based management), an unrelenting focus on learning outcomes, and the creation of schools for a knowledge society and global economy (Caldwell & Spinks, 1998). However, no system of education seems to remain at the same point along these tracks for very long.

An important implication is that school leaders should have the capacity to adjust to the changing scope of school-based management and must be ready to respond to central initiatives as these may be determined from time to time at the national, state / province, or district levels.

Tensions between centralization and decentralization

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- ***Centralization and decentralization are in tension, with centralization indicated when control, uniformity, and efficiency are preferred, and decentralisation indicated when freedom, differentiation, and responsiveness are preferred.***
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The challenge is to achieve a balance of centralization and decentralization, depending on what values are preferred or are required and the capacities of people at different levels to carry out their respective functions.

Some practices are similar, but conceptually different to decentralization. Notable among these are déconcentration or dispersion that involve moving people who previously worked at a central location, such as a capital city, to another location, such as a region or a province or a city, closer to the action. Under these arrangements, power, authority, responsibility, and influence can remain just as centralized as before. The advantages of déconcentration may lie in control in the gathering of intelligence about conditions in the field and efficiency in direction and support to schools.

Forces driving the move to school-based management include demand for less control and uniformity and an associated demand for greater freedom and differentiation, interest in reducing the size and therefore the cost of maintaining a large central bureaucracy, commitment to empowerment of the community, and desire to achieve higher levels of professionalism at the school level.

An important implication is that schools leaders should be comfortable in operating in a political climate that invariably accompanies the shifting balance of centralization and decentralization and the values that underpin such a shift, but acknowledge and draw on the capacity of central units, however dispersed, to provide support.

A contentious issue in different political contexts

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- ***School-based management has been contentious because different driving forces have shaped policy, and these have often reflected or have been alleged to reflect political preference or ideological orientation.***
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School-based management that has been driven by concern for empowerment of the community and enhancement of the profession has often been associated with governments of the left. School-based management that has been driven by an interest in greater freedom or more differentiation has often been associated with governments of the right, with school-based management sometimes seen as a manifestation of efforts to create a market among schools in systems of public education.

School-based management is often contentious in the early stages of adoption, but it invariably gains acceptance after a period of time to the point that few stakeholders seek a return to a more centralized approach in school operations. There are, however, some noteworthy exceptions, particularly in the case of Hong Kong in China. The School Management Initiative (SMI) in the early 1990s was presented as an initiative in school-based management but adoption was slow, especially in the aided sector, where it was seen by many to be more constraining than empowering. Leung (2003) concluded that “the aims of the government’s decentralization reform were to strengthen control and to ensure educational quality through management techniques. That is, “quality” was

defined in terms of an efficient use of resources, output assessment, performance indicators, and external evaluation. Neither a distribution of authority nor an empowerment of the stakeholders was its main goal". The reform remains contentious in Hong Kong.

In the final analysis, even though other driving forces may have been at work, a critical criterion for judging the effectiveness of reform that includes school-based management is the extent to which it leads to or is associated with the achievement of improved educational outcomes, including higher levels of student achievement, however measured. In recent times, there has been an alignment of views that a primary purpose for school-based management is the improvement of educational outcomes and, for this reason, most governments have included it in their policies for educational reform.

An important implication is that school leaders should ensure that the attention of the school community (including staff) is focused unrelentingly on learning outcomes for students and that this must remain of central concern even though the notion of school-based management is often highly contentious.

The search for evidence

Until recently there has been little evidence that school-based management has had either a direct or an indirect effect on educational outcomes.

Critics have frequently seized on this finding. However, much of the early research was drawing on information or opinion from systems where impact on outcomes was never a primary or even a secondary purpose. This was particularly the case when school-based management was implemented as a strategy for dismantling large, costly, and unresponsive central bureaucracies or as a strategy to empower the community and the professional. Even when impact on outcomes became a primary purpose it was difficult to draw conclusions on impact because of the weak database on student achievement.

