

# Sorting Out a Sense of Place: School and School Board Relationships in the Midst of School-Based Decision Making

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School districts across the United States are turning to school-based decision making to help reconnect schools with communities (Mertz & Furman, 1997). The belief exists that school-based decision making compels schools to be more responsive to the communities in which they reside. Researchers interested in building community in schools have indicated that particular versions of school-based decision making may lead to the development of community through involvement in school governance (Blackledge, 1995; Bryk, Easton, Kerbow, Rollow, & Sebring, 1993; Driscoll & Kerchner, 1999; Hess, 1995; Mertz & Furman, 1997).

Research conducted on school-based decision making has illustrated three types of decision-making processes. In two of these models, decision

making is simply realigned within the organization and does not meaningfully include community members. For example, in the administrative control model, principals are responsible for decision making and may or may not consult others (Murphy & Beck, 1995; Wohlstetter & Buffet, 1992). In the professional control model, decision making is delegated down the professional hierarchy to teachers (Murphy & Beck, 1995; Ornstein, 1974). Most who believe that school-based decision making can lead to a greater sense of community advocate a community-control model of decision making. The community-control model purportedly “shifts power from professional educators and the board of education to parent and community groups” (Wohlstetter & Odden, 1992, p. 533).

Despite endorsement of the community-control model as being most likely to strengthen school communities, implementation of the model is decidedly problematic. Even under the community-control model, school professionals maintain primary control over decisions. Chicago’s reform, considered an example of the community-control model, suggests that community members defer to professionals and act as “monitors rather than initiators of the school program” (Merz & Furman, 1997, p. 52). Further, parents or community representatives on the councils tend to be “traditional supporters of schools” (Malen & Ogawa, 1988, p. 260) and may not represent the diversity of subcommittees represented in the school (Merz & Furman, 1997).

In this article, we illustrate that another impediment to the formation of community with the community-control model of school-based decision making is the requirements placed on schools by outside influences. The placement of schools within larger districts, cities, counties, and states makes them vulnerable to these larger arenas. The relationship between the schools and these broader jurisdictions has inherent tension. This tension may hinder the ability of schools to establish community or sense of place.

Proponents of community and community-control models assume concentricity to communities, that as community size decreases, communities become more stable and insular. Thus, the school community, being a relatively small community, can become stable and achieve a high degree of closure if those within the school operate in prescribed ways (Coleman, 1990). This article indicates that school communities are eccentric in that the school site is never fully closed to these larger and ever-widening communities in which it resides.

In presenting this argument, we discuss the results of a study investigating the relationship between schools and school boards. This study involved two data-collection phases. In the first phase of the study, we interviewed principals about their relationships and their schools’ relation-

ships with the school boards and the role school-based decision making played in these relationships. In the second phase of the study, we focused on one school district that had adopted community control school-based decision making to more closely examine the intersections of communities.

### The Extant Literature

The failure of systemic reform efforts has led to an increase in school-site reform initiatives. Researchers such as Chubb and Moe (1990) have argued that due to systemic constraints, educational success can only be obtained by focusing on individual schools. According to Chubb's research, the more influence local school professionals and community members have over the hiring and firing of teachers, curriculum decisions, instructional methods, and disciplinary policy, the more effectively organized schools are likely to be (Chubb, as cited in Brandt, 1990–1991). This research assumes two things: that school professionals and community members will be given the authority to influence these decisions given predominate governance structures and that governance structures will not undergo a counterproductive shift in response to this influence. Given recent research on school-based decision making and on school board members' relationships with superintendents, it appears unlikely that these assumptions will hold true in school-based managed schools.

### Decentralized Decision Making

Centralized reform efforts have a poor track record as instruments for educational improvement. Historically, "top-down, politically driven education reform movements are addressed primarily to restructuring. They have little to say about educating" (Goodlad, 1992, p. 238). The failure of systemic reform efforts has led to an increase in school-site reform initiatives. Chubb and Moe (1990) argued that due to systemic constraints, educational success can only be obtained by a focus on individual schools. Thus far, however, the success of these school-site initiatives has only been speculative.

As Elmore (1993) argued, debates about centralization and decentralization in American education have been primarily about who should have access to and influence over decisions. Reviews of the literature on school-based decision making indicate that seldom if ever does school-based decision making actually mean real control over the core elements of the organization. In most instances, school-based decision making means an incremental shift of responsibility from central administration to the school site on some limited set of dimensions.

