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The Control of Public Education
and School Library Media Programs

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ACCORDING TO THE Constitution, individual states have the greatest responsibility for developing programs of support for public education. Obviously, there are many influences other than state governments which control public education in today's society. This control may be direct and somewhat measurable, as in the case of federal funding programs or state certification standards for instructional personnel. The control may also be indirect and more difficult to measure, as citizens exercise their democratic prerogatives in the voting booth or as students and researchers in institutions of higher education generate ideas. School boards of education and superintendents openly control some school policies, while students and teachers may have more subtle influences on policy-making and other processes existent in public schooling. Private foundations, accrediting agencies and associations, interest groups, and publishers, producers and creators of media also have some control over what public education is and will become in this country. The degree to which these and other undefined groups control public education may vary among geographical areas and among periods in time.

Patterns of control have clearly changed within public education over the past few decades, and these changes have significant implications for school library media professionals and their programs. If school library media programs are viewed as systems interacting with other systems,[1] one can become almost overpowered with a sense of bureaucratic hopelessness. On the other hand, if each of these systems is defined and the influences controlling it analyzed, a manageable holistic design emerges and

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some relatively simple solutions to the problems created by bureaucracy may be determined.

The purpose of this paper is to describe some of the major influences controlling public education today, the changes in this control within this century, and the potential impact these controls could have on the development of school library media programs. It would be unrealistic, considering the space available, to analyze critically all the factors which affect school library media programs. Discussion will therefore be limited to patterns of control by local, state, and federal governments; the general public; accreditation and certification agencies; teacher groups; and those members of various groups who propose a more rational management of public education.

CHANGING PATTERNS OF CONTROL

It is not within the scope of this paper to trace in detail the developments of power and control associated with public education; several excellent works exist which offer the reader a wide diversity of opinions concerning educational control.[2] Some particular changes in control which have occurred merit some description here, however, in order to provide a contextual basis on which the remainder of the discussion will be developed.

Before the 1950s local school boards were relatively autonomous in controlling public schools.[3] Despite the influence of professional educators and other factors during these years, the school board maintained the notion that they represented the wishes of the people they served and were therefore best suited to control the formal educational environments of the local community. Because of the demographic composition of these school boards and their frequently biased decisions, they were deemed "elitist"[4] and oppressive by different human rights groups. These groups included those with racial and religious interests, as well as those with differing educational ideologies. Teachers during this time were also becoming more frustrated by their lack of personal involvement in decision-making processes which affected them directly.[5]

With the *Brown* decision of 1954,[6] the federal government began an era in which legislative, executive and judicial leaders were to accept greater moral responsibility for assuring equal opportunities for public schooling. When the success of Sputnik signaled Russian technological superiority, the fear of being a second-rate world power prompted these same leaders also to accept greater fiscal responsibility. Categorical aid from the federal

government reflected these concerns. Funds were quickly followed by fears among many of the nation's people of a "Big Brother" government.

The 1960s, often described in terms of turbulence and conflict, was a period in which many of the frustrations and fears of the previous decade were released. Negotiation and litigation of educational issues were accompanied by student demonstrations and teacher walkouts; fist fights in cafeterias were accompanied by equally violent floor fights in houses of government. Teachers, students, and the general citizenry demanded a voice in directing those aspects of public schools that related to their own lives; some wanted more freedom, some wanted to control that freedom. Parents began to form citizen action committees and teachers began to strengthen their own professional associations. During these years, the professional teachers' associations became one of the most successful influences in educational policy decisions.[7] It was also during the 1960s that education became a highly volatile political issue, especially in state contests.[8]

Names such as Holt, Illich and Rafferty became associated with ideas that were held in contempt by some and lauded by others. These men were among the many extremely vocal (and often articulate) critics of public education who emerged in the 1960s. Some of their work appeared on bestseller lists and was frequently discussed in university classrooms. It may be impossible to measure the impact and control that books such as *Why Johnny Can't Read*[9] had on education and society. These works and many others like them, however, certainly added a critical dimension to public education which required readers to ask fundamental questions about the role, purpose and methods of education.

Today, many of the ideas, criticisms, fears and frustrations expressed in the previous two decades are still present; in some ways they have become more pronounced and more urgent. Many of the names have changed, but the case of active participants remains relatively stable. One of the outstanding differences today is the balancing of power among the various groups concerned with the control of public education. It is not difficult to find supportive evidence that the influence of each group is becoming more powerful and, at the same time, being met quickly by some opposing — or at least equally influential — force.