A review of research (Caldwell, 2002) suggests that there have been three generations of studies and it is only in the third that evidence of impact on outcomes has emerged, and then only when certain conditions are fulfilled. The first generation was in times when impact on outcomes was not a primary or even secondary purpose. The second generation was when such purposes may have been to the fore but the database was weak. The third, emerging in the late 1990s and gathering momentum in the early 2000s, coincides with a pre-eminent concern for learning outcomes and the development of a strong database.

An important implication is that school leaders should be aware that self-management does not necessarily have an impact on the learning outcomes of students and they should make every effort to ensure that mechanisms for making the connection are in place in different areas of school operations.

6 Applications in developing countries

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- ***Many of the best examples of impact on learning may be found in developing nations.***
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The author observed this at first hand in Indonesia when invited to serve as international evaluator of a pilot project in 79 schools in three provinces funded by UNESCO, UNICEF, and the Government of Indonesia. The project was known as “Creating Learning Communities for Children”. School-based management was just one of four strategies that involved:

1. Providing each of the 79 schools with a small budget,
2. conducting professional development programs for teachers on new approaches to curriculum and teaching,
3. engaging in community development to encourage parents to support their schools, and
4. re-invigorating the school experience for students, or expressing it more bluntly, to make it worthwhile for them to come to school, in an initiative known as “Active Joyful Effective Learning” (AJEL).

Dramatic improvements were evident within 12 months, notably in rates of attendance and in test results.

Illustration on a larger scale is furnished in the report of the Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education (LLECE, 2002). A qualitative study of schools with outstanding results in seven Latin American countries concluded that success was underpinned by the quality of school-level management and the effectiveness of classroom teaching practice. It was concluded that

“In terms of links with the central administrative level, it should be noted that these schools base a good part of their success [on their] autonomous operation, taking advantage of trends at the central level to move toward increasingly more decentralized administrative and pedagogical models” (LLECE, 2002).

An important implication is that school leaders should focus on the core business of the school in their efforts to bring about improved learning outcomes for students, and this includes curriculum, pedagogy, professional development, and building the support of the community.

Linkages with learning outcomes

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- ***Recent research has shown the direct and indirect links between school-based management and learning outcomes.***
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Recent studies (Caldwell & Hayward, 1998; Caldwell & Spinks, 1998; Fullan & Watson, 2000; Ouchi & Segal, 2003; Volansky & Friedman, 2003) have highlighted the importance of local decision-making being pre-eminently concerned with learning and teaching and the support of learning and teaching, especially in building the capacity of staff to design and deliver a curriculum and pedagogy that meets the needs of students, taking account of priorities in the local setting, including a capacity to identify needs and monitor outcomes. Also evident is the importance of building the capacity of the community to support the efforts of schools. Expressed another way, the introduction of school-based management may have no impact on learning unless these measures, broadly described as capacity building and capacity utilisation, have been successful.

At a macro-level, international studies of student achievement such as TIMSS and TIMSS-R and PISA and PISA+ have confirmed the importance of a balance of centralization and decentralization, with a relatively high level of school-based management being one element of decentralization, including local decision-making on matters concerned with personnel, professionalism, monitoring of outcomes, and the building of community support.

These reflect the importance of intellectual capital and social capital in building a system of self-managing schools. The building of intellectual capital is an instance of capac-

ity building, considered in more detail in proposition 11. Social capital refers to the building of mutually supportive relationships among school, home, community, church, business, and industry, and other agencies in the public and private sectors.

Experience suggests that, no matter how strong the strategic intention, it will take many years for a shift in the balance of centralization and decentralization in favour of the latter to have impact on outcomes. It is one thing to pass legislation shifting power, authority, responsibility, and influence from one level to another – such a shift is a change in structure. It is another thing to build capacity to have the desired impact on learning and to change the culture at all levels.

An important implication is that school leaders should ensure that they and their colleagues are up-to-date with their knowledge of good practice in school improvement, and that the building of social and intellectual capital lies at the heart of the work of senior leaders in the school.

