

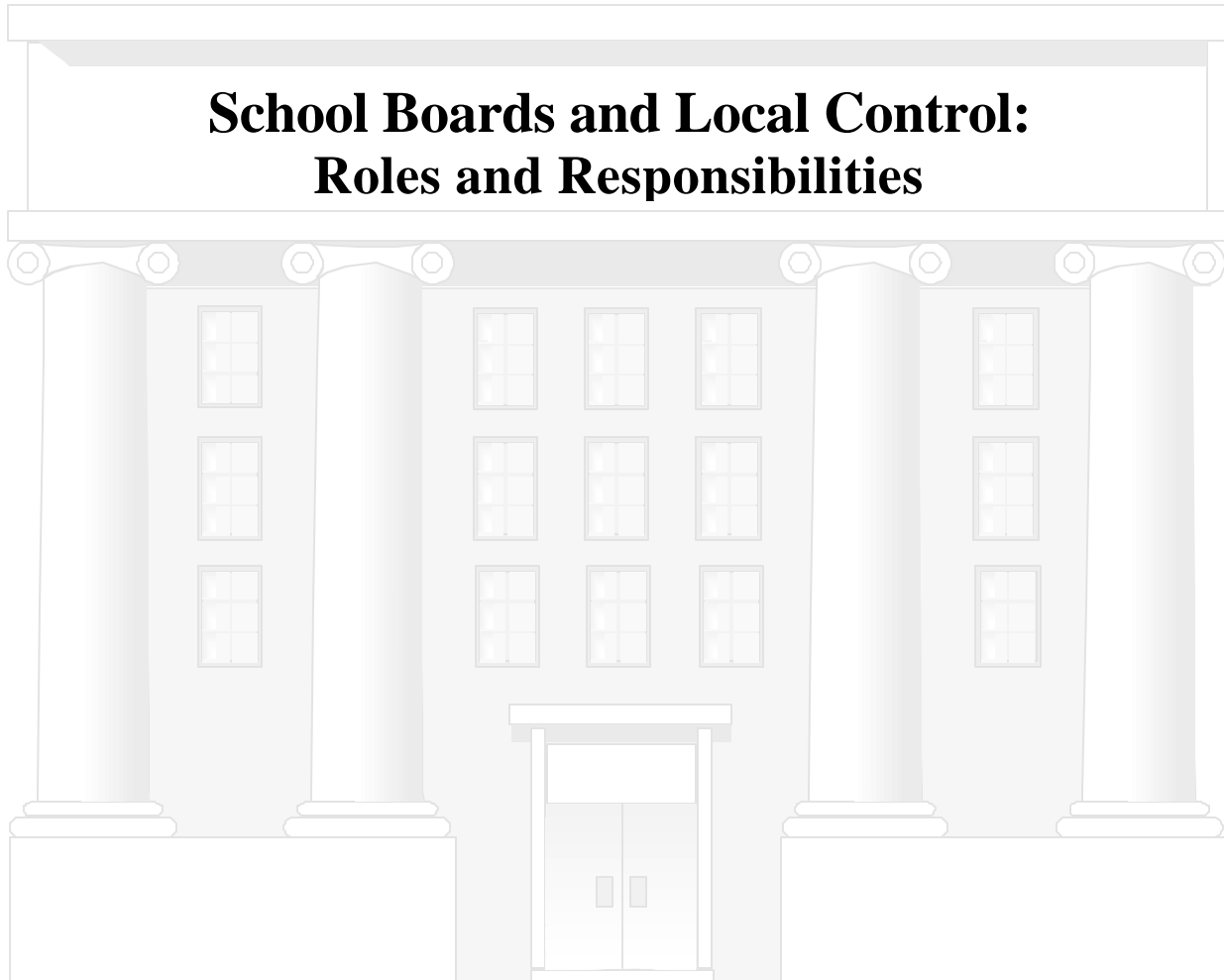


**Bringing
Focus
to the
Issues**

Research Atlanta, Inc.

Georgia State University
Andrew Young School of Policy Studies

**School Boards and Local Control:
Roles and Responsibilities**





Bringing
Focus
to the
Issues

Research Atlanta, Inc.

Georgia State University

Andrew Young School of Policy Studies

School Boards and Local Control: Roles and Responsibilities

By
Dr. Catherine Freeman

In July 1992, the Georgia State University Policy Research Center agreed to assist Research Atlanta in selecting and preparing its reports. The Board of Directors of Research Atlanta sets the research agenda while the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies facilitates the research and prepares the reports. The reports are reviewed and approved by Research Atlanta before their release. The objective is to produce concise, well-documented reports analyzing local public policy problems and issues and advancing practical, cost-effective options for addressing them.

RESEARCH ATLANTA, INC.

Research Atlanta, Inc. is an independent, non-partisan, non-profit organization that studies problems affecting metropolitan Atlanta. The goals of the organization are:

- \$ To develop and present reliable information about community issues to Atlanta area leaders in a manner that encourages informed policy planning and implementation.
- \$ To present information on community issues to the general public so that it can better understand and participate in decisions affecting the community.

Research has been conducted in such areas as public education, taxation, government structure, private philanthropy, housing, delivery of government services, and transportation.

