

School Board Leadership: A Proud Past and a Challenging Future



Harvey Alvy, Ed.D., Michael Dunn, Ed.D, Elissa Dyson, M.P.A.
Mary Fertakis, Phil Gore, M.Ed., Mark Selle, Ph.D.

“Everyone uses some sense of the past in everyday life ... the real question is whether the histories we all use in decision making enrich and ground our understanding of the choices we face.”

“Americans chose, collectively and decisively, to establish and sustain the world’s most universal and popular system of education.”

David Tyack, in the Introduction to
SCHOOL, The Story of American Education

“I realized that China wants what America is eager to throw away ...

... an education that respects individual talents, supports divergent thinking, tolerates deviation and encourages creativity; a system in which the government does not dictate what students learn or how teachers teach; and culture that does not rank or judge the success of a school, a teacher, or a child based on test scores in a few subjects determined by the government.”

*Yong Zhao, **Catching Up or Leading the Way: American Education in the Age of Globalization***

“Is education primarily a consumer good or a common good?”

Democracy is about making wise collective choices, not individual consumer choices. Democracy in education and education in democracy are not quaint legacies from a distant and happier time. They have never been more essential to wise self-rule than they are today.”

David Tyack, from *SCHOOL*

Why public schools need democratic governance

“The business model assumes that democratic governance is a hindrance to effective education. It assumes that competition among schools and teachers produces better results than collaboration. It treats local school boards as a nuisance and an obstacle rather than as the public’s representatives in shaping education policy.”

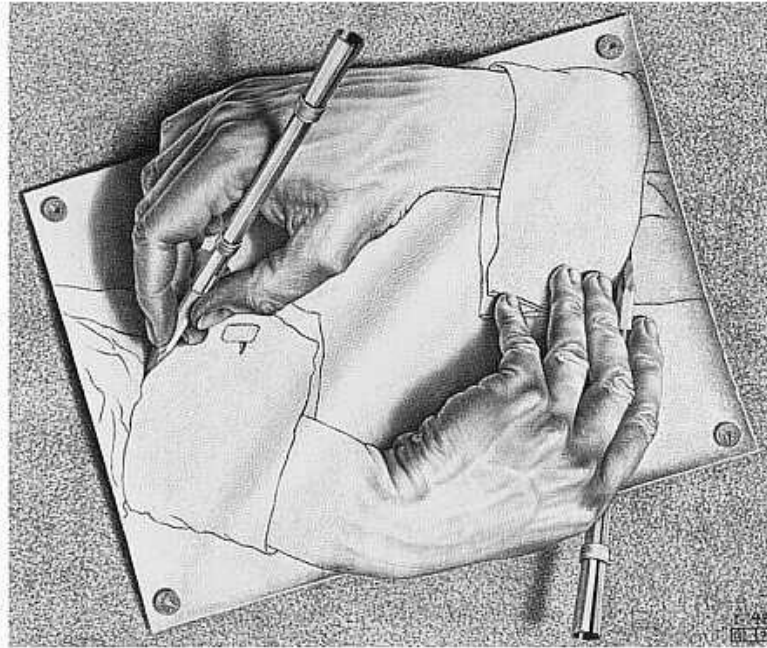
Diane Ravitch, in *Kappan*, March 2010

Decline in support for local control of public schools (from PDK-Gallup Poll 2010)

“Who should bear the greatest responsibility for determining what is taught in schools?”

	1980	2010
School boards	68%	28%
State government	15%	43%
Federal government	17%	28%

Our themes: Lessons from history



- 1. Nothing new under the sun***
- 2. Democratic voice***
- 3. The genius of the AND***

Where did the district system come from?

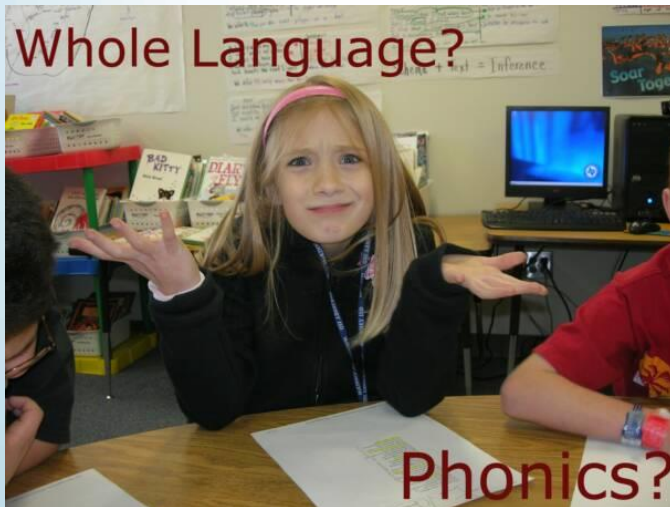


“The New England district system swept the country.”

Issues school boards have faced

“The arrival of millions of new immigrants [in the early 20th Century] had a large impact on the nation’s schools.”

--Diane Ravitch, *Left Back*, p. 55



In the mid 19th Century Horace Mann:
“... advocated the whole-word method of teaching reading, while the [Boston School] masters defended phonics, the traditional approach of learning letters and then putting them together to make words.”

Urban and Wagoner, *American Education: A History*, 1996, p. 107

**“Best Practice”
Reading Instruction**

Tyranny of the OR



“Instead of being oppressed with the ‘Tyranny of the OR,’ highly visionary companies liberate themselves with the ‘Genius of the AND’—the ability to embrace both extremes of a number of dimensions at the same time.”