8 Measurement of impact on learning outcomes

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- ***Measurement of outcomes is central to success in the implementation of school-based management.***
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Greater attention to the measurement of outcomes is invariably an aspect of school-based management in recent times. This has not always been the case, as evident in the early experience with the practice cited above. In one sense, the heightened attention to the measure of outcomes is a feature of school reform in every nation, regardless of the extent to which there has been a focus on school-based management. On the other hand, however, a focus on outcomes is an aspect of accountability that invariably accompanies the introduction of the practice. Expressed simply, in return for gaining greater authority to manage its own affairs, a school should be expected to show how well it is doing in addressing the goals of the school system.

The case for school-based management in recent times is invariably cast in terms of impact on learning, especially in the face of evidence of how the link to learning can be made. If there is to be success for all students in all settings, then schools must have a capacity to measure how well students are doing at any point in time, determine what learning experiences are necessary to ensure success, and then measure and report on the outcomes. Benchmarking the performance of schools in similar socio-economic circumstances is common practice in systems where school-based management has been introduced. Teachers are becoming skilful in the analysis of data about student performance, within their own schools, and across different schools in systems where

benchmarking has been introduced. In this respect, the professional in education is developing the same capacity as the professional in health in an outcomes-oriented data-driven approach to their work.

The implication for leaders in schools and school systems is that building a capacity for measurement of outcomes is important if the links between school-based management and learning are to be made.

Change at the centre and in schools

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- ***The change in culture that is required at the centre is just as powerful as the change in culture that is required in schools.***
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While an initiative in school-based management is usually an initiative of government and the most senior leaders in a school system, personnel at the centre frequently resist the change, for they perceive and indeed experience a loss of power, authority, responsibility, and influence. Forces that may drive a return to centralization may soon appear. This need not occur if there is appreciation that the change may call for an increase in power, authority, responsibility, and influence in matters related to the centrally-determined framework of goals, policies, curriculum, standards, and accountabilities. There remains a need to provide strong support for schools, and this is often best done at the regional or district level through déconcentration and dispersion of non-school based personnel. Building capacity at the centre to do these things well is just as important as building capacity at the school level.

An important implication is that leaders at the central level should have a deep understanding of the nature of school-based management and of the links to learning that are required for school improvement to occur, acknowledging that this means the building of different capacities for direction and support rather than a loss of status.

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Decentralization of budget to the school level

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- ***An important feature of school-based management in most school systems is the decentralization of budget to the school level.***
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The argument in favour of decentralizing a significant amount of the system budget to the school level is that there is a unique mix of student learning needs in the school and that calls for a unique mix of resources of all kinds. It is no longer possible for such a mix to be determined at the centre, whether it be for the standard allocation of staff or the determination of how money should be spent on supplies, equipment, and services. Some school systems have decentralized to the school level decisions related to the allocation of more than 90 per cent of the state budget for public school education. The challenge under these circumstances is to design an appropriate resource allocation model that will distribute resources in a fair and transparent way, ensuring that schools have a “global budget” that enables them to resource efforts to meet the unique mix of local learning needs. This task may take several years, with continual refinement based on experience and changes in policy. A resource allocation model usually takes account of the number of students, level of schooling, special education needs, and the location of the school. There is considerable experience in several nations in doing this work (Ross & Levacic, 1999).

An important implication is that leaders at the central level should develop the capacity to determine an allocation mechanism that delivers resources to schools in a

manner that reflects the unique mix of needs that may be found in different schools. School leaders will develop the capacity for plan-driven budgeting that ensures high priority learning needs are supported and centrally determined priorities are addressed.