THE ANDREW YOUNG SCHOOL OF POLICY STUDIES

The Andrew Young School of Policy Studies was established at Georgia State University in 1996 in an effort to train tomorrow's leaders in the public, non-profit, and private sectors, as well as provide practical research and solutions to many of the important policy problems facing local, state, and national governments. In addition to graduate and undergraduate degrees in economics, urban policy studies, public policy, and public administration, research programs focus on the following policy issues:

Regional Economics; State and Local Government Finance; Environmental Policy; Economics of Developing and Transition Countries; Human Resource Development; Education Policy; Health Policy; Urban Structure; Planning, and Poverty; Innovation, Science and Entrepreneurship; Transportation Policy and Management; and Public Management.

Research Atlanta, Inc.
Board of Directors

Andrew Feiler
President

John Ahmann
Vice President – Project Selection

Doug R. Hooker
Secretary/Vice President – Strategic Planning

Margaret M. Joslin
Vice President – Community Outreach

Paul Kelman
Vice President – Communications

Steven C. Baker
Treasurer

Kathy Ashe

Sally S. Bethea

Lisa Borders

Dolores Cross

Mario Diaz

Greg Hawkins

Richard L. Holmes

Ayesha Khanna

David J. Paterson

Helen Preston Tapp

T. Michael Tennant

Charles H. Tisdale

STAFF

Deborah O. McCarty
Executive Director

Jennifer Kreider
Associate Director

Janice Ransby
Executive Assistant

Board of Advisors

John F. Allgood
J. Veronica Biggins
Cecil D. Conlee
Bradley Currey, Jr.
Ann Q. Curry
Ann W. Cramer
Larry L. Gellerstedt, III

William L. Gibbs
Milton H. Jones, Jr.
Ingrid Saunders Jones
D. Raymond Riddle
Horace H. Sibley
Lyndon A. Wade
Sam A. Williams

Funding for Research Atlanta, Inc.
is provided mainly by contributions
from businesses, foundations and individuals.
Donations are tax-deductible.

For additional information
about Research Atlanta, Inc.
or to obtain a copy of any report, contact:
Research Atlanta, Inc.
Andrew Young School of Policy Studies
Georgia State University
Atlanta, Georgia 30303
Phone: 404-651-1385
FAX: 404-651-1906
Internet: www.researchatlanta.org

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the following individuals for their generous and valuable suggestions and comments:

Dr. David Sjoquist – Georgia State University

Dr. Ben Scafidi – Georgia State University

School Board Members in Atlanta City, DeKalb, Fulton, Decatur City, Cobb, Cherokee, and Gwinnett Counties

Deborah McCarty – Research Atlanta

The Board of Research Atlanta, Inc.

However, the conclusions and any errors in this study are the responsibility of the author alone.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Catherine Freeman is a Senior Research Associate with the Fiscal Research Program of the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies at Georgia State University. She holds a Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University in Education Policy. Her concentration is on educational policy issues and resource allocation consequences. More specifically, she is concerned with k-12 school finance, legal issues of equity and adequacy, education reform strategies, educational accountability, political processes and education, and theories of education reform. She has written papers for Georgia's Governor's Education Reform Study Commission on increasing school level flexibility and the roles and responsibilities of state educational agencies. Additionally, she worked with the Georgia Professional Standards Commission to produce a teacher labor market projection report. She is currently serving on the staff of Georgia's Closing the Gap Commission. Dr. Freeman has and will continue to work supporting litigation in state Supreme Court cases relating to school finance issues.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	1
About the Author	2
Contents	3
Executive Summary.....	4
I. Introduction	5
II. Role of School Boards in the U.S.	6
III. School Boards in Georgia	7
IV. Winter and Fall 2000 <i>Georgia Poll</i> Results	8
V. Metro Atlanta School Board Member Interviews	9
VI. What Other City School Boards Look Like	10
VII. Conclusions	13
VIII. Appendices	14-23
Appendix A – <i>Winter 2000 Georgia Poll</i> Results	14
Appendix B – <i>Fall 2000 Georgia Poll</i> Results	18
Appendix C – Local School Board Members Interview Questions	23
IX. References	24

School Boards and Local Control: Roles and Responsibilities

Dr. Catherine Freeman Executive Summary

This report describes the roles and responsibilities of local school boards, examines how much Georgians know about these roles and responsibilities, and presents the opinions of local school board members regarding both the public's involvement in local schools and the ability of school boards to successfully deliver adequate educational services to local schools.

In order to accomplish these goals, questions were added to the Winter and Fall 2000 *Georgia Poll's* to determine whether individuals know who makes curricular, financial, and personnel decisions that directly affect local schools. Ten members of metro Atlanta's school boards were interviewed in order to gain more in-depth information regarding the public's awareness of local school board activities and how the stated roles and responsibilities of local boards are translated into actual practice.

Even though the composition and recognized authority of school boards vary, not only by state, but by locality as well, there are some overarching roles and responsibilities of school boards. Most school boards have the responsibility to:

1. Establish procedures and policies for the administration of educational services in the district.
2. Implement the state's education laws and programs
3. Monitor the operation of the school district and its programs.
4. Hire the district superintendent.
5. Oversee the annual budget preparation and resource deployment

Local school councils are to be created in every Georgia public school by October 3, 2003, as the councils will bring a new dynamic to local school governance. These councils must be made up of the principal of the school, two parents, two teachers, and two businesspersons. School councils are advisory bodies and are designed to provide advice and recommendations to the school principal and the local board on any matter, including curriculum, budget, principal selection, and the performance of school personnel. Local boards have the ability to give these councils more authority, as they deem appropriate.