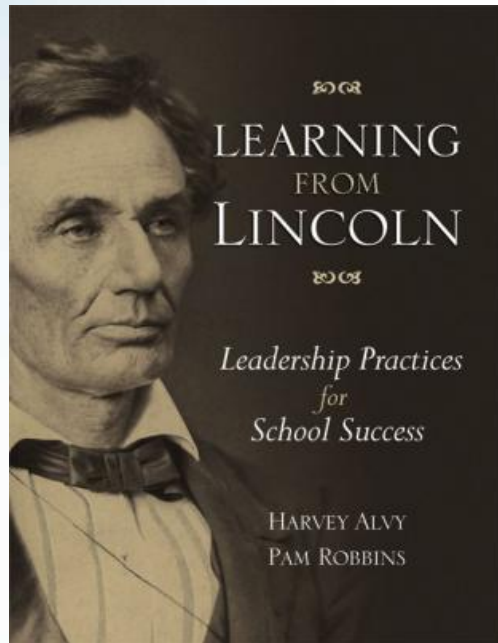
Collins and Porras, *Built to Last*, p. 44

Local control OR central control?



“The ‘Genius of the AND’ is APPROPRIATE CONTROL.”

Learning from Lincoln

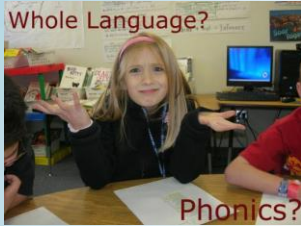


“Upon the subject of education, not presuming to dictate any plan or system respecting it, I can only say that I view it as the most important subject which we as a people can be engaged in.”

Abraham Lincoln, March 9, 1832

Quoted in Alvy and Robbins, *Learning from Lincoln*, p. 164

Questions for consideration ...



Nothing new under the sun

Either/Or: What are the indicators that suggest the initiatives/innovations being pursued are substantive and enduring, not fads?



Democratic voice

Shaping educational policy: When and how should school board members exercise their voice in shaping state and federal educational policy?



The genius of the AND

Appropriate control: How can we break “the tyranny of the OR” and embrace “the genius of the AND”?

**Current challenges,
or continuing challenges
in new forms**



Local control: A rich legacy



In the 19th Century, American school board members constituted the largest body of public officials in the world.

Americans distrusted distant government and wanted governance of school to be close at hand and transparent. Local citizens could vote for their representatives on the school board, participate in decisions, and deliberate about what was the best way to educate their children.

Whence, local control today?



By the early 20th century, professional leaders in education had come to agree that there were entirely too many school districts and too much grass roots democracy. They had a name for the defect: 'The rural school problem.'

Today, some activists in cities and suburbs try to reproduce a kind of citizen participation that occurred spontaneously in rural communities when direct democracy and local control seemed synonymous terms.



Choice

Choice in American education has long meant something else – not parents making individual choices but communities making collective choices about schooling, by electing (choosing) school boards that set educational policy.



Federal and state governments' role in education



In recent years, when reformers have discussed national standards, state frameworks, and school site management, **they typically have ignored local districts and their school boards.** With some important exceptions, policy analysts in recent years have generally focused attention on every level of governance ***but*** local districts.

ESEA

Late in 1963, the nation's school children gained a new champion: a former schoolteacher, now president, named Lyndon Johnson. He made more funding available, as legal expert Jay Heubert explains: **'There was a carefully thought-out strategy involving a carrot and a stick.** The Civil Rights Act said, among other things, that states and school districts could lose their federal funding if they refused to desegregate their schools. The Civil Rights Act then, was the stick, the threat of losing federal funds. The carrot was a significant increase in federal funds that came in the form of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.'



NCLB • Obama Blueprint • RTTT • i3

Influence of foundations



“It is worth reflecting on the wisdom of allowing education policy to be directed, or one might say, captured by private foundations. **There is something fundamentally antidemocratic about relinquishing control of the public education policy agenda to private foundations run by society’s wealthiest people;** when the wealthiest of these foundations are joined in common purpose, they represent an unusually powerful force that is beyond the reach of democratic institutions ... They are not subject to public oversight or review, as a public agency would be. They have taken it upon themselves to reform public education, perhaps in ways that would never survive the scrutiny of voters in any district or state. If voters’ don’t like the foundations’ reform agenda, they can’t vote them out of office. **The foundations demand that public schools and teachers be held accountable for performance, but they themselves are accountable to no one.** If their plans fail, no sanctions are levied against them. They are bastions of unaccountable power.”

Diane Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System* , pp 200-201

Possibilities for the future



- 1. Nothing new under the sun***
- 2. Democratic voice***
- 3. The genius of the AND***

Difficult seas to navigate



“The ‘Genius of the AND’ is APPROPRIATE CONTROL.”

Questions for consideration ...



Nothing new under the sun

Are school boards obstacles to reform?
Are they defenders of the status quo?



Democratic voice

Whom could do it better? Might elected mayors, chancellors, governors or politically appointed boards better govern public education?



The genius of the AND

What is the win-win blended approach to public school governance that produces the best results for kids?

Future possibilities



Nothing new under the sun

Are school boards obstacles to reform? Are they defenders of the status quo?



Democratic voice

Whom could do it better? Might elected mayors, chancellors, governors or politically appointed boards better govern public education?



The genius of the AND

What is the win-win blended approach to public school governance that produces the best results for kids?

Local control—OR vs. AND—central control?



“The ‘Genius of the AND’ is APPROPRIATE CONTROL.”

What is the best hope for your students' future?