FEDERAL CONTROL

Over 90 percent of the money spent for public education in this country comes from local and state revenues. It would appear that with such an investment, outside funds would not be sufficient to influence radically the decision-making processes of local and state officials. Since the passage of

a variety of civil rights legislation and the provision of categorical aid, however, many have argued that the federal government has an unduly powerful influence in public education. Part of this fear may be based in conservative, states-rights political ideology. Another reason for some fear is the indirect control resulting from fundings made by the federal government to support such supposedly politically unbound groups as the Education Commission of the States, state departments of education, and other foundations which direct or support research in education.[10] Unlike the direct funds which may be labeled and counted, indirect fiscal responsibility represents a subtle control so widespread that it may resist immediate perception.

Federal legislation and Supreme Court decisions have had tremendous impact on all educational programs. Categorical funding such as ESEA and NDEA have helped to establish and develop school library media programs which otherwise might be physically or functionally nonexistent at the building and district levels. The reasons for this funding are based on the inability of some school systems to raise adequate revenue to support programs of education which provide equal opportunities to all citizens regardless of race, geographical location or physical handicap. Existing methods of raising revenue for public schools have been shown to be inadequate, and modification of these methods alone will not relieve the pressure on local and state agencies. It will be necessary, therefore, to rely on federal dollars for some years to come; in fact, if public education is to meet the needs of students and society in future years, these funds must increase.[11] If and when there is an increase, it will be accompanied by increased concern among some people that a conflict of moral and legal obligation exists between local and federal authorities.

One way in which the federal government has responded to criticisms of its overly powerful control has been to provide formerly categorical funds to school systems while granting new authority among the systems' administrations to determine how these funds are to be spent. An example of this which directly affects school library media programs is the recent partial consolidation of ESEA and NDEA programs. State governments have been given these funds, which were earmarked in the past for school library media programs, to spend on guidance, testing and library programs according to locally determined need.

Federal control of public education through legislation and judicial decisions has been and still is very real. It is doubtful that a sudden reversal in this power will occur in the near future, although there is some evidence that a wider distribution of authority is being attempted.

STATE CONTROL

Alan Rosenthal, director of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University, has claimed that state legislatures are becoming more involved in decisions which control public education. Several states already are very active, while others, Rosenthal predicts, will become more involved in decisions which have traditionally been given to local governing agencies. The reasons for this increased involvement include: (1) legislators have more staff members who can study educational issues in greater depth; (2) internal leadership of many state legislatures has become more decentralized, thus allowing for greater participation among their members; (3) there has been an increase in the number of standing committees responsible for education which are taking their mission more seriously; (4) many state legislatures are convening annually instead of biennially; and (5) legislators themselves are becoming "more independent, moralistic, aggressive and issue-oriented" than their predecessors.[12]

An indication of the potential control which state-level governments may have in education is the degree to which education itself has become an important factor in state politics. Until the 1960s, education was not an issue on which candidates could depend for gathering support or which they feared as damaging to a campaign. Today this has changed to the point that some state governorships have been determined by a politician's stand on educational issues.[13] This is notable because recent research has indicated that a state's governor is a key agent in determining educational policy within the state.[14] While this may indicate voter control, it may also point to the power being transferred to this office by the voter.

Increased state control of education is implicit in some recent federal legislation. One law which is of particular concern to school library media professionals is Title IV-B of the previously mentioned ESEA. The guidelines for this funding program require that a state advisory council be established to determine how the federal funds are to be allocated to local school systems. School library media professionals have feared that because a member of their profession is not specifically designated currently as a required member of that council, funds which formerly were directed to their programs by the federal government will be diverted to other programs by state governments.

Because research and court decisions have pointed out the inadequacy of local property taxes as a base for public education funding, state governments are being "pressed" into greater financial responsibilities.[15] Because the equation *money = power + control* has been a fairly accurate

description in public education, it must be assumed that state acceptance of greater fiscal responsibility will be accompanied by an increase in the degree of state control.

