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ABSTRACT
        The relationship between the political context of
school districts and their choices of decentralization policy is
explored in this paper. It was expected that district politics would
affect decentralization policies in two ways: the form of
decentralization adopted and the degree of change. The decision to
decentralize in three large urban school districts was studied
through semistructured interviews with school board members and other
shapers of school district policy--27 in Chicago, 24 in Los Angeles,
and 20 in Miami-Dade. Findings suggest that a combination of
externally mandated reform and local decentralization results in
radically different decentralization policies, exemplified by the
Chicago experience. Administrative decentralization and internal
choice, characteristics of the Miami-Dade and Los Angeles situations,
facilitated moderate to incremental change from standard operating
procedures. A conclusion is that conflict among insiders influenced
not only the character of the reform as expected, but also the
extremeness or degree of change adopted. Four tables are included.
(36 references) (LMI)

EXPERIMENTING WITH DECENTRALIZATION:

THE POLITICS OF CHANGE

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Introduction

Restructuring schools received national prominence at the 1989 Education Summit when President Bush and the nation's governors recommended improving schools by decentralizing management. By the end of 1989, fourteen states had sponsored site-based decision making projects and numerous local districts had initiated school restructuring experiments of their own (see CSSO, 1989 for highlights of state and local district restructuring efforts).

School decentralization shifts formal decision making away from the central administration to a smaller decision making arena -- the school. Decentralized schools alter influence relationships by empowering school and community groups to make decisions about budgets, personnel, and programs.

Across school districts, approaches to decentralization reform vary considerably. Although all plans decentralize decision making by shifting responsibility from a big, centralized bureaucracy to some other level, new decision makers -- some combination of school and community groups -- differ across districts. The alternatives, moreover, can be thought of as a natural experiment in ways to restructure school districts. This study assesses the experiences with decentralization in three large, urban school districts -- Chicago, Los Angeles and Miami-Dade -- and tries to explain from a political perspective, why the sample cities adopted different decentralization plans, from Los Angeles, which is the least experimental in terms of restructuring, to Chicago which is the most experimental.

The basic underlying assumption of decentralization is that if schools have greater autonomy, students will learn more. The literature on school improvement asserts that shared decision making at the school level is integral to the process of creating an effective school culture which, in part, is associated with improved student performance (Purkey and Smith, 1985). There also is the idea that delegating decision making responsibility to teachers will raise morale, increase their level of effort and lead to better teaching (Meier, 1987).

From a political perspective, decentralization enables groups heretofore excluded to be in power.

> Proponents of this perspective contend that, by altering influence relationships...school based management can make schools more successful with their clients, more responsive to their constituencies, [and] more deserving of public support...(Malen et al., 1989, p. 10).

Thus, the preference for decentralization reflects a general claim that decentralization is inherently more democratic, since power over schools is placed in the hands of elected representatives who are "close to the people" (LaNoue and Smith, 1973).

The focus of this paper is on decentralization as a political issue. Decentralization is viewed as a vehicle for changing who governs schools and in this way, is a policy tool for opening up school systems to involve "outsiders" (i.e., groups previously not involved) in school governance. In this context, decentralization involves restructuring or an exchange of power.

The main research question in the present study focuses on the relationship between the political context of districts and the districts' choice of decentralization policy. In general, it is expected that district politics will affect decentralization policies in two ways:

1) The character of change, that is the form of decentralization adopted and the catalyst for the change; and

2) The extremeness or degree of change, that is the extent of difference from past management practice.

Conceptual Framework and Research Hypotheses

The conceptual framework for this study is derived from the urban politics and school decentralization literatures. A review of relevant research from both literatures follows, along with related hypotheses for the present study.

Urban Politics. The urban politics literature has focused on questions related to leadership and the politics of cities, and also the relationship between politics and city policies. The beginnings of scholarly concern with the question of local leadership dates to 1953 when Floyd Hunter's Community Power Structure first appeared: "Prior to 1953...the question of 'Who Governs?' was answered in much the same manner by both social scientists and the lay public" (Bonjean and Olson, 1964, p. 279). Hunter, who is credited with developing the first systematic

technique for investigating community decision making, conducted an intensive study of Atlanta, Georgia in an effort to determine who really ran the city. Hunter concluded that a small elite group, consisting primarily of local businessmen and wealthy families operating outside of electoral politics, dominated most of the major decisions made by the city government.

In 1961, Dahl's study of decision making in New Haven, Connecticut, Who Governs?, was published. He found that power in the city was dispersed and that different people and groups exercised influence over major decisions made by the city. His research suggested the idea of a community power structure in which groups with multiple interests compete to influence decision making.