The results from both *Polls* revealed that the public is not well informed about the role and responsibilities of local school boards or the newly formed local school councils. A full sixty-one percent did not know about the creation of local school councils, while sixty-nine percent were somewhat or not at all familiar with local school boards. Notwithstanding, respondents believe the best way to deliver and manage educational services are through local school boards and that members of local school boards should be elected rather than appointed. These findings were consistent across all gender, race, income, education, and age categories. School board members echoed these results and believe that parental and community involvement is quite low, at around 10%.

Urban school systems across the state and across the nation struggle to serve new and different populations in addition to their struggle to hire and retain qualified teachers and administrators. Looking to other cities may provide insights into not only improving student achievement, but also potentially improving the way in which education is governed.

I. Introduction

School governance is a critical issue often discussed and intimately linked to the quality of public education in the United States. The ultimate responsibility for operating schools falls primarily in the hands of district level school boards and the superintendents they hire. A 1998 poll by the National School Board Foundation found a growing dissatisfaction with local school boards.¹ The survey found that most Americans believe local school boards should be held more accountable for public school performance since they determine most policies that govern local schools. School Board members, unlike most individuals involved in education, are held accountable only through the ballot box.

Currently, an increasing number of communities are rethinking ways in which to govern their local schools. Some communities have abolished local school boards all together, while others have changed from boards appointed by state or local officials to elected boards. Some states have centralized public education governance, relieving local systems of much responsibility, while others have created and greatly empowered local school councils in an effort to decentralize.

The purpose of this report is to present the actual and perceived roles and responsibilities of local school boards, in addition to revealing the public's knowledge level and opinion of local school boards and local school councils in Georgia. Results from school board member interviews give further insight into how these roles and responsibilities help or hinder local school board's abilities to govern. Finally, this report presents three mini case studies of Chicago, Houston, and Washington, D.C city school boards. These large urban school boards have all undergone major reorganization efforts in an attempt to raise student achievement.

The first section of this report gives a brief introduction to the roles and responsibility of school boards and broadly sketches some of the roles school boards play in making policy and administrative decisions. In Section II, the role of local school boards and local school councils, both as legal and political entities are explored. Section III details the responses from questions asked in the Winter 2000 and Fall 200 Georgia Poll, which illuminate how uninformed the public is about the roles and responsibilities of the different entities directly involved in local school governance. Section IV contains the results from interviews conducted with ten Metro Atlanta school board members; the interviews support the finding of both *Polls*. Section V looks at three large urban school districts in order to introduce how other school boards have reorganized to implement major reform efforts; it is expected that this will be a topic of a subsequent study. These three cities have undergone major education reforms over the last decade and all have seen gains in student achievement. Finally, Section VI outlines future research opportunities.

¹ National School Boards Foundation (1999). *Leadership Matters: Transforming Urban School Boards*. Available online at <http://www.nsbf.org/report>.

II. Role of School Boards in the U.S.

This section briefly explores the roles and responsibilities of school boards in the U.S. Local school boards are, in most cases, constitutionally created and continue to exist as state entities, but over the past few decades the roles and responsibilities have changed as a result of changes in the needs of both the local education system and state education policy makers. More and more state and local policymakers are holding school boards accountable for student achievement as well as for the fiscal health of the school system.

Currently, local boards allocate all executive functions to the superintendent of the local school system. Superintendents are entrusted with implementing the local school board's policies and managing the daily operation of the schools. The superintendent is held accountable for each school's academic achievement. Hiring the superintendent can be the most controversial and difficult responsibility of local school boards. Most superintendents only stay an average of three years in large, inner-city school districts.² The combination of a large, diverse student population and more often than not, a power struggle between the school board and the superintendent, are often the cause of such short tenures. Many superintendents have accused school boards of micromanaging the schools and not giving the superintendent the opportunity to implement necessary changes with respect to the curriculum and staff.³

The legal authority of a local school board lies within the board as a corporate entity created by the state legislature, and in the case of Georgia, created by the state constitution.⁴ Board members must balance the requirements of the state with the preferences of local voters. The local political support for school boards is weak in most districts; few residents actually vote in school board elections. Furthermore, the issues surrounding board elections tend to be contentious and personal, rather than focused on education policy.⁵

Even though the composition and recognized authority of school boards vary, not only by state, but by locality as well, there are some overarching roles and responsibilities of school boards. Most school boards have the responsibility to:

1. Establish procedures and policies for the administration of educational services in the district.
2. Implement the state's education laws and programs
3. Monitor the operation of the school district and its programs.
4. Hire the district superintendent.
5. Oversee the annual budget preparation and resource deployment

Many of these responsibilities are reassigned or even taken away when city or state officials believe the local school board to be failing in its duties to provide an adequate education. This reorganization is often controversial, as it shifts power from one policy making entity to another. Examples of such shifts are seen in a number of mayoral takeovers of school systems that occurred in the late twentieth century.

² Glass, Thomas E. (2000, November 8). The shrinking applicant pool. *Education Week*. Vol. 20, number 10, page 68,50-51.

³ Glass, Thomas E. (2000, November 8). The shrinking applicant pool. *Education Week*. Vol. 20, number 10, page 68,50-51.

⁴ Section V Paragraph II of the Georgia State Constitution

⁵ Hadderman, Margaret. (1988). *State vs. Local Control of Schools*. ERIC Digest Series Number 24.