For example, Wohlstetter and Odden (1992) found that school-based decision making tends to (a) be a popular reform that results in little substantive change, (b) be created without clear goals for student learning, (c) lack any accountability mechanisms that assess its performance with respect to goals and organizational improvement, and (d) be caught in a state–district policy context that often sends mixed signals or contradictory support to schools. The idea that school-based decision making involves decentralization of authority and responsibility to the school masks considerable disagreement over who is the object of decentralization and what decisions are to be made at the school-site level (Clune & White, 1988; Malen, Ogawa, & Krantz, 1990).

Despite these considerable problems, many continue to believe that school-based decision making holds some promise for improving schools and building community. Wohlstetter, Smyer, and Mohrman (1994) concluded that school-based decision making can be effective at improving schools when a high involvement model is implemented. Expanding Lawler's (1986) work on organizations in the private sector, Wohlstetter et al. (1994) concluded that four conditions are necessary to get school-level participants actively involved. These conditions include empowerment, knowledge that enables employees and community members to understand and contribute to the organization, information about the performance of the organization, and rewards for high performance.

Also, as mentioned previously, Driscoll and Kerchner (1999) indicated that school-based decision making holds promise for improving community and building social capital if a community-control model is implemented. Their argument concluded that if a school-based decision making model is used that authentically engages community members in the decisions impacting the school and its curriculum, social capital will be built resulting in school improvement. On the basis of Coleman's (1990) work on social capital, three conditions must be present for community and social capital to occur: a high degree of closure in the relationships among different kinds of actors in the school, stability among the actors in the school, and group norms that reinforce the public-good aspect of the school. When these conditions are present, social capital will result, leading to high organizational productivity.

### *School Boards*

To compound the school-based decision making issue, research on school boards has shown that boards operate from a political/self-interest rather than a community/public-good model (Greene, 1992). This means

that rather than deferring to the school community's decisions, board members respond to the demands of individual parents and members of the much broader district community by actively engaging in school management. Also, the extant literature on school board and superintendent relationships documents an endemic tension (Feuerstein & Opfer, 1998; Tallerico, 1989). This tension is due in part to the disequilibrium between lay control and the power of professional expertise and also to the ambiguous nature of policy making and administrative functions in educational governance (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970; Tallerico, 1989; Tucker & Zeigler, 1980; Zeigler, Kehoe, & Reisman, 1985).

In addition to the tension intrinsic to the school-site/school-district relationship, conflict often arises between the school district and the state, and this conflict directly impacts the school site. Wohlstetter and Buffet (1992) found specific to school-based decision making that district-initiated programs often conflict with state rules and regulations and that state-initiated reforms, even when targeting school-site implementation, often contradict school district policy.

The uncertainty of school-site decisions, combined with the political nature of schools and the tension between political control and professional expertise in the superintendent-board relationship does not bode well for school-community and district-community relationships. Therefore, we ask three questions:

1. What is the relationship between school communities and school boards?
2. What role does school-based decision making play in this relationship?
3. More specifically, do school boards impede the formation and maintenance of school communities and, therefore, the possibility of social capital?

## Methods

As stated previously, data collection for this study took place in two phases. The first phase involved an investigation of the relationship between schools and school boards that relied on perceptions of principals; the second phase took a closer look at one school district that had adopted a community-control model of school-based decision making. To conceptualize each data-collection phase of the study, we relied on an interpretive orientation. On the basis of Patton's (1990) work, the interpretive framework is "notably suited for grasping the complexity of the

phenomena we investigate" (p. 216). Erickson (1986) indicated that the primary question in this form of research is "what do these happenings mean to the people engaged in them?" (p. 124). We, therefore, wanted to gain "immediate and local meaning of actions as defined from the actors' point of view" (p. 119). We also felt, again following Erickson, the "need for specific understanding through documentation of concrete details of practice" (p. 121). Because of this, in-depth interviews were our primary source of data collection throughout the study. In the second phase of the data collection, these interviews were supplemented by newspaper accounts and available documents.

### *Participants*

In the first phase of the data collection, we conducted in-depth interviews of seven Georgia principals, six men and one woman. Their ages ranged from 42 to 55 years old. The principals' experiences in school administration were no less than 10 years. All were White. Six were high school administrators, and one was a middle school administrator. Four of the principals worked in systems that were considered to be large, metropolitan school systems, and three of the principals interviewed worked in suburban or rural school systems. The sample selected was emergent in that principals identified one another as possible participants.