Following Dahl's study, in the late 1960s through the 1970s were comparative analyses of community power and policy outcomes. This body of research extended the question of who governs to who governs and with what effects. It also moved power structure analysis from studies involving one or a few cities, like Dahl's, to larger numbers of communities (for example, see Clark, 1968a). Research questions involved the analysis of what characteristics of communities are likely to encourage different patterns of power and leadership and what policy consequences emerge from different types of power structures (Clark, 1968b; Walton, 1970).

In the education arena, Crain's 1968 study of desegregation in fifteen cities used the community structure paradigm to analyze a single issue -- the decision to desegregate schools.

Crain's findings focused on the link between the political style of cities and their desegregation policies. He concluded that cities resembling each other in their handling of desegregation have fundamental similarities in their community power structures:

> ...the most important factor determining the behavior of the school boards we studied seems to be the amount of influence in the hands of the civic elite -- the businessmen and others who participate in city decision making from outside the government and the political parties (1968, p. 3).

From Crain's study emerged the concept of an educational power structure where power over local school districts is dispersed across multiple actors, some of whom are outside of the district organization (e.g., business community, reform groups, state legislature) and others of whom are inside, such as the superintendent, school board and union. The pluralist model, as suggested by Crain, is applied in the present study to define the educational power structure in the sample cities.

In addition, the present study expands upon Crain's work by investigating the link between districts' educational power structures and their choice of decentralization reform. It is expected that the decision to decentralize will reflect the balance of power between actors within the local school district organization and those outside of the district organization.

Based on his research into desegregation, Crain further concluded that the composition of the school board was an important predictor of district policies. In particular, he found that the level of conflict among board members greatly

affected the choice of a final desegregation plan. Boards with high levels of conflict were less able to make decisions regarding desegregation and often took no action either for or against integration. A similar outcome is expected in the case of decentralization reform, leading to the hypothesis that conflict among actors within the local school district will limit their policy making ability and provide an opportunity for outside actors to take control of the reform process.

School Decentralization. The literature on school decentralization distinguishes between two forms of decentralization: administrative decentralization and community control. In the first model, school systems are divided into smaller field units within school boundaries and the field units are empowered to make some decisions formerly made by the central office (Ornstein, 1974). As decision making authority is delegated down the ranks of the hierarchy, accountability remains directed upward (Hanson, 1979). Thus, the locus of power and authority remain with a single, central administration and board of education: "Since the professionals and school board members retain power, most school people prefer this kind of organization" (Ornstein, 1974, p. 3).

By contrast, community control, referred to in the 1980s as local empowerment, shifts power from professionals and the central board to community groups not previously involved in school governance. Thus, lay persons, not the professional hierarchy, are in control and accountability is directed outward

toward the community (Ornstein, 1983 and 1974).

Case studies of decentralization efforts in the 1960s and 1970s suggested that the catalyst for the reform determined the form of decentralization adopted. When the demand for decentralization arose within the district, from the superintendent or teachers' union for example, the response was an internal change -- administrative decentralization -- and power was not shifted outside of the organization, to the community for example (Fantini and Gittell, 1973; Greenberg and Johnston, 1972; Thompson, 1967). However, when the push for decentralization came from outside the district, it often ended in a change of power that involved external actors in school district affairs (Peterson, 1976; O'Shea, 1975; Fantini and Gittell, 1973; Greenberg and Johnston, 1972). As McCurdy commented in her analysis of the 1960s decentralization efforts in Detroit and New York City:

> It is unlikely that the leadership of either school system would have voluntarily chosen local empowerment as it would dilute their control of education decision-making by increasing the influence of non-professionals (1989, p. 7).

Hence, it is expected in the present study that administrative decentralization will occur when decentralization is an internal choice decided by school groups and individuals. Likewise, it is expected that local empowerment will occur when the decision to decentralize is imposed on the district by outsiders, namely groups and individuals who are not part of the local school district organization.

Decentralization also has been characterized according to the extremeness or degree of change it represents from past management practice. Decentralization is most radical when groups heretofore excluded are in power, and change is slight when decision making is retained in the school organization by the original decision makers or by a few groups or individuals in the organization (Wissler and Ortiz, 1986; Levy, 1966). In addition, Ornstein defines degree in terms of power:

> Community control of the schools carried to the fullest
> extent implies total governance by the community...over
> personnel (hiring, firing, and promoting), curriculum
> (course electives, textbooks, and evaluation), student
> policy (student-teacher relationships, discipline, and
> testing), and financing (federal funding, allocation of
> money, and determination of the budget) (1974, p. 4).

Extrapolating from Ornstein's definition, administrative decentralization at the extreme implies governance by the field subunit over personnel, curriculum, student policy, and financing. In the present study, it is expected that radical change will occur when support for educational reform in the city is high and when decentralization is a high priority issue.

The extremeness of the change also may be related to the condition of the school district, with the most radical change occurring when a school district is in crisis. Theodore Lowi in The End of Liberalism observed:

> A crisis is a time when leadership and ideologies begin to
> falter. It is a time when established standards fall and
> customary procedures yield unexpected results (1969, p.
> xiii).