III. School Boards in Georgia

The next section describes the roles and responsibilities of local school boards in the state of Georgia. Additionally, the roles and responsibilities of the newly formed local school councils are explained. Over the next few years, questions of control and authority will likely permeate local school boards as schools create local school councils

Local school boards in Georgia are responsible for hiring both professional and administrative personnel in the local school systems. The local school boards are also responsible for arbitrating personnel recommendations from their superintendents. These recommendations include such things as disciplinary action, recognition, and dismissal requests. Local school boards establish educational goals for their districts that are consistent with state policy and designed to improve student achievement. The boards approve courses to be offered and require periodic reports on the status of the educational program offered by the districts. Additionally, each board also publishes an annual educational performance report on the district and each campus. Achievement, financial, curricular, and administrative information are included in these yearly reports and most can be found on the World Wide Web. Local school boards have the added responsibility of approving the district's annual budget.

According to House Bill 1187, local school councils are to be created in every Georgia public school by October 3, 2003, as the councils will bring a new dynamic to local school governance. These councils must be made up of the principal of the school, two parents, two teachers, and two businesspersons. School councils are advisory bodies and are designed to provide advice and recommendations to the school principal and the local board on any matter, including curriculum, budget, principal selection, and the performance of school personnel. Local boards have the ability to give these councils more authority, as they deem appropriate. The local board of education must be responsive to the councils and the council members are required to participate in any hearing mandated by the State Board of Education related to unacceptable performance of the school or recommended interventions.

The members of the councils are representatives of the community, and are in place to help strengthen the connection between the schools and the local boards. The councils are to work to improve student performance, but this task seems virtually impossible without the power to control the environments within the schools.

IV. Winter and Fall 2000 *Georgia Poll* Results

The Winter 2000 Georgia Poll and Fall 2000 Georgia Poll were used to solicit the public's opinion and knowledge of local school boards and local school councils.⁶ The *Poll* questions were designed to determine whether individuals know who makes curricular, financial, and personnel decisions that directly affect local schools. Opinions were sought regarding who should have more and less power in the daily operation of schools. Respondents were also asked about local school councils and their roles in local decision-making processes.

The results from both *Polls* revealed that the public is not well informed about the role and responsibilities of local school boards or the newly formed local school councils. A full sixty-one percent did not know about the creation of local school councils, while sixty-nine percent were somewhat or not at all familiar with local school boards. Notwithstanding, respondents believe the best way to deliver and manage educational services are through local school boards and that members of local school boards should be elected rather than appointed. These findings were consistent across all gender, race, income, education, and age categories.

Parents more than non-parents think they should be more involved in school governance decisions. Seventeen percent of parents believe they should be the final authority over local schools, in addition to being the most qualified to make decisions about what children learn and about discipline and safety policies. Parents feel most strongly about being involved in decisions relating to discipline and safety, curriculum, and the hiring, firing and promoting of teachers.

At higher levels of income and education, respondents across all races generally agreed that local school boards and or school administrators responsible, rather than parents, should be held responsible for school governance decisions. As income and education levels fell, respondents indicated greater preferences for parental involvement in school governance decisions

The Fall 2000 *Poll* results reveal the public's support for local school boards. Forty percent of respondents felt local school boards should have the power to hire, fire and promote teachers, school administrators, and principals. Furthermore, at least 25% of respondents thought local school boards should be responsible for setting policies about what children learn, the selection of textbooks and other instructional material, and discipline and safety policies. Close to 50% of respondents felt local school boards were doing either an excellent or good job compared to 61% for teachers and 57% for principals.

Questions on the Winter 2000 *Poll* sought to illicit the public's knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of local school boards. In doing so, respondents were asked who has the power to hire and fire teachers, control curricular decisions, manage the yearly budget, and set disciplinary and safety policies. The results reiterate the point made in board member interviews that there is a large portion of the population that knows little or nothing about school boards, much less how schools operate on a day-to-day basis. In fact, at least 20% of the participants responded "Don't Know" when asked about hiring/firing practices, curriculum, or the financial management of schools. These results further illustrate that most people without children in the school systems are relatively uninformed regarding who governs local schools. Although both surveys found that few knew about the local school councils, this might not be unreasonable since their implementation is in process and will not be

⁶ A complete list of questions that were added to both *Polls* are in Appendix A

complete for another two years. These results can be interpreted as either a complete failure of the system to communicate with the public or that there is little interest in public schooling, particularly among those without children.

V. Metro Atlanta School Board Member Interviews

As a supplement to the *Poll* results, several metro school board members were interviewed. Initially, members of the Atlanta City, DeKalb, Fulton, Decatur City, Cobb, Cherokee, and Gwinnett County School Boards were sent a letter explaining the study and requesting a phone interview. Only ten members from all seven districts responded to our repeated phone calls and faxes. Five of these were from Atlanta City, two from Cobb County, two from Decatur City, and one from DeKalb County. Most respondents had remarkably similar responses to our questions regarding the roles and responsibilities of school boards but had very different opinions on the both the daily operation of the board and future of school boards as currently organized.⁷

Responding school board members overwhelmingly agreed that there is a lack of public interest and involvement in local schools. Most school boards have a small group of deeply involved parents while the majority of citizens pay virtually no attention and have no knowledge of the role or responsibilities of their local board members. One board member estimates that only two percent of their constituents, both parents and non-parents, pay close attention to the board and its rulings, while fewer than ten percent having any knowledge at all about what the board is designed to do. Another board member strongly believes that most people cannot discern between the county school board and the local central office administration staff.