We selected the school district for the second phase of the data collection based on input from principals participating in the first phase of the study. These principals identified their systems as having district-wide policies of school-based decision making, as having implemented a community-control model of school-based decision making in their own schools, and as having had significant interactions with their school board. Within the chosen district, we interviewed four school board members and conducted one additional principal interview. The principal was a male high school principal who was between the age of 45 and 55 years old. Of the four school board members, three were men and one was a woman. One of the men was African American, and all others were White. Their ages ranged from 45 to 70 years old. One board member was retired, one worked part time, and the rest held full-time employment in the community. Two of the board members had education-related professional experience.

### *The Community Control District*

The school district chosen in Phase 2 had a total population of 149,967 and a school-age population of 24,229. Its 41 schools had approximately 61% of their students eligible for free lunch. It had a district-wide policy of

school-based decision making. Each school had to constitute a school-site decision making council known as the *leadership team*. This team could have, at minimum, three community members: two parents and one business community representative, who were to be elected. The function of the leadership team was to make decisions regarding the most effective and efficient allocation of the school's resources, including land, labor, and capital. Other decision areas also included in the charge were instruction and duty assignments. The teams were to meet monthly and were encouraged to form subcommittees and task forces as a way to recruit other teachers, parents, students, and business representatives to assist in addressing solutions to specific needs.

### *Data Analysis*

The data from the interviews were analyzed with Boyatzis's (1998) thematic approach. Themes were developed that "at the minimum describe and organize possible observations and at the maximum interpret aspects of the phenomenon" (p. vii). These themes led us to an initial understanding of the relationship between school communities and school boards and the role that school-based decision making may play in this relationship. In our presentation of these findings, we include quotations and examples that are representative of responses. These quotes and examples are not the entirety of the data available.

## Findings

### *The School Board's Relationship to the School-Site Community*

*Principals' perspectives.* All eight principals interviewed felt their relationships with school board members were positive. For example, principals indicated that "I feel that my relationship with our local board is very good" and "I know most of them personally and have had opportunities to work with them in the community." The principals often contacted board members to gain support, and this contributed to a positive relationship. One principal stated, "I have the kind of relationship that I would not hesitate to pick up the phone and call each one to ask for help or a question for clarification." This same principal related an incident where he sought to hire an athletic director. He stated, "I telephoned each board member to ask for their support for my recommendation. They responded by voting unanimously to hire the candidate."

Despite the overwhelming perception that the relationship was positive, principals later in the interviews indicated a number of negative aspects to the school board–school relationship. One principal described board members as using schools experimentally for their specific educational and personal agendas. He stated, concerning a board-imposed program, “I think this is coming from a political need, and we [the schools] are formatting programs.” Three out of eight principals further indicated that they experienced negative relationships with one or two board members but that the negative relationships never expanded to include the entire school board. One principal stated, “Some of the board members are good friends, and two are just okay. One board member is terrible, and he is trouble.” Another principal remarked that “Overall, the relationships are good. However, there is a bubble every now and then with one board member.”

Finally, all principals indicated that school visits by board members could be intrusive. For example, principals mentioned either surprise visits or scheduled visits where school board members “walk the halls and point out things that we’re doing wrong” as having a negative impact on school morale. Thus, although principals characterized the relationship between their schools and their school boards as positive, these relationships did have their trials. Primarily, schools were often impinged on by the actions of one or more board members operating from specific political agendas.

*School board members’ perspectives.* When the school board members were asked to describe their relationships with schools, each board member without hesitation responded that the relationships were positive or excellent. One board member stated that he tried to be open with the relationship “so that principals will come to him with their problems.” Another school board member elaborated that if her relationship was very good with the principal, she would call him or her to give the principal a “heads up” about a problem that has arisen.

The positive relationship that board members felt they had with schools did not always play out in constructive or unobtrusive ways for the school. Only one board member interviewed indicated that he did not contact schools about parent or constituent complaints. All the other board members contacted the school either because they believed they should give the principal a heads up or because they felt they must to serve their constituents.

For example, both a principal and board members related an incident where a board member intervened in a school decision for a parent and it resulted in significant implications for the school and the district. A teacher

in a high school International Baccalaureate class had offered one point extra credit if students returned all four progress reports during the year. A student had failed to return one of the progress reports, and the one point extra credit was the difference between an A and a B. The student and his parents appealed the B to the teacher, principal, superintendent of instruction, and finally, the superintendent. Each appeal upheld the grade. The parent contacted a board member about the grade. The board member brought the matter to the board, and the board called the teacher before the board to question her grading practices. The principal accompanied the teacher and spoke in support of her decision and the conclusion of the formal appeal process. Because neither the grade nor the appeal process violated board policy, the board was compelled to uphold the grade. However, the board member who originally brought the complaint proposed a new district-wide grading policy that forbade the use of extra credit in high school classes.