Documentary data from decentralizing school districts corroborate

that observation:

> ...initiatives tend to surface during periods of intense
> stress...Often "out of a sense of urgency"... federal, state
> or district officials advocate or mandate decentralization
> of one form or another...(Malen et al., 1989, p. 6).

The second major area of research on school decentralization

has examined the politics of decentralization. LaNoue and

Smith's 1973 study of five cities (Detroit, Los Angeles, New

York, St. Louis, and Washington, D.C.) from 1969-1972 produced

some interesting findings with regard to participation. State

and local political leaders, they discovered, were rarely central

participants, instead opting to remain "aloof" from district

efforts to decentralize.[1] Traditional school interest groups

(superintendents, administrators, teacher organizations) also

were not activists in the decentralization movement.

> Administrators... have been either lukewarm or
> ambivalent...Public school leadership has been
> precarious...Teachers have tended to back decentralization
> in principle and to be suspicious or even hostile in
> practice (La Noue and Smith, 1973, p. 229).

While politicians and interest groups were wary of school

decentralization, federal officials from the U.S. Office of

Education and the Office of Economic Opportunity and private

foundations, such as Danforth and Russell Sage, were important

promoters, offering seed money, technical advice, and legitimacy

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[1]The one exception was in New York where Mayor John Lindsay
"played a critical role in translating the protests of minority
parents into a program for system-wide restructuring of school
governance" (La Noue and Smith, 1973, p. 228).

to local decentralization efforts.

In analyzing decentralization reform in Detroit and New York during the 1960s, McCurdy argued that outside actors, and specifically the state, intervened and mandated reform because district leadership was faltering:

> In both New York City and Detroit race riots over
> desegregation issues created a crisis of public authority.
> The failure of local school leaders to prevent the riots may
> have led to the weakening of the traditional educational
> leadership and allowed external forces to impose a reform
> (1989, p. 6).

In the present study, it is hypothesized that actors outside the school district, such as the state legislature, will step-in to impose decentralization when insiders are perceived as ineffective.

An in-depth study of decentralization politics in Chicago by Peterson (1976) during a similar time period produced some complementary results with regard to participation and the degree of change implemented. According to Peterson, Chicago's decentralization reform, which was managed by the superintendent and his administrative staff, altered the governance structure "in only the most marginal fashion" (1976, p. 226). Peterson attributed this result to the fact that decentralization was the responsibility of insiders who were committed to maximizing their own discretionary powers and furthermore, that change threatened their organizational interests, values and operating procedures. Thus, school decentralization in Chicago was "modest," "token," and "incremental" (1976, p. 226).

A more recent study by Wissler and Ortiz (1988) of
Riverside, California's efforts to decentralize during the 1960s
and 1970s produced results similar to Peterson's. Wissler and
Ortiz found that in Riverside the move to decentralize was lodged
in the office of the superintendent with the superintendent
pushing for decentralization as a means of improving the school
system. According to Wissler and Ortiz, the superintendent chose
administrative decentralization and was able to implement the
reform gradually with the full support of school board members
and without interference from actors outside the district
organization, such as the state legislature. The authors
concluded, moreover, that the stability of the superintendent, in
terms of experience in the school system and length of time in a
leadership position, helped him implement the reform of his
choice. Hence, in the present study stability among actors
within the district organization is expected to enhance their
ability to control the decision to decentralize and therefore,
the likelihood that administrative decentralization will be
adopted.

Study Methods

Previous research (for a review of the literature, see Malen
et al., 1989) suggests that the range of possible structural and
educational outcomes from decentralization efforts is diverse.
What is not known about decentralization is how the composition
and interests of decision makers and other policy actors effect

new governance structures and, hence, the likelihood of significant educational improvement. To investigate the relationship between political context and choice of decentralization policy, this study examined the decision to decentralize in three large, urban school districts -- Chicago, Los Angeles, and Miami-Dade.

Data collection, which occurred from Fall, 1988 through Spring, 1989, was handled similarly in each city. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with school board members and others who might have influenced the decision to decentralize including:

o   Teacher union representatives

o   District superintendent

o   City political leaders (city council members identified as active in educational affairs, mayor's staff)

o   Education reform/Community organizations

o   State political leaders (chairs of education committees, governor's staff, state superintendent of public instruction)

Interview questions focused on defining the political context of the city, and tracing the genesis and development of decentralization policy.

As suggested by the review of the literature, politics in this study was defined by six factors:

o   Educational power structure

o   Perceived effectiveness of inside actors

o   Level of conflict among inside actors

o   Stability of inside actors

o   Existence of a crisis

o   Support for educational reform/decentralization

The first four factors were expected to influence the form of
decentralization adopted and who was responsible for the change.
The other two were expected to affect the extremeness or degree
change.