This lack of public involvement is unnerving since one role of local school boards is to represent their constituents in the policy making process. Most board members felt that he or she was very involved in the community and through PTA meetings, school events, emails, and phone calls are able to keep in touch with their community and its needs.

The local school board members surveyed agreed that there are two fundamental roles of local school boards. First, school boards are mandated to oversee the operation of and set policies for local schools. Second, school boards hire superintendents to administer the day-to-day management of local schools. The members agree that it is not the board's role to interfere with the superintendent, but instead to be a "cheerleader" for him or her.

The politics associated with school boards is a major hurdle for most metro boards. In fact, one board member believes that the politics surrounding the board interferes with the superintendent's ability to operate on a daily basis. Some board members question the motives of fellow board members who view the position as a stepping-stone for future political aspirations.

Responding board members feel that the public should elect the president of the school board. According to one board member, the annual election among board members has been attributed to up to ninety percent of the board's problems throughout the school year. Another major problem cited by many board members is inter-board alliances. These, in essence, provide the opportunity to filibuster some member's ideas, and in the worst case, publicly disparage the board or other members.

⁷ A complete list of interview questions can be found in Appendix B

One characteristic that seems to help overcome controversy and disagreement is the ability for a board to remain intact for a long period of time. Many of the boards in the metro Atlanta area have been together for a number of years and feel that they have a good working relationship with each other. They feel there is a higher level of accountability to board members who have served together and know each other on a personal level.

All of the board members interviewed believed that they should retain ultimate authority over hiring and firing, curricular decisions, and financial management of schools. Even with this authority, members indicated that they are only directly involved in the budget development process and leave the other responsibilities to the superintendent. The obvious exception is when a matter regarding a specific teacher or a specific curricular requirement comes before them. Most are very willing to admit that they are not the experts in education, but the superintendent is and is hired to ensure the success of all local schools.

Responding school board members are unanimous in not knowing what role the new local school councils will play, both politically and administratively, at the local level. Some felt that the local school councils would work to assist the boards, as they are a way to mandate greater public involvement in the local education process. Most believe that the concept is excellent; there is some concern about the prescriptive nature of the how councils operate and how they are made up, in addition to the feasibility of proper implementation. One board member said that the law does not properly take into account school size and grades served. Some small elementary schools may have a difficult time obtaining the proper mixture of parents, teachers, and business leaders. One metro school board member completely opposes the idea, as it will make a great deal of additional work for the principal, in addition to making the principal's position very political.

An interesting split of opinions emerged when the board members were asked who was ultimately accountable for the success of students. Half asserted that the superintendents are to be held accountable while the other half believe the responsibility falls in their lap. All members believe that it is their responsibility to hire individuals whom they believe have the abilities to be successful and it is their responsibility to give the superintendent the resources necessary to carry out the job.

In summary, metro Atlanta school boards believe very strongly that they can make a difference and that the current organizational structure can facilitate better student achievement. Most feel that local school councils can only help in the information flow and the effort to get parents and non-parents involved in schools. They are aware that there has to be an effort to increase public participation in not only school board elections, but in the schools themselves. School board positions need to be filled with people who have the time and dedication to the local education systems in addition to having the leadership qualities that facilitate new ways to increase student achievement.

VI. What Other City School Boards Look Like

This section looks at three urban school districts that are in the process of major reforms of their education system, including changes in the way in which local school boards operate. These changes must be framed in the different political environments that exist and understood as examples for the system in metro Atlanta, not solutions. A further study that looks in greater depth at not only these, but other large urban systems would greatly expand our understanding of what reforms improve the board's ability to increase student achievement outcomes.

Urban school districts face many problems that are not necessarily found among suburban or rural districts. For instance, many urban districts are plagued with old and often decrepit facilities, high teacher turnover coupled with low teacher experience, high student mobility and low parental involvement, and most importantly, chronically low student achievement. In order to remedy this situation, some states have chosen to grant city school boards and superintendents wide latitude to implement reforms in the hopes of reversing the cycle.

The three school districts are urban school systems with large minority populations, much like that of Atlanta. Each system has a different catalyst for the reforms, but they are all similar in the fact that student achievement among minorities in each city was among the worst in the country. The information presented here comes from National Center of Education Statistic reports, policy center papers, journal articles and newspaper items.⁸

Chicago

Few could argue that Chicago has historically been one of the worst school systems in the country.⁹ Chicago schools underwent sweeping reforms in hopes of raising abysmal student achievement scores. The reforms included increased accountability measures, the creation of local school councils, and a relaxation of teacher certification requirements. Chicago was one of the first cities to experience a mayoral takeover of the city schools. In 1995, Mayor Richard Daley took emergency control of the schools for four years and hired a new school chief executive officer and the president of the five-member reform school board.¹⁰ After just two months in office, the team repaired the district's tattered finances and labor relations by erasing a four-year, \$1.3 billion shortfall, adopting a balanced \$2.7 billion budget, and signed a four-year contract with the teachers' union. These achievements came when at a time when the city was accustomed to perennial budget deficits, repeated school shutdowns, and frequent labor unrest.¹¹ The new management team privatized maintenance services, cut new deals with vendors, and trimmed the district's bureaucracy.

The local school councils were given unprecedented powers. The councils to hire and fire their schools' principals and have the authority to use a portion of the schools' budgets on what they believe is important. Each council consists of six parents, two teachers, two community members, and, in high schools, one student. Voter turnout for the council elections was initially quite large. As time has passed, voter turnout has declined, as has the number of parents and community members willing to run.