Another common example of contact given by board members included parental complaints involving a teacher. A board member justified calling a school about these incidents by explaining that as a former teacher, she wanted the principal to know if something had happened that would jeopardize a teacher's employment, especially if a parent had accused the teacher of unprofessionalism.

It was clear from the interviews with board members that contact with schools about specific problems or decisions was not a result of unclear roles or procedures. All the board members could articulate their role in policy making. They further indicated that when they became aware of a problem at a school, they should have contacted the superintendent and let her or him handle the situation. The following were some of the reasons given for not following these procedures: "Often I feel like it is something I can handle with out bothering the superintendent," "The superintendent is very busy," "I can get things taken care of faster if I do it directly myself," and "There are some things the principal should know first." It is obvious from the interviews that they often stepped out of their prescribed role and circumvented district procedures.

One way board members felt they maintained positive relationships with the schools and still served their constituents was by making school visits. A school board member commented, "I find principals like to have school board members in their schools. I try to maintain excellent relationships with principals, and it is very important to work with principals one on one." This school board member visited all of the schools in the school district at least three times per year. He had a goal of making 129 visits to the schools in his district in that school year. Most members stated that they visited schools seven to eight times per month. School board mem-

bers also indicated various levels of involvement in classrooms in the schools. School board members gave examples of this involvement, which included reading to elementary students on a regular basis and attendance at the various special programs at the schools such as Quiz Bowls, Black History Month celebrations, graduations, and other very visible school-related events.

*School Boards and Community-Control  
School-Based Decision Making*

*Principals' perspectives.* Five of the eight principals who were interviewed revealed that board members had overturned their school-based decisions concerning student issues (discipline and grading), financial disbursement, and personnel. For example, one board member overrode decisions regarding class assignments for a student based on the parent's complaint.

In another incident, the school-based decision-making team became aware of a financial shortfall in athletics. The decision-making team decided to solicit area businesses to donate funds to support their sports program. The solicitation was made, and they raised a significant amount of money. The decision-making team set up procedures for how the money was to be divided among the school's teams and gave preference to historically underfunded sports (primarily women's sports). When the school submitted a request to release the funds to be spent, it came to the attention of the board. The school board became upset that the school had solicited funds for athletics and did not agree with the way the money was to be spent. As a result, they came up with their own disbursement plan for the money.

One of the primary reasons school-based decisions were overturned by boards appeared to be complaints from parents or community members in their district. One principal responded, "He [the board member] never called the superintendent. ... He always called me when he had a complaint." Another principal related an instance where a sign-in procedure had been developed to enhance school safety. A school board member, who did not represent her school's district, contacted the principal to "find out why certain sign-in procedures were used for youth ministers." Despite being told the reason for the policy, how it had been developed, and that it applied to all visitors, the school board member continued to question why the youth ministers were not permitted to "roam freely around the cafeteria during the three lunch periods." Thus, the principals' examples indicate that school-based decisions were vulnerable not only to indi-

vidual board member issues, but also, because boards act as conduits for district-wide community interests, they became vulnerable to these complaints and issues.

*School board members' perspectives.* School board members believed that school-based decision making gave them more freedom to become involved in school-site problems. One board member revealed that she felt freer to directly call schools under school-based management about problems that arose. She stated that under school-based decision making, schools "are more responsive and responsible. They know about decisions and usually know about the problems before I make the call."

One board member who was extremely visible in the schools (he made 88 school visits in 6 months) assumed the role of being proactive and supportive when issues arose in school-based managed schools. This board member communicated to all of the schools in the school system, not just those in his immediate district. He also "helps with the solutions" to problems being addressed in school-based managed schools.

Only one of the board members did not exercise such direct involvement with the decisions made at the schools. This school board member made it clear to us that he or she followed protocol by providing the parents with information about how to properly exercise the chain of command within the school system, beginning with the teacher or principal. It was this school board member's belief that their role was to provide a framework for school-based management to work, not to micromanage the schools.