Politics of Decentralization

Across the sample, decentralization reform is considerably
diverse in terms of character and extremeness of the change.
This section profiles the politics and decentralization polices
in the three cities, with the goal of assessing the extent to
whicn political context explains variations in policy outcomes,
that is the choice of decen'ralization policy.

Chicago. Chicago's decentralization plan was imposed
externally on the school district in 1988 by the state
legislature after intense lobbying in Springfield by reform
groups from Chicago. The educational power structure in Chicago
helps explain this outcome.

In 1987 Chicago experienced a 19-day teachers' strike. This
event galvanized the community and sparked the formation of
numerous school-reform organizations that pressed for "no more
business as usual" (Snider, 1989, p.15). These organizations --
a coalition of neighborhood-based reformers and business forces -

- have been credited with orchestrating decentralization reform
in Chicago one year later:

> An unusual political scene was played out in the state
> Capitol at Springfield last year. First came busloads of
> parents disgusted with the Chicago schools' dismal
> performance. And then delegations of Chicago's business
> heavies, who urged precisely the same decentralization
> reform. The parent-business lobbying continued for months.
> Finally, the Democratic Legislature and Republican governor
> gave the reformers 95% of what they asked (Peirce, 1989).

The interview data from the present study lend further
support to the conclusion that outside actors are the major
players in the city's educational power structure. When
respondents were asked who was essential to passing education
reform in Chicago (see Table 2) and whose opposition to a reform
would be impossible to overcome (see Table 3), the results
suggest that state political leaders controlled the education
reform process. 26% of respondents named one or more state
legislators as essential, while 22% specified the governor as the
most necessary supporter. In deciding whose opposition would be
impossible to overcome, 30% chose a state legislator(s) and 19%
named the governor. The superintendent, union and school board
received few mentions.

As an additional measure of power structure, respondents
were asked to name four local school reform groups (see Table 1.).
The selection of actors outside the school district signified
that they guided the education reform process, while the
selection of insiders indicated they dominated the process.

Table 1

Measure One - Educational Power Structure

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Name Four Local Education Reform Groups

_____

	General Social Reform	Education Reform	Business	Parent/ Community	Teachers	School System	Other	None	Missing
	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}
Chicago	17{18}	44{47}	12{13}	7{8}	3{3}	1{1}	1{1}	11{12}	5{5}
Los Angeles	8{8}	6{6}	9{10}	5{5}	14{13}	14{13}	14{9}	24{24}	8{8}
Miami-Dade	5{4}	4{3}	11{9}	15{12}	19{15}	16{13}	3{2}	28{22}	3{2}

_____

Chicago n=108 [27x4]

Los Angeles n=96 [24x4]

Miami-Dade n=80 [20x4]

Note. Due to rounding, numbers in rows do not always add up to 100 percent.

17

13

Table 2

Measure Two - Educational Power Structure

Name a Person/Group Whose Support Is Essential In Passing A Reform

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	Superintendent	Union	School Board	State Political Leaders		Governor	Mayor	Parent/ Community	Business	No one	Other	Missing
				State Legislators	State Supt.							
	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}
Chicago	4{1}	4{1}	0	26{7}	0	22{6}	4{1}	4{1}	7{2}	11{3}	15{4}	4{1}
Los Angeles	0	25{6}	0	8{2}	0	25{6}	0	0	4{1}	4{1}	29{7}	4{1}
Miami-Dade	20{4}	25{5}	5{1}	5{1}	0	5{1}	0	5{1}	0	25{5}	15{3}	0

Chicago n=27

Los Angeles n=24

Miami-Dade* n=21

Note. Due to rounding, numbers do not always add up to 100 percent.

* One respondent in Miami-Dade selected the district superintendent and the union. One point, therefore, was added to each category, increasing the sample from 20 to 21.

1.: 2:)

Table 3

Measure Three - Educational Power Structure

_____

Name a Person/Group Whose Opposition to a Reform Would Be Almost Impossible to Overcome
_____

				State Political Leaders								
	Superintendent	Union	School Board	State Legislators	State Supt.	Governor	Mayor	Parent/ Community	Business	Other	No One	Missing
	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}
Chicago	0	8{2}	0	30{8}	0	19{5}	4{1}	0	0	4{1}	33{9}	4{1}
Los Angeles	4{1}	25{6}	0	0	0	25{6}	0	0	4{1}	4{1}	33{8}	4{1}
Miami-Dade	5{1}	25{5}	15{3}	5{1}	0	5{1}	0	0	0	15{3}	30{6}	0

Chicago n=27

Los Angeles n=24

Miami-Dade n=20

Note. Due to rounding, numbers in rows do not always add up to 100 percent.

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Respondents rarely mentioned teachers or the school system, which included the superintendent and school board, suggesting again that inside actors had little influence over reform. Instead, respondents placed the balance of power with local actors outside of the school district. 44% of the respondents identified specific education reform groups; another 17% mentioned general social reform organizations; and 12% cited business groups. These findings confirm the original hypothesis that local empowerment occurs when the decision to decentralize is imposed on the district by actors who are not part of the local school district organization.