In 1999, Mayor Daley's ability to maintain control of the schools ended and he appointed a more traditional school board, expanded from five to seven members, with staggered terms. The board was authorized to reorganize the central office and appoint a general superintendent. This new board has the power to approve the annual budget, develop and implement policy, carry out its desegregation obligations, levy taxes, and implement any mandates imposed upon the Board of Education by the new education reform legislation.¹²

⁸ Please see References for a complete list of sources.

⁹ National Commission on Governing America's Schools (1999). *Governing America's Schools: Changing the rules*. Education Commission of the States: Denver, CO.

¹⁰ Vander Weele, Maribeth. (1995, April 30). Kentucky Schools Stand as Model; State Takeover Gives Edgar Idea for Reform. *Chicago Sun-Times*. Late Sports Final Edition.

¹¹ Editorial Projects in Education. (1998). *Quality Counts 1998: The Urban Challenge: State Policy Update*.

¹² State of Illinois Public Acts 86-1477.

The challenge facing Chicago is the power struggle that is occurring between local school councils and the board of education. As many cities are looking to create such councils, notice needs to be taken to the governance and organizational impediments that such councils are having on the ability of the city and its officials to deliver state on education priorities.

Mayor Daley's takeover has been cited as the beginning of a trend in large city mayoral takeovers. Michigan recently gave the mayor of Detroit control over the schools and New York City Mayor Gulianni tried unsuccessfully to get power over his city school system.

Houston

The Houston Independent School District has seen many changes over the last decade. In 1990, Houston took on the formidable task of improving school performance system wide. The board began decentralizing administrative authority and allowed for critical decisions to be made at the campus level. This was made possible with the creation of campus-level planning and decision-making committees. In 1996, then board president Dr. Don McAdams outlined a plan that focused on five key issues: accountability, best efforts, competition and choice, decentralization, and expanded parental involvement. Charter schools became an integral part of this effort. This decentralization effort, in addition to the district's charter school initiative, has paid off. The percentage of students in the Houston Independent School District that passed all Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) tests went from 37% in 1995 to 73% in 2000.¹³ The state of Texas as a whole has seen an increase in achievement scores, but Houston stands out not only because it started at the bottom, but because it was able to increase the scores of all children in its district.

The Houston Board of Education is made up of nine elected members who serve four-year terms. The Board is by statute created to "have exclusive power and duty to govern and oversee the management of the public schools of the district".¹⁴ The Superintendent is the educational leader and the chief financial officer of the school district whose duties include: assuming administrative responsibility and leadership for the planning, operation, supervision, and evaluation of the education programs, services, and facilities of the district, assuming administrative authority and responsibility for the assignment and evaluation of all personnel, making recommendations regarding the selection of personnel, initiating the termination or suspension of an employee or the non-renewal of an employee's term contract, managing the day-to-day operations of the district as its administrative manager, preparing and submitting to the board of trustees a proposed budget, preparing recommendations for policies to be adopted by the board of trustees and overseeing the implementation of adopted policies, providing leadership for the attainment of student performance in the district based on the indicators adopted by the State Board of Education or the district's board of trustees, and organizing the district's central administration.

Washington, D.C.

In 1996, the federal government stripped the Washington, D.C. school board of all its power and created a financial control board that reported directly to Congress. This came after years of mismanagement and failure in the system. Academic achievement, graduation rates, and the number of certified teachers teaching outside of their fields were exorbitant. The school board was left in place, but until summer of 2000, it had only an advisory role to the financial control board and the board of trustees and the authority to grant charters. During the interim period, there was much discussion about

¹³ HISD (2000). Houston Independent School District scores set new record. Available online at <http://www.houstonisd.org/News/99-00/050200TAASScoresSetRecod.htm>.

¹⁴ Texas State Constitution: Education Code

the organizational structure of the board once it regained its powers. In June of 2000, D.C. residents voted to change the eleven-member elected school board with limited powers to a nine member board with four of its members appointed by the mayor. This new board has had its powers restored, as both city leaders and Congress approved its reinstatement.

Many believe that the problem in D.C. is unique. It is not a state, has oversight from Congress and competing supervisory boards. In addition, it has had to four superintendents in the last five years. Student achievement has been abysmal and with the opening of charter schools, teacher retention is low. Teachers have been fleeing the city schools for the charter schools in hopes of an improved working environment and better career opportunities. The new board has been in place with full power for about a year and its responsibilities have included selecting the superintendent, budgeting, as well as establishing broader curricular and resource deployment policies. The Board also has the responsibility to grant charters.

Each of these districts has very different hurdles to jump, but all have the same goal of improving student outcomes. Not one of the districts profiled can solve the many problems large urban districts face, however each offers insights into different ways of attempting to solve low student achievement outcomes.

VII. Conclusions

Local school boards have played an integral role in the daily operation of local schools. They have been entrusted to determine curriculum, manage personnel, balance budgets, and set policies regarding discipline and safety. Local school councils are being implemented in Georgia to improve communication between the community and the local school board. Additionally, many are looking to these councils to improve the public's participation in local schools.

Results from the Winter and Fall 2000 *Georgia Polls* indicate that the public knows very little about the role local school board's play in local education. However, local school boards do have the public's support, as most felt that they were the best entity to manage and set policies for local schools. School board members recognize the lack public participation, in addition to acknowledging the need for better communication between local board member's and their constituents.