A perplexing issue that emerged in the interviews with school board members concerned the amount of decision making authority granted to schools. Despite having a policy that devolved most decisions to the school-based team and despite the fact that most schools in their district operated within a community-control model, school board members did not uniformly believe in this approach. For example, a board member declared "many decisions cannot be made at the school level." He cited examples of disciplinary issues and curricular decisions that need to be made at the board level "in order to maintain uniformity and consistency across schools." He further indicated that the board should make most decisions and that decisions made at the school level were really secondary decisions carrying out board decisions. For clarification of this statement, he described the hiring of teachers as an example of secondary decision making of schools. This board member stated that the board should screen a teacher and determine if the teacher is qualified before the school makes the decision to hire him or her. In some instances, then, board members

acted on their beliefs about school-based decision making rather than on procedures outlined in policy that they had themselves passed.

*The Superintendent as an Intermediary*

*Principals' perspectives.* An unexpected finding from these interviews was the important role that the school superintendent played in facilitating a positive relationship between the school community and the school board. Each principal who was interviewed indicated that the superintendent was responsible for establishing the parameters for the school board members. Four of the eight principals responded that the superintendent explicitly established the role of the school board. One principal stated, "He [the superintendent] works very forthrightly with them to reinforce their professionalism," and another principal replied "the superintendent made it plain that board members don't get involved in local school issues. He keeps them [the board] informed and directed."

Three of the eight principals indicated that they were uncertain of the superintendent's role with respect to the school board members. The principals who experienced inappropriate inquiries from school board members also had a superintendent in a transitional phase. For example, one superintendent was an interim superintendent, one was newly appointed to the system, and one was in his last few months of a nonrenewed contract. One principal responded that she "never heard the superintendent describe how he viewed the board's relationship with principals or if he thought they [board members] should contact principals about parental complaints." Another principal stated "the superintendent has to be strong. The superintendent was weak so the board members set the agenda for the meetings and began talking about principals in their executive sessions."

These "weak," or less directive, superintendents could have a negative impact on the relationship between the school and the board. In the chosen school district, the principals interviewed discussed the superintendent as being a pawn of the board. At the start of this study, their superintendent was on interim status. The principals related that the board chose to hire the interim superintendent on a permanent basis because that superintendent did not interfere with any of the board's actions.

One principal explained that when he thought about the relationship between the board and the superintendent, the ideal relationship would be one of equal status. That is, the superintendent would bring professional expertise to the relationship, and the board would bring the values and norms of the community. In this principal's ideal scenario, each perspec-

tive would be given equal weight in policy decisions. However, he felt that the board members did not respect the educational expertise of the new superintendent and that the superintendent was, in fact, chosen for the position because the board wanted more control. He stated, "the superintendent is at the whim of the board."

Less directive school superintendents created an atmosphere within the districts that allows school board interference in school-based decisions: "They [the board] look for problems, and then the superintendent reacts to the problem. The superintendent doesn't bring problems to the board; it is the other way around." The principals revealed that if the superintendent did not take an active role in giving the board direction (i.e., bringing problems to the board for them to work on), the board would then become involved in school-based decisions.

*School board members' perspectives.* The school board members in this study did not allude to the superintendent's role as an intermediary but instead had assorted views on the superintendent's role in the school district. For example, the female school board member who was also a retired teacher responded that the superintendent's role in relationships between the board and the school was to protect the principal. She further explained that the superintendent "should make sure the principal is being treated fairly and that they aren't being harassed by board members."

Another school board member implied that the superintendent's role was as a go-between for board members and schools. He elaborated that the superintendent was responsible for things that occurred at the school level and for carrying out policies. These board members' perceptions coincided with those of principals from their district in that none of the board members indicated an active decision-making or goal-setting role for the superintendent. Rather, board member comments indicated that they considered the superintendents' role to be carrying out the wishes of the board.

## Discussion

Driscoll and Kerchner (1999) suggested that school-based decision making can lead to community and social capital in schools, that schools can gain a sense of place through community building. As we discussed earlier in this article, Driscoll and Kerchner argued that for a school community to create social capital, there must be a degree of closure in the relationships among different kinds of actors, stability in the social structure, and norms

that reinforce the public-good aspect of group relationships. We believe the perceptions of principals and school board members indicate serious problems for the development of closure, stability, and shared norms that will lead to this definition of community and social capital. Also, perhaps the concept of community as closed is inappropriate and misleading for school contexts.

Three primary interpretations of our findings support these conclusions. The first interpretation exists in the area of the relationship between school communities and school boards. The responses from each group were similar, but when considered in the context of the examples, a different type of relationship emerged. The principals initially related that their schools' relationship with school board members were more positive than their subsequent examples indicated. We drew three possible conclusions from this. First, the possibility exists that principals were very reluctant to disclose the true nature of their relationships with their boards. To do so may have risked further conflict. Second, school board contact and conflict over decisions may have been so prevalent in the schools that principals would not consider it unusual. Regularity and normalcy of the contact would then be considered positive, and lack of contact would be an indication of negativity.