A related factor, perceptions of effectiveness, also influenced the policy outcome in the expected direction. Respondents' perceptions of the effectiveness of inside actors were low and insiders often drew rating majorities in the not very effective or not at all effective categories (see Table 4). For instance, none of the respondents described the superintendent as very effective. Instead, 48% of respondents viewed the superintendent as not very effective and 33% rated him not at all effective. As for other inside actors, the majority of Chicago respondents viewed the school board as not very effective (60%). The union also received low effectiveness ratings: 37% viewed it as not very effective and 44% ranked it as moderately effective. One year before the Chicago reform law was enacted Chicago's public schools were declared the worst in the nation by the U.S. Secretary of Education, William Bennett:

Table 4

Measure One - Perceived Effectiveness

Leadership on Educational Reform

	Very effective	Moderately effective	Not very effective	Not at all effective	DK	Missing
	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}	%{n}
Superintendent						
Chicago	0	15{4}	48{13}	33{9}	4{1}	0
Los Angeles	17{4}	33{8}	29{7}	0	13{3}	8{2}
Miami-Dade	95{19}	5{1}	0	0	0	0
School Board						
Chicago	4{1}	19{5}	60{16}	15{4}	4{1}	0
Los Angeles	13{3}	42{10}	33{8}	4{1}	4{1}	4{1}
Miami-Dade	65{13}	30{6}	5{1}	0	0	0
Union						
Chicago	15{4}	44{12}	37{10}	0	4{1}	0
Los Angeles	29{7}	25{6}	21{5}	25{6}	0	0
Miami-Dade	80{16}	15{3}	5{1}	0	0	0
Mayor						
Chicago	8{2}	22{6}	30{8}	30{8}	8{2}	4{1}
Los Angeles	13{3}	25{6}	33{8}	21{5}	4{1}	4{1}
Miami-Dade	0	30{6]	10{2}	55{11}	0	5{1}
State Superintendent						
Chicago	0	56{15}	30{8}	11{3}	4{1}	0
Los Angeles	21{5}	54{13}	13{3}	13{3}	0	0
Miami-Dade	50{10}	30{6}	5{1}	0	15{3}	0
Governor						
Chicago	22{6}	44{12}	22{6}	8{2}	4{1}	0
Los Angeles	4{1}	4{1}	33{8}	50{12}	4{1}	4{1}
Miami-Dade	5{1}	50{10}	15{3}	15{3}	15{3}	0

Chicago n=27
Los Angeles n=24
Miami/Dade n=20

Note. Due to rounding, numbers do not always add up to 100 percent.

"You've got close to educational meltdown here" (Wilkerson, 1989, p. 12). Many constituencies probably viewed the poor condition of the school system as the result of insider ineffectiveness.

Interview data also indicate high levels of conflict among insiders in the Chicago school district and this factor, along with the district's condition, may have contributed to perceptions of ineffectiveness. When the union representative was asked to characterize labor-management relations on a five-point scale that ranged from very good to very poor, he described relations as poor. In addition, the teachers' union has gone on strike four times, the highest number among the three cities, since 1980 (the last one occurred in 1987). Some acrimony also emerged from the interview data between the union and the superintendent. The appointment of the superintendent was not supported by the union and a majority of the board members described the appointment as controversial. There also were high levels of conflict among school board members, which was measured by asking members how often heated discussions occurred at board meetings. Most of the board members stated that heated discussions occurred either fairly often or very often.

In sum, the state legislature, education reform groups and the business community led the drive for local empowerment in Chicago. These outside actors apparently viewed the district's educational crisis as indicative of the ineffectiveness of insiders. In addition, conflict among inside actors was high, indicating they had difficulty working with one another. Hence,

outsiders decided to take charge of reform by pursuing changes in how the Chicago public schools were governed.

In terms of form, Chicago's decentralization plan most closely resembles the local empowerment model: it empowers individuals previously not involved in school governance and extends to them a broad range of powers.   Each school is governed by an elected council of eleven: six parents, two teachers, two community representatives, and the principal. Not only do lay people outnumber professional educators, but each council has a parent majority and is headed by a parent as well. Further evidence of outsiders' power is the policy that requires only six votes -- the number of parent members -- to approve retaining a principal and only seven votes to hire a new principal.

Unlike the past when the Chicago school system was highly centralized (Walberg et al., 1989), the most important decisions now are made by the local school councils. Under the Chicago reform law, the councils govern the areas of personnel (e.g., hiring principals), curriculum (e.g., selecting textbooks), and finance (e.g., budget approval).