Capacity building requirements

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- ***Capacity building at the local level is a key theme in successful experience of school-based management.***
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For teachers, this has taken the form of professional development that deals with such topics as needs assessment, curriculum design, research-based pedagogy, and continuous monitoring. For principals and other leaders at the school level, these topics are also relevant, but others are essential, including strategic leadership, human resource management, policy making, planning, resource allocation, community building, and boundary spanning – between schools and other organisations in the private and public sectors that can support the work of schools including those in health. Building these capacities is important for creating what some have called a “new professionalism” in education that is research-based, data-oriented, team-focused, and outcomes-driven. In these respects, the education profession is taking on the characteristics of the medical profession, where continuous lifelong learning is an expectation and a pre-condition for accreditation and re-accreditation.

These needs give rise to the new field of knowledge management in schools. This refers to building the intellectual capital of the school, and involves the creation, dissemination and utilisation of professional knowledge that takes account of a rapidly expanding knowledge base, and the need for access to that base in a timely and easily understandable manner. Extensive use of information and communications technology and the design of an intranet at the school level will aid the effort. Postgraduate programs in knowledge management are now emerging to take

their place with programs in human resource development, financial management, curriculum, and pedagogy. Universities have an important role in building capacity and undertaking research on the processes and outcomes of school-based management. These are best conceived as partnerships with schools and school systems.

An important implication is that school leaders should devote a major part of their work to capacity building in the school and will place a high priority on knowledge management to build the intellectual capital of the school.

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Synergy through networks

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- ***The impact of school-based management across a system of schools is enhanced if powerful networks are established for the creation and dissemination of good practice.***
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The introduction of school-based management has been criticized on the grounds that a sense of system is lost, with schools tending to operate in isolation if not in competition. This need not be the case. To state it more positively, when schools in a system where school-based management has been implemented are working together in powerful networks, the opportunity for impact on learning across the system is enhanced. This is evident in England where there is a high level of school-based management. More than 100 Networked Learning Communities have been established in England by the National College for School Leadership. The experience of secondary schools that have joined the specialist school program is also informative.

More than half of the 3200 secondary schools in England have adopted one of ten specialisms while still addressing the full range of curriculum in the national framework. Specialist schools consistently outperform non-specialist schools and this finding applies in all socio-economic settings. In the most recent study of outcomes (Jesson, 2003), it was found that results for students at specialist schools are improving three times faster than those in other comprehensives, with children of average or below average ability making the greatest progress. Inner-city comprehensives with the highest levels of poverty also

improved more rapidly if they were specialist. The Specialist School Trust provides support to specialist schools through its principal-led networks. A recent report indicates that these networks have been an important factor in achieving the outcomes described above (Prime Ministers Delivery Unit, 2003).

The creation of such networks does not imply that a central authority does not continue to play an important role. It does so through centrally determined frameworks of goals, policies, standards, accountabilities, and support. A combination of a top down or vertically organized system and powerful lateral networks enhances the possibility of transformation, that is, systematic, significant, and sustained change across all schools. According to David Hargreaves (2003): “Knowledge-based networks are not the alternative to existing forms of public provision: they are an essential complement. Rather than being represented by an organizational structure or single policy lever, transformation becomes an “emergent property” of the whole system as it learns to generate, incorporate and adapt to the best of the specific new ideas and practices that get thrown up around it”.

An important implication is that networks of schools have an important role to play in building the capacities described in each of the 12 propositions set out in this paper.

Conclusion

A helpful way to conclude is to see the challenge as one of creating a new kind of education system that suits the 21st century. A recent book on the theme of ‘the adaptive state’ has described the challenge in these terms:

We need new systems capable of continuously reconfiguring themselves to create new sources of public value. This means interactively linking the different layers and functions of governance, not searching for a static blueprint that predefines their relative weight. The central question is not how we can achieve precisely the right balance between different layers – central, regional and local – or between different sectors – public, private and voluntary. Instead, we need to ask How can the system as a whole become more than the sum of its parts? (Bentley & Wilsdon, 2004)

Expressed simply, school-based management is not a “silver bullet” that will deliver the expectations of school reform. When implemented under the right conditions, it is one of several strategies to be addressed simultaneously in a constantly changing mix of strategies that involve different levels of governance in a school system.

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