LOCAL CONTROL

With the exception of some southern states, most county administrative units have declined in influence and control of educational systems.[16] Although local property tax accounts for a good portion of the funds expended for education, most local administrative units make few major decisions. There are indications that this may be changing.[17]

Mark Hanson foresees that one result of the current balancing of power among teachers, administrators, and citizens will be an increase in district-level responsibility for negotiation and policy development.[18] Another writer has pointed to a variety of judicial decisions which seem to indicate a shift of control from federal authorities to local school boards.[19] Looking toward the coming decades, a public school superintendent describes the role of the superintendent in terms of increased political involvement and districtwide control. He sees this as a positive force in establishing direction and leadership for the variety of concerns with which an institution in a pluralistic society must deal.[20]

Local control may also be interpreted to mean building-level control. Ideally, the principal is not merely a paper-shuffling bureaucrat, but a talented manager and effective decision-maker. The importance of this level of control is pointed out by John Goodlad's multiyear study of the League of Cooperating Schools in southern California. He concludes from his research that if significant change is to take place, it will occur at the building level. There may be outside influences, but the people within the building make and influence change more than does any other factor.[21]

Carrying local control one step further, we come to the individual teacher. Meyer concludes that most of the teaching done in this county occurs within the isolation of a classroom and that, as a result, the teacher is not subject to serious evaluation.[22] This implies that the individual teacher must be convinced of an idea or practice before it will be taken into the relatively safe atmosphere of the classroom. There the teacher is free to use whatever ideas or methods (within certain legal and moral limits) that he or she wishes without serious concern for the consequences. A tremendous controlling influence on public education — especially related to changes — therefore exists within a school and within the classrooms of that school.

COLLECTIVE CONTROL

Albert Shanker, one of the most outspoken personalities associated with teacher control through collective action, suggests[23] that teachers have been important in determining the course of public education since the time of Horace Mann. In the 1950s and 1960s, collective action in the form of teacher unions began to gain momentum. Salary, fringe benefits, and working conditions were the areas most frequently mentioned by these burgeoning activist groups.[24]

Since the earlier attempts to gain primarily personal benefits, teachers' unions have become more insistent on gaining more control both in decision-making processes which determine curriculum content and in other, more encompassing policies.[25] An example of the latter is the success of the Chicago Teachers Union as the principal force in the design of READ, a program which was established for the purpose of improving reading among inner-city children.[26] The implications of such activities across bureaucratic lines are apparent. Collective action is not limited to teacher groups, however. Administrators are also forming collectives and are gaining recognition at many negotiating tables.[27]

Some of the criticism aimed at collective negotiations by educators is that most of their negotiation procedures are modeled on those of labor unions.[28] Another criticism results from the need to bring in professional negotiators for both educators and local school boards as the complexities of negotiated settlements continue to grow.[29] This change in the way in which controls are determined at the local and state levels could have different impacts on public education. A possible impact may be that innovation and change might be stifled by both teachers and school boards because of the fear of failure; failure which could be used against either group in ensuing negotiations. The possibility also exists that educators, including school library media personnel, might not actively pursue a profession's definition and unique description if they are limited by other labors' mind sets toward negotiation.

There has been little exploration by researchers into the positive or negative effects of collective negotiations on school library media programs. In one study, it is reported that the only perceptible outcome of negotiated contracts on school library media programs was related to salary and fringe benefits for the program personnel.[30]

Another facet of collective control which does not have the stigma so often attached to unions is the professional associations. According to researchers, lobbying by these groups has had a significant influence on legis-

lative decisions for many years.[31] From data gathered as a part of the Educational Governance Project, it was concluded that "organized educators, albeit badly fragmented in most states, are among the most influential groups in the legislative arena."[32] Speaking to the National Education Association (NEA), President Carter's press secretary Jody Powell expressed appreciation for the "massive support from teachers" and pointed out that this support "was critical to our winning this very close election."[33] It is apparent that professional associations control education through lobbying and candidate support. Another way in which control is maintained is through the well-known channels of communication established by conventions, presses, member networks, and research.

The NEA itself is currently lobbying for the rights of teachers and other public employees to strike and participate in collective negotiations. It has been suggested that the NEA serve as a bargaining agent in some areas or that it join with groups which label themselves as unions. The positive or negative effects of any type of collective action initiated or supported by teachers will not be discussed critically here. The point to be made, however, is that there is every indication that these types of activities will persist in public education. Those who plan to effect educational futures cannot expect to escape either commitment for or opposition to such activities.

PUBLIC CONTROL

Recent statistics reported by the National Opinion Research Center indicate that fewer people today have a "great deal of confidence in education" than in 1974.[34] Those who have the greatest confidence in public education tend to be blacks and/or less affluent, and less educated than those expressing lack of confidence.[35] Such a dichotomy presents educators with a double-edged dagger aimed at the roots of their support. Those who are less able to pay and who often have not had equal access to quality education expect more from public schooling. On the other hand, another distinct group of society has become disillusioned with the often-exaggerated claims of educators and is demanding that public education be improved. Both groups are beginning to insist on proof of educational success and a greater voice in the determination of some educational policies.