Third, we believe the inconsistency in principal responses indicates significant role conflict and instability. Principals of school-based managed schools straddle two roles. The first and more traditional role is that of spokesperson and representative for their school and district. In this role, principals are most likely to want to present a positive impression. The second role is that of community member within their school. In this role, they feel protective of the community and impinged on by outside interference.

The demands that are thrust on principals, such as for improved student achievement, safer schools, and teacher accountability, have helped to shape the position as it is perceived today as "an instructional leader, initiator of change, school manager, personnel administrator, problem solver and boundary spanner" (Portin, Shen, & Williams, 1998, p. 2). The results of this study show that community control is a significant contributor to the multiplying and changing role of the principal. As a result of this, the principal's role can be further described as both community member and representative with limitations imposed by local, state, and federal policies and laws (Portin et al., 1998).

This community member-representative, in many circumstances, is forced to function in paradoxical leadership roles: to perform as a leader who complies with and enforces policies and to perform as a leader who embraces school-based decisions. The paradoxical leadership roles would

indicate some instability of relationships (i.e., between the principal and school board, the principal and teachers, the principal and community members, etc). Because the principal is positioned between the school community and the board community (and this position indicates conflict), we conclude that significant differences in norms, values, and objectives exist between these two groups.

Our second interpretation of the perceptions of participants in this study also supports the notion that instability and a lack of norms exist across the two groups. School board members strongly indicated that their relationships with principals were positive or excellent, but their examples of strong relationships pointed to a lack of cognizance concerning the relationship. The board members who were extremely visible in the schools, who directly contacted principals about parental complaints, and who took an active role in the resolution of parent-school problems perceived their relationships with principals to be positive when in actuality, the relationships were one sided. The school board members forced the principals to include them in the decision-making process and, therefore, created tense autocratic relationships, not positive ones.

We believe that some of the variation in these perceived relationships may have been due to differing perceptions of community control and school-based decision making. Dlugosh and Sybouts (1995) indicated that "one of the difficulties of the school reform movement[s] is coming to an agreement about definitions of terms" (p. 318). The principals and school board members indicate interdistrict disagreement over what school-based decision making should look like.

However, another explanation for the variation within school board responses is that they represent a fundamental dissociation between the norms and goals of the school board and those of the school. Researchers have long cited the political nature of school boards (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970; Tallerico, 1989; Tucker & Zeigler, 1980; Zeigler et al., 1985). The elected positions of board members create a susceptibility to self-interest, self-preservation, and competition, all of which are considered antithetical to notions of public good and community. School-based decision making reinforces notions of cooperation and common purpose but, in doing so, increases the disconnection between the school board and the school.

The third interpretation of the perceptions of principals and school board members reveals the lack of closure between the school community and the school board. This lack of closure was evident in two instances: the interference of board members in school decisions and the importance of the superintendent's role. The interference of school board members was an obvious indication that the school community was not

closed. However, the importance of the role of the superintendent, although less obvious, was also a good indicator that the school community was not closed to the outside interests of school board members and the community at large.

The strength of the superintendent is an important component in the degree of closure possible in schools. Logically, school-based decision making may suggest a decreased role for the superintendent; however, we argue that the authority and strength of the superintendent must be maintained. The superintendents must assert themselves as a liaison between board members and individual schools to maintain the integrity of school-based decisions. The strength of the school superintendent determined, in our study, the difference between problem-solving boards and problem-seeking boards, where problem-solving boards were given direction and policy issues to address by the superintendent and problem-seeking boards searched out problems and issues at school sites because of a lack of direction from the superintendent.

Ultimately, the question remains whether school-based management enhances community and, thus, social capital. If social capital and community require closure, stability, and norms that reinforce the public good, as Driscoll and Kerchner (1999) suggested, this study indicates they are not achievable. However, we argue that perhaps the current notion of school-as-community is too narrowly drawn. Community defined by stability, closure, and agreed-on norms does not represent the realities of today's schools and may, therefore, be impossible to obtain. This concentric (i.e., small, closed, and stable) notion of community denies the placement of schools in broader jurisdictional structures (i.e., districts, states, and countries). If schools are to establish community and find their sense of place, they must attend to how they intersect with these broader arenas, and this may require an eccentric (i.e., open, expanding, and fluid) notion of community.

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