Urban school systems across the state and across the nation struggle to serve new and different populations in addition to their struggle to hire and retain qualified teachers and administrators. Solutions to these challenges are not laid out in HB 1187 and will make local school boards look outside the state for success stories. While Chicago and Washington, D.C. school boards were taken over in attempts to revamp the school systems, Houston hired an outstanding superintendent that was able to garner the support of the school board and make drastic changes to the system. Atlanta schools are improving, but a comprehensive review of other large urban school systems would provide insights into not only improving student achievement, but also potentially improving the way in which education is governed.

Appendix A
Winter 2000 Georgia Poll Results

1. In your opinion, do you think parents, local school boards, administrators in each school, or state officials should have the responsibility of...hiring, firing and promoting of teachers?

17.3% Parents
40.1% Local School Boards
25.1% Administrators in each school
6.5% State Officials
4.8% Someone else
4.9% Don't know
1.3% No Answer

2. What about the hiring, firing and promoting of principals and school administrators?

14.7% Parents
52.9% Local School Boards
8.8% Administrators in each school
12.6% State Officials
4.9% Someone else
5.0% Don't know
1.1% No Answer

3. In your opinion, do you think parents, local school boards, administrators in each school, or state officials should have the responsibility of setting policy about promoting and retaining students?

15.5% Parents
36.8% Local School Boards
20.0% Administrators in each school
9.2% State Officials
9.1% Someone else
8.1% Don't know
1.3% No Answer

4. In your opinion, do you think parents, local school boards, administrators in each school, or state officials should have the responsibility of setting policy about what children should learn in each grade?

18.6% Parents
25.7% Local School Boards
13.4% Administrators in each school
23.2% State Officials
10.6% Someone else
6.8% Don't know
1.7% No Answer

5. In your opinion, do you think parents, local school boards, administrators in each school, or state officials should have the responsibility of selecting textbooks and other instructional materials?

15.1% Parents
28.9% Local School Boards
18.3% Administrators in each school
17.5% State Officials
11.5% Someone else
7.2% Don't know
1.5% No Answer

6. In your opinion, do you think parents, local school boards, administrators in each school, or state officials should have the responsibility of...setting discipline and safety policy?

19.0% Parents
30.4% Local School Boards
19.3% Administrators in each school
11.9% State Officials
11.5% Someone else
6.1% Don't know
1.7% No Answer

7. In your opinion, how good of a job do you think each of the following is doing -your local school board?

12.1% Excellent
36.7% Good
25.7% Fair
9.0% Poor
14.9% Don't know
1.5% No Answer

8. In your opinion, how good of a job do you think each of the following is doing - teachers?

19.0% Excellent
41.5% Good
18.3% Fair
5.5% Poor
13.8% Don't know
1.9% No Answer

9. In your opinion, how good of a job do you think each of the following is doing –Superintendent?

12.4% Excellent
35.0% Good
22.8% Fair
9.5% Poor
18.0% Don't know
2.2% No Answer

10. In your opinion, how good of a job do you think each of the following is doing - principal?

17.2% Excellent
39.8% Good
19.0% Fair
7.2% Poor
14.6% Don't know
2.1% No Answer

11. In your opinion, how good of a job do you think each of the following is doing -your State Superintendent?

8.9% Excellent
35.4% Good
24.3% Fair
9.2% Poor
20.4% Don't know
1.8% No Answer

12. In your opinion, how good of a job do you think each of the following is doing -your State Board of Education?

8.5% Excellent
36.7% Good
28.2% Fair
9.8% Poor
15.3% Don't know
1.5% No Answer

13. In your opinion, is the board of education in the community where you live too powerful, does it have the right amount of power, or is it not powerful enough?

- 17.6% Too powerful
- 40.1% The right amount of power
- 21.2% Not powerful enough
- 18.9% Don't know
- 2.2% No Answer

14. Who should appoint members of the local school board?

- 59.8% Elected
- 13.7% Appointed by City or County Council
- 6.7% Appointed by someone else
- 5.3% Appointed by someone else
- 3.4% Abolished
- 9.4% Don't know
- 1.6% No Answer

Appendix B
Fall 2000 Georgia Poll Results

1. How familiar are you with your local school board?

14.5% Very familiar
9.6% Familiar
33.2% Somewhat familiar
35.8% Not at all familiar
5.0% Don't know
1.9% No Answer

2. In your opinion, how good of a job is your local school board doing?

7.2% Excellent
29.1% Good
24.9% Fair
11.0% Poor
21.3% Don't know
6.5% No Answer

3. To the best of your knowledge, who has the power to hire and fire teachers in local schools?

17.7% Principal
29.8% Local school board
17.1% State Board of Education
3.2% Governor
25.8% Don't know
6.4% No Answer

4. To the best of your knowledge, who has the power over what is taught in local schools?

6.1% Principal
6.1% Teachers
19.0% Local school board
31.8% State Board of Education
5.7% Governor
24.8% Don't know
6.4% No Answer

5. To the best of your knowledge, who has the power over how money is spent at your local school?

4.6% Principal
27.8% Local school board
21.5% State Board of Education
13.5% Governor
25.8% Don't know
6.9% No Answer

6. Who, in your opinion, should have the power to hire and fire teachers in local schools?

6.5% Parents
22.5% Principal
26.5% Local school board
12.9% State Board of Education
2.7% Governor
21.6% Don't know
7.3% No Answer