Those who have faith in public education must be reassured and the confidence of those who have lost that faith must be restored if public education is to survive. John Sawhill, president of New York University, suggests that: "To restore confidence, we have to strengthen the respon-

siveness of our institutions to the people they serve. And, as the first step in this process, leaders in our large governmental, academic, and business bureaucracies must make a commitment to subject their decision making to public scrutiny and defend themselves against the adverse criticism of their constituencies."[36]

Responsiveness also includes the right of participation. If anything has been learned from the chaos of public administrations in the past few years, it should be that the democratic process works. If it is to work, however, people must be involved in its functioning. Too often, educators have tended to exclude parents and other citizens from educational decision-making.[37] The frustrations of powerlessness and a concern for their children have caused many community citizens to become more vocal — in some instances more violent — in their demands to be included in education again.[38]

Perhaps too many have expected too much from education. Perhaps schools have been forced to accept responsibility for things which other institutions in society have abandoned, failed to provide, or failed in providing. Drug problems, sex problems and racial problems are among those for which society holds schools accountable. Basically, all of these and other concerns are "people" problems, the solutions to which lie in a broader base of school and community cooperation. Early childhood educators propose that parent-school cooperation is essential to the successful education of young children; perhaps it is essential for public education at all levels.[39] Failure of some apparently mutually beneficial programs (including one designed to promote greater citizen involvement in local schools) can be linked directly to the failure of the educators involved to elicit public participation in the initial planning stages of the projects.[40]

Public control goes beyond the local levels of educational policy-making. Two veteran congressional staff members have pointed out that national legislation related to educational issues is influenced greatly by public opinion and press treatments of the issues. In some cases, this influence may be even greater than that resulting from lobbying by teachers' associations.[41] Whether at the polls or in the streets, public opinion is an influential factor in education. This growing power will be a part of educational control for many years.

ACCREDITATION AND CERTIFICATION CONTROL

There are presently more than forty agencies, including six regional agencies, which influence school library media programs through volunteer or required accreditation.[42] Several regional agencies are currently

evaluating existing policies which include standards for school library media programs.[43] Many people involved in school librarianship believe that these agencies have been important in establishing and supporting school library media resource centers in school systems, in which they would otherwise have been lost in a maze of different priorities. It can safely be said that this kind of control has been important in forming a framework on which to base other program elements, even if it has not helped to improve school library media programs as much as some professionals would like.

Little research has been done to determine the effectiveness of standards for school library media programs; most of what is available is a comparison of various library media programs to existing standards. In the report of one study, the researcher concluded that accreditation was not a reliable predictor of the services available in selected Kentucky elementary schools.[44] While this may be an accurate study, more intensive research must be done before one can be assured that school library media programs do not benefit from accreditation standards.

Another control process which is especially important to school library media programs is statewide certification of instructional personnel. Several states are in the process of revising their certification standards; the revisions will provide greater regulation of who will teach in public schools. Both the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) point out that many state certification standards for school library media personnel are grossly inadequate descriptions of what these professionals should be. Each group has suggested models for certification, the most recent of which is that published by AASL Certification of School Media Specialists Committee.[45]

MANAGERIAL CONTROL

Within the past decade, change has occurred in the managerial control of education systems at all levels. There has been a tendency among many public institutions, including public education, to react to crisis rather than to anticipate and plan to avoid such situations. The concept is not new, but there is a new awareness of the concept. The events of the 1960s highlighted the need for more effective planning methods. Today there are attempts to provide more rational ways in which school systems might be managed.

Beginning with the Johnson administration's adoption of Planning

Programming Budgeting Systems (PPBS), an almost endless series of plan-
ning techniques became a part of management in many public institutions.
A variety of these systems for planning have been used by many schools
and school systems since the late 1960s.[46] Currently, management by ob-
jectives (MBO) techniques are replacing the PPBS types which were so
popular in the earlier attempts to bring sound management into public
education.[47] There is evidence that other methods of resource control are
being used. School systems in ten states already are using a zero-based
budgeting system.[48] If the new federal administration follows through in
its projected use of this system, there is reason to believe that, like PPBS,
it will also be widely used by public education.