Having been touted by observers as the "Chicago Revolution," the city's decentralization reform represents a radical departure from past district management practices. Michael Kirst of Stanford University called it "the biggest change in American school control since the 1900s...It is the most drastic change in any school system I can think of. It is absolutely precedent-

breaking" (Wilkerson, 1989, p. 12). As one political observer
noted:

> The effort to overturn Chicago's top-heavy bureaucracy <u>came</u>
> <u>after</u> [emphasis added] Mr. Bennett denounced the 410,000-
> student school system where the dropout rate is 45 percent
> and the average test score of students in nearly half the
> schools was in the bottom 1 percent in the nation in 1987
> (Wilkerson, 1989, p.12).

Thus, in Chicago the city was in crisis, customary practices were
perceived to have failed, and reformers resorted to radical
change. These findings support the expectation that the degree
of change is related to the condition of the school district,
with the most radical change occurring when a district is in
crisis.

As noted earlier, under decentralization in Chicago most
important decisions were transferred from central office staff to
local councils. The reform law also replaced tenure for
principals with four-year contracts, controlled by the school
councils that can decide whether to keep the principal or to hire
another.[2] Finally, in order to make a fresh start, the law
disbanded the Chicago school board and gave the mayor authority
to appoint an interim board. All of the nearly 600 Chicago
schools are required to have this new process in place and
functioning by the end of the 1989-1990 school year. All these
changes reflect not only the balance of power in Chicago but also

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[2]Under the Chicago reform law, half of the principals came up
for reappointment this year and the other half will be up in 1991.
According to voting results from March, 1990, 49 of 272 school
councils decided <u>not</u> to retain their principals (Snider, 1990).

who was responsible for the change. Outsiders, who lobbied for decentralization, gained considerable authority in running the Chicago school district; the weakness of inside actors is evidenced by the powers they lost.

Miami-Dade. In contrast to Chicago, decentralization reform in Miami-Dade was an internal decision by actors within the school district organization. As part of their 1988 collective bargaining agreement, the union and the district created a pilot program known as School-Based Management/Shared Decision Making (SBM/SDM).

As expected, the findings indicate that inside actors dominated the reform process in Miami-Dade. When respondents were asked to name four major reform organizations in the city, teacher and the school system were cited most frequently and in contrast to Chicago, only a small percentage (4%) identified an education reform group (see Table 1). Inside actors also were selected more often when respondents were asked who was essential to passing education reform and whose opposition would be impossible to overcome (see Tables 2 and 3). 35% of respondents chose the superintendent or union as essential to passing a reform, while 40% selected the union or school board as the strongest potential opponent. State political leaders, the mayor, parent and community groups, and business were not seen as essential to a reform's success or failure.

Decentralization reform in Miami-Dade had the strong backing of both the district and the union.

> Restructuring [decentralization] was not something that one
> side wanted and the other resisted; hence it could not be
> held hostage and used as a bargaining chip (Timar, 1989, p.
> 272).

Data from interviews also indicated low levels of conflict among
inside actors. The union has not gone on strike since a state-
wide strike in 1968 and relations with the school district were
characterized as very good. The high level of cooperation may be
partly attributed to Joseph Fernandez, who served as deputy
superintendent and later as superintendent in Miami-Dade. He is
a former union steward and has retained strong contacts with the
United Teachers of Dade (Timar, 1989). Regardless of the reason,
the success of decentralization in Miami-Dade often is attributed
to labor-management cooperation:

> Clearly, the success of local education reform in Dade
> County is principally the result of the collaboration and
> commitment of the school board/administration and the
> teachers' union, which together have marshaled strong
> community support for the reform agenda (Cistone et al.,
> 1989, p. 393).

From the interview data, levels of conflict among school board
members also were low. The majority of respondents in Miami-Dade
said that heated discussions occurred sometimes and one board
member responded that such discussions never occurred. By
contrast, in Chicago most board members stated that heated
discussions occurred either fairly often or very often.

In sum, the school board, union and superintendent in Miami-
Dade experienced few conflicts and a great degree of harmony with
one another. Decentralization reform in Miami-Dade has been
characterized as a "nonadversarial partnership" between the Dade

County Public Schools and the United Teachers of Dade.

The reform, which began during the 1987-88 school year, utilizes the administrative decentralization model. Control over schools remains within the district organization, however, powers have been delegated down the hierarchy to teachers and administrators.

> Stated simply, SBM/SDM allows teachers and principals to develop their own system for the total management of their individual schools, with minimum direction from higher authority (St. John, 1989, p.3).

In equal numbers, teachers and management serve together on SBM/SDM councils which range in size from 9 to 32. Accountability in the district remains directed upward, with principals at SBM/SDM schools reporting directly to the deputy superintendent.

Inside actors in Miami-Dade have tenure and experience with the school district and were perceived as extremely effective by respondents (see Table 4). The superintendent began his professional career as a high school math teacher in the school district in 1963. During his rise, he held almost every administrative position including assistant superintendent for school operations, associate superintendent for school operations and deputy superintendent. He was named superintendent in July, 1987. 95% of the respondents interviewed for this study viewed him as very effective.