7. Who, in your opinion, should have the power over what is taught in local schools?

13.2% Parents
10.3% Principal
7.0% Teachers
21.3% Local school board
16.5% State Board of Education
1.9% Governor
22.1% Don't know
7.7% No Answer

8. Who, in your opinion, should have the power over how money is spent at your local school?

12.8% Principal
33.2% Local school board
16.7% State Board of Education
3.6% Governor
22.2% Don't know
8.9% No Answer

9. Who is ultimately held accountable for how much students learn at your local schools?

33.1% Teachers
9.5% Principal
10.8% Local school Board
4.3% Superintendent
5.9% State Board of Education
1.7% Governor
26.4% Don't know
8.5% No Answer

10. Who should ultimately be held accountable ultimately responsible for how much students learn at your local school?

32.7% Teachers
8.9% Principal
12.4% Local school Board
3.4% Superintendent
5.9% State Board of Education
2.4% Governor
24.6% Don't know
9.7% No Answer

11. In the Governor's education reform package, Local School Councils were created and are to be made up of the principal of the school, two parents, two teachers, and two businesspersons. Do you know about these Councils?

15.0% Yes
60.9% No
18.6% Don't know
5.6% No Answer

12. Do you think such Local School Councils should have final authority over hiring and firing decisions?

30.3% Yes
35.1% No
27.2% Don't know
7.4% No Answer

13. Do you think such Local School Councils should have final authority over what is taught?

27.1% Yes
38.8% No
26.6% Don't know
7.6% No Answer

14. Do you think such Local School Councils should have final authority how money is spent at your local school?

30.0% Yes
36.3% No
26.6% Don't know
7.1% No Answer

15. Do you think local school boards have too much, the right amount, or too little control over local schools?

20.6% Too much control
15.7% The right amount of control
25.5% Not enough control
31.1% Don't know
7.1% No Answer

15a. If too much, then who should have more?

29.2% Parents
28.2% Local school councils
18.5% Administrators in each school
14.8% State Board of Education
2.8% State Legislators
1.9% Governor
1.9% Don't know
2.8% No Answer

15b. If too little, then who should have less?

20.1% Parents
15.5% Local school councils
8.0% Administrators in each school
12.6% State Board of Education
20.7% State Legislators
6.9% Governor
9.8% Don't know
6.3% No Answer

16. How important are local school boards in determining how much students learn?

31.3% Very important
18.8% Important
13.8% Somewhat important
4.8% Not at all important
24.5% Don't know
6.7% No Answer

17. How important should local school boards be in determining how much students learn?

38.4% Very important
17.4% Important
10.3% Somewhat important
3.9% Not at all important
22.5% Don't know
7.6% No Answer

Appendix C
Local School Board Member Interview Questions

- 1) How familiar is the public with the local school board?
- 2) What is the role of the school board?
- 3) How are decisions made by the board?
- 4) In your opinion, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the current board? What changes would you make if any?
- 5) What role does the board have in the hiring and firing of district personnel?
- 6) What role does the board have in the curriculum used in local schools?
- 7) What role does the board have in the financial management of the district?
- 8) Are there any roles or responsibilities that the board does not have that you feel it should?
- 9) How will Local School Councils change the way in which the board operates?
- 10) With the trend toward increasing accountability for student outcomes, who, in your opinion, should be held ultimately responsible?

References

Charles A. Dana Center, University of Texas at Austin. (1999). *A Hope for Urban Education: A Study of nine High-Performing, High-Poverty, Urban Elementary Schools*. (Washington, D.C.: US Department of Education, Planning and Evaluation Service).

Editorial Projects in Education. (1998). *Quality Counts 1998: The Urban Challenge: State Policy Update*.

Georgia State Constitution Section V Paragraph II

Gewertz, Catherine. (2000, February 9). Compromise plan for D.C. governance stalls. *Education Week* 10, 4, p. 3.

Gewertz, Catherine. (2000, July 12). New D.C. chief will face revised board structure. *Education Week* 19, 42, p. 3.

Glass, Thomas E. (2000, November 8). The shrinking applicant pool. *Education Week*. Vol. 20, number 10, page 68,50-51.

Hadderman, Margaret. (1988). *State vs. Local Control of Schools*. ERIC Digest Series Number 24.

Houston Independent School District (2000). Houston Independent School District scores set new record. Available online at <http://www.houstonisd.org/News/99-00/050200TAASScoresSetRecod.htm>.

Massell, Diane. (2000, September). The district role in building capacity: four strategies. *CPRE Policy Briefs RB32-September 2000*.

National Commission on Governing America's Schools (1999). *Governing America's Schools: Changing the rules*. Education Commission of the States: Denver, CO.

National School Boards Foundation (1999). *Leadership Matters: Transforming Urban School Boards*. Available online at <http://www.nsb.org/report>.

Scoon Reid, Karla. (2000, November 15). First elected president chosen for D.C. board. *Education Week* 20, 11, p.3.

Rose, Lowell C & Gallup, Alec M. (2000, September). The 32nd Annual Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup Poll: Of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools. *The Phi Delta Kappan*. p. 41-58.

State of Illinois Public Acts 86-1477.

Texas State Constitution: Education Code

The Heritage Foundation. (2000). *No Excuses: Lessons from 21 High Performing, High Poverty Schools*. Washington, D.C.

Vander Weele, Maribeth. (1995, April 30). Kentucky Schools Stand as Model; State Takeover Gives Edgar Idea for Reform. Chicago Sun-Times. Late Sports Final Edition.