Arguments have been posited that businessmen who have little or no
knowledge of education are being allowed to control public education.[49]
Today, it appears we are entering a new era, "because a marriage is being
consummated between business and education, each contributing what it
is best equipped to contribute in order to bring advanced technology and
the economies of scale to education."[50] Former U.S. Commissioner of Ed-
ucation Terrell Bell foresees the "focus of judicial influence on education
shifting toward school finance."[51] Not only judicial influence, but public
influence (through demands for resource accountability), will force school
systems to adopt or develop management systems which are based on rea-
son and evaluation. These changes will undoubtedly affect school library
media programs. Within the past five years, planning systems specifically
designed for school library media programs have been developed. Included
among these systems are models developed by individual states,[52] individ-
ual researchers,[53] and by professional associations.[54]

An increase in the influence of educational technologists accompanies
this movement toward greater efficiency in education.[55] Based on the idea
of more rational methods of instruction, educational technology has be-
come a major force in the control of education. Students, professors,
teachers, and other practitioners and researchers throughout the world are
exploring ways in which students and teachers may make more effective
uses of resources to assist the individual to attain the highest levels of
knowledge possible.

Whether educators will allow these controls to become a "cult of effi-
ciency"[56] or will use them as part of a more holistic design remains to be
seen. It is more likely that a single answer to any of society's problems is
no longer possible, but that stronger managerial controls in many aspects
of public education will continue to be used widely.

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IMPLICATIONS OF CHANGING CONTROL

A look at the complex interrelationships which control public education and at those which may affect it in the future reveals a crazy-quilt of individuals, groups, agencies, and institutions influencing (or attempting to influence) all aspects of public education. School library media programs may be affected directly by accreditation or certification standards; they also may be affected indirectly by widespread feelings of mistrust and alienation among our citizens. The traditions of education are being challenged, and those elements of public education which cannot be justified to the several influential segments which control education will not be allowed to continue.

There are some specific changes or trends in control which could have a negative effect on school library media programs; one such trend is the decentralization of control. Decentralization could result in a further fragmentation among schools within a system and among systems themselves. If bureaucratic barriers are strengthened, either from fear or as an extension of organizational growth, the spirit and functional reality of cooperation among school libraries within a system or between school libraries and other types of libraries may be threatened. If universal access to the world's information is to be the right of each individual, then each student and teacher in every grade and in every school must be served by interconnecting lines of communication and cooperation which transcend geographical and political boundaries. Advancements in delivery systems and related technology make the geographical problems seem miniscule; political and other human problems which control access must also be recognized and solved.

Some comfort can be found in the apparent success of ESEA Title IV-B allocations, which were labeled as an attempt at decentralization. When this legislation was first enacted, many professionals expressed concern that school library media programs would be forgotten or requests for funds overridden, because the legislation was not specifically designated for these programs alone. Given the responsibility to allocate these funds within their states, state advisory councils have included school library media professionals without having been specifically required to do so — to the great surprise of some persons. An apparently healthy relationship also seems to exist between school library media personnel and those associated with guidance and testing.[57]

More powerful local control, especially when influenced by local citi-

zens, could pose a problem in assuring intellectual freedom. Local control has sometimes resulted in local oppression; one of the most vulnerable areas is that of the free exchange of ideas. If the community were to cause such free exchange to be inhibited, school media professionals would either have to implement their professional obligation or be forced to admit that they cannot assure equal and free access of information to all people.

The growing influence of teacher associations and unions on public education presents another potentially dangerous situation to school library media professionals. If these groups do not support the ideals of school library media program operation proposed by the profession, these programs will not be fought for in terms of resource or legislative support. The integration of the school library media program in the total curriculum is still a dream in many schools. If not part of the daily professional life of teachers, will it be a part of their negotiations and lobbying?

Local administrations are frequently the focus of many school library media personnel communications. Without support from building- and system-level administrations, school library media programs cannot develop to optimum levels. Whether for cooperative information access, material loans or processing, the goodwill and understanding of these educators is essential. If, as some of the research reported in this paper has shown, local administrations are becoming more powerful in determining fundamental policies of schooling, school library media programs and the ideals of the professions could be greatly enhanced or be destroyed, depending on the commitment of these people.

As schools continue to develop and use more rational systems for resource allocation, more school library media professionals need to be involved in both the developmental and operational stages of these systems. Otherwise, as Robert Wedgeworth has said, systems may be adopted which do not reflect the unique planning needs of the school library media program.[58] The conclusions of one study suggest that school library media personnel in one state have not taken full advantage of existing systems to plan their own programs or to inform others of their programs.[59] With the increased emphasis on individual learning (i.e. based on the needs of the individual rather than necessarily on teacher vis-à-vis the student) and the growing support for multimedia teaching methodologies, school library media programs could become, in reality, the center of the school's instructional program. This, however, will require school library media professionals to adopt, adapt and develop systems of planning which will

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