The school board and union in Miami-Dade, like the superintendent, also were stable and received high effectiveness

ratings. School board members averaged 11.3 years in their positions. By contrast, the average length of tenure in Los Angeles was about 5 years and in Chicago the average tenure was 3.8 years. The union, which was formally recognized in 1974, has had the same leadership since its inception. The school board was described by the majority of respondents (65%) as very effective. As for the union, 80% rated United Teachers of Dade as very effective (see Table 4).

As a second measure of effectiveness, respondents were asked to rank actors, on a scale of 1 (least effective) to 6 (most effective), in terms of their ability to make needed changes in the school district. The results, which are displayed in Table 5, lend further support to the findings regarding perceived effectiveness. The superintendent ranked the highest with 55% rating him as most effective. The school board followed with 35% of the respondents ranking it "5", and 50% of the respondents placed the union fourth. The stability and high effectiveness levels of inside actors appear to have helped insiders retain control over the reform process and, ultimately, the choice of decentralization policy.

The historical background of SBM/SDM in Miami-Dade (for a summary, see Cistone et al., 1989) suggests the reform was not a radical change but instead a concept that evolved over time from a series of joint management/union ventures. Nevertheless, district management under SBM/SDM differs significantly from past practice in Miami-Dade. Councils have been given the power to

develop their own budgets including discretionary decision making in 80 to 90 per cent of the budget (Cistone et al., 1989). The councils also make decisions on how schools should be run:

> ...from the number of teachers, the selection of textbooks, and class content, to the size, duration, and number of classes. Schools also have the flexibility to use funds for other purposes, such as special equipment and even hiring of special teachers (St. John, 1989, p. 4).

For example, at one high school in Miami-Dade the SBM/SDM council increased the school's discretionary fund from about $90,000 to $125,000 by increasing the average class size by one student, rather than hiring an additional teacher at the school. The teachers wanted to use the extra $35,000 for equipment (Timar, 1989). As Joseph Fernandez, former superintendent of schools, explained: "The instructions to schools were very simple. We told them the sky's the limit." Participants were assured that mistakes would be permitted and schools were urged "don't be afraid. Try it. Go for it" (St. John, 1989, p. 4). Thus far, over 300 waivers from the union contract, school board rules, and state department of education regulations have been granted since the initiative began (Olson, 1990).

The organization of the school district also changed under SBM/SDM. Middle management was greatly reduced (Timar, 1989) and as noted earlier, SBM/SDM schools no longer report through the conventional hierarchy of area and central offices, but rather report directly to a central office administrator. Furthermore, SBM/SDM schools have the option of contacting directly offices in charge of school operations, thereby avoiding several layers of

district bureaucracy. So, for example, a request for maintenance at SBM/SDM schools may be made directly to the maintenance department from the principal (Timar, 1989).

Based on interview data, there is considerable public support and business support for education reform in Miami-Dade. When respondents were asked how they would characterize support from each constituency, an overwhelming majority stated there was strong support from the public (75%) and the business community (80%). Backing from these constituencies for education reform may have spurred inside actors to pursue radical change.

Los Angeles. Decentralization in Los Angeles was adopted in June, 1989 later than in Chicago and Miami-Dade. When collective bargaining reached a stalemate over salary, decentralization was thrown onto the table as a bargaining chip.[3] Thus, decentralization arrived on the coattails of salary negotiations and the reform was neither a major focus nor a primary concern in Los Angeles, as it had been in Chicago and Miami-Dade.

The fact that decentralization came about through collective bargaining, and was not imposed on the district, suggests an educational power structure where the balance of power rests with insiders. Interview data support this claim. Leadership for education reform in Los Angeles is provided by teachers, through the union, and the school board. The strength of the union, in

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[3]The union, United Teachers-Los Angeles ultimately went on strike for nine days in May and June, 1989 before signing a new contract.

particular, also is demonstrated by data indicating that 25% of

the respondents named the union as essential to education reform

and also as the most difficult opponent to overcome (see Tables 2

and 3).[4] This outcome may be partly explained by the stability

of the union in Los Angeles. United Teachers-Los Angeles was

formally recognized in 1970 and the union president has served

since 1984.[5] The current president also had extensive experience

in leadership positions with the union before being elected

president. The stability of the union in Los Angeles clearly

enhanced the group's ability to control decentralization reform,

much like the superintendent in Wissler and Ortiz's study of

Riverside, California.

Insiders, specifically the school board and union, also

received high effectiveness ratings (see Table 4). A majority of

respondents (about 55%) viewed both actors as either very

effective or moderately effective. There appears to be less

consensus than in Miami-Dade, but the data again suggest support

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[4]In Tables 2 and 3, 25% of the respondents in Los Angeles also named the governor. The strong position of the governor probably is the result of California's tradition of reform "by remote control." Change in the Los Angeles Unified School District often has come about through state legislation, such as Senate Bill 813 (1983) which mandated a variety of reforms, from raising standards for students and lengthening the school day to creating a mentor teacher program. The governor of California, moreover, has line-item veto power. The present governor who is Republican has used it in recent years to cancel monies for education programs authorized by the state legislature, which is controlled by Democrats.

[5]There is a two-term limit on the president's tenure.

for inside actors as leaders of education reform in Los Angeles.

Los Angeles' decentralization plan, similar to Miami-Dade's, adheres to the administrative decentralization model and not too surprising given the strength of the union, features a dominant role for teachers. Decision making has been pushed down the ranks of the professional hierarchy to local school leadership councils, which have between six and sixteen members (depending on the level or the size of the school). Half of the council seats are reserved for teachers, including the school's union representative, and the remaining spots are divided among parents, community members, the school principal and a non-teaching school employee. While parents and community members are included, the locus of control rests with principals and teachers.[6]

In terms of change, decentralization reform in Los Angeles is more incremental (and less radical) than either Chicago or Miami-Dade. As noted earlier, decentralization was not a high priority issue in Los Angeles, as in the other cities; in fact, it moved onto the reform agenda only after the union voted to strike.

Decentralization in Los Angeles also is on a slower implementation schedule, involving a two-stage process: 1) shared decision making, that is sharing current school-based

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[6]In recent weeks, parents at many schools in Los Angeles, complaining that teachers "grabbed the lion's share of the power," are calling for equal representation with teachers on the school leadership councils (Banks and Merl, 1990).

decisions formerly under the purview of the principal, such as scheduling and use of school equipment; and 2) school-based management, that is increasing the number and kind of school-based decisions in all areas of school operation including budget, teacher hiring and assignment, and curriculum and teaching methods.

Local school leadership councils at every school in the district were elected beginning July, 1989 and the first phase began during the 1989-1990 school year. Change generally was characterized as "rather mundane:"

> Lunch and recess schedules have been changed, first graders allowed to perform in the school talent show, [and] teachers granted access to copying machines (Banks and Merl, 1990).

Currently, individual schools are busy preparing proposals to expand their restructuring programs into the second phase. However, unlike the district and union in Miami-Dade, inside actors in Los Angeles have done little to encourage schools to participate. For example:

o Proposal guidelines were published at the end of March and proposals are due to a central committee by April 20th for judging.

o Only 70 schools (out of more than 600) in the district will be selected to begin the SBM phase this September.

o The final decision on which schools will be selected for SBM will not be made until late August and schools are expected to begin in the fall.

As one teacher remarked: "They gave us a row boat and said cross

the Atlantic in ten days."

The level of conflict among insiders was very high in Los
Angeles. Labor-management relations were described as very poor,
and the union has called three strikes since 1980, the last one
occurring in May, 1989. The current superintendent was not
supported by the union, and his appointment was described by a
majority of school board members as controversial. Among school
board members conflict levels also were high. A majority of the
board members (67%) stated that heated discussions almost always
occurred at board meetings.

Thus far, administrative decentralization in Miami-Dade,
under the cooperative direction of the union and district, has
produced innovation and radical change in the school district.
By contrast, in Los Angeles where there are high levels of
conflict among the insiders in charge of decentralization, the
scope of reform is more limited. "The district expects to do
things business as usual," commented the unions' secondary vice-
president and co-chair of the central committee (Bradley, 1990,
p.10). These findings suggest that conflict among insiders
influenced not only the character of the reform, as expected, but
also the extremeness or degree of change adopted.

Summary of Findings

Chicago

o   Form of decentralization was local empowerment and reform
     was imposed externally on the district by the state

legislature

* Educational power structure: Balance of power lies with actors outside the school district; strength of local reform groups

* Inside actors (superintendent, union, school board) perceived as ineffective

* High levels of conflict among insiders

o Decentralization policy represents a radical departure from standard operating procedures

* School district was in crisis

Miami-Dade

o Form of decentralization was administrative decentralization and reform was an internal choice

* Educational power structure: Balance of power lies with actors inside the school district; strength of union, superintendent and school board

* Inside actors (superintendent, union, school board) perceived as extremely effective

* Stability (tenure and experience) of insiders is high

* Low levels of conflict among insiders

o Decentralization policy represents a considerable departure from standard operating procedures

* Strong support from public and business community for education reform in Miami

Los Angeles

o   Form of decentralization was administrative decentralization
     and reform was an internal choice

*   Educational power structure: Balance of power lies
     with actors inside the school district; significant
     power of union

*   Stability of union leadership

*   High effectiveness ratings for union and school board

o   Decentralization policy represents an incremental change
     from standard operating procedures

*   High levels of conflict among insiders (board, union
     and superintendent)

*   Decentralization was not a high priority issue

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