



The view from the edge

Oakland's progress in the implementation of site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools (2002-2003)

An Occasional Paper

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Executive Summary

This report examines Oakland's ongoing progress with the implementation of its site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools policies with a specific focus on the role of the district central office in supporting implementation during the 2002-2003 academic year. Findings come primarily from a series of interviews conducted between 2002 and 2003 with central office administrators, school principals, school and community support providers, community organizers, school board members, and others involved with implementation.

This report is called *The view from the edge* to capture the overall status of implementation in Oakland during this period. Specifically:

- Oakland's efforts to reshape students' school experiences and the inner workings of the central office remained ambitious— what one national education reform leader called “the cutting edge” of prioritizing school autonomy and central office transformation as levers to improve urban school performance.
- Oakland appeared on the brink of using at least the new small autonomous schools policy to achieve significant changes in school and central office operations district-wide.
- The complexity of these efforts combined with budget and teacher crises and state receivership threatened Oakland's progress.

The findings reported here fall into three categories:

I. Advancements

The implementation of the new small autonomous schools advanced significantly in terms of schools' progress, the central office's participation, and respondents' overall perceptions of the new small autonomous schools as a catalyst for district-wide change. Various influences converged to support implementation including:

- School leadership to forged ahead with implementation
- A reconceptualization of autonomy among various participants
- Key roles for school and community support providers and community organizers
- District central office capacity-building related to basic operations
- Improved communication throughout the district
- The proliferation of small schools initiatives across the country

II. Challenges

Significant challenges remain including:

- Perceived limited progress on granting schools specific autonomies
- Implementation of site-based decision making
- Progress with issuing a credit card for school-based purchases
- Persistent district central office staff overload
- Lack of productive union engagement
- Writing Teams' limited performance
- New autonomous schools' capacity
- Equity concerns related to participation in reform and access to reform resources
- Fiscal strains and state receivership

III. Cross-cutting Tensions

Central office administrators' participation has been riddled with tensions—developments that simultaneously bolster and challenge implementation:

- Closer central office-school interactions and improved communication
- The re-location of the Office of School Reform to Mountain Boulevard
- Superintendent's increased role in school support
- Formal agreements about resources and autonomy

This report recommends that the leadership of Oakland Unified School District:

- Provide a clear statement that the new small autonomous schools remain a district central office priority and catalyst for change.
- Embrace or disband site-based decision making.
- Develop and implement a district central office staffing plan appropriate to the district central office's commitment to these initiatives.
- Disband the writing teams and focus available resources on building school and central office capacity.
- Establish a timeline and strategy for engaging all relevant unions in implementation.
- Encourage school and community support providers and community organizers to continue their work.
- Invest in documenting school implementation.
- Clearly communicate how schools become site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools.
- Engage the state and federal government in implementation support.

A note to readers

from the Oakland Cross-city Campaign for Urban School Reform Committee

Since the main interviews for this report were completed in March 2003, a state administrator has assumed leadership of Oakland Unified School District and key staff, including the superintendent, have left their central office posts. The author conducted follow-up conversations with several respondents between April and September of 2003 to explore the relevance of study findings in the new Oakland context. These exploratory conversations strongly suggested that the findings presented here remain relevant and may have grown increasingly urgent in light of potential opportunities to strengthen district central office operations under new leadership.

Introduction

The view from the edge is the second in a series of reports commissioned by Oakland's Cross-city Campaign for Urban School Reform Committee¹ to provide an independent analysis of the progress of Oakland Unified School District's central office in the implementation of its Site-based Decision-making and New Small Autonomous Schools Policies.²

The first report, *Oakland' site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools*, provided a first-ever synthesis of the district central office's efforts to support site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools up to the end of the 2001-2002 academic year and cross-cutting policy recommendations.³ This second report examines Oakland's progress through the end of the 2002-2003 academic year. These reports do not aim to evaluate the success or failure of these reforms but to check the status of implementation, to identify roadblocks and opportunities, and to recommend and prioritize next steps for deepening and expanding school and district central office participation. Both reports focus on the question: How can the central office support the implementation of the site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools?

First annual report: Key findings

The first report highlighted that the site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools policies took hold in Oakland thanks to efforts by a variety of players including the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools, Oakland Community Organization, the Urban Strategies Council, the Oakland School Board, and the school district central office. During the 2001-2002 academic year, these reform partners were essentially building a plane while flying it—establishing basic agreements about the level of decision-making authority or autonomy the policies conveyed to participating schools and implementation resources after schools already had begun implementation. The report found that barriers to implementation stemmed largely from:

- The absence of basic, starting agreements about what autonomy, if any, the two policies conferred to schools.
- Low levels of central office staff engagement in implementation.
- Limited communication within the central office and between the central office and schools about virtually all aspects of implementation.

The report concluded that district central office leaders could bolster implementation by:

- Immediately establishing baseline definitions of autonomy in key areas of school operations to give schools a starting point; developing a schedule for revising those definitions as schools progressed with implementation.
- Prioritizing the development of school autonomy related to school budgets and human resources.
- Seeking assistance from an independent intermediary organization to help manage relationships and role changes between the district central office and participating schools.

- Developing an infrastructure to support both site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools not one or the other.
- Engaging the state and federal government as partners in implementation.
- Enhancing the central office staff dedicated to implementation support.

Second annual report: Key findings

This second report is called *The view from the edge* to capture the overall status of implementation in Oakland during the 2002-2003 academic year. Specifically:

- Oakland’s efforts to reshape students’ school experiences and the inner workings of the central office remain ambitious— what one national education reform leader called “the cutting edge” of prioritizing school autonomy and central office transformation as levers to improve urban school performance.
- Oakland appears to be on the brink of using at least the new small autonomous schools policy to achieve significant changes in school and central office operations districtwide.
- The complexity of these efforts combined with budget and teacher crises and state receivership threatens Oakland’s progress.

This report recommends that the leadership of Oakland Unified School District:

- Provide a clear statement that the new small autonomous schools remain a district central office priority and catalyst for change.
- Embrace or disband site-based decision making.
- Develop and implement a district central office staffing plan appropriate to the district central office’s commitment to these initiatives.
- Disband the writing teams and focus available resources on building school and district central office capacity.
- Establish a timeline and strategy for engaging all relevant unions in implementation.
- Encourage school and community support providers and community organizers to continue their work.
- Invest in documenting school implementation.
- Clearly communicate how schools become site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools.
- Engage the state and federal government in implementation support.

As with the previous report, this report’s concluding recommendations specifically address the leadership of Oakland Unified School District’s central office. However, this report also aims to inform all participants in implementation. In particular, the Oakland Cross-city Campaign for Urban School Reform Committee hopes that this report will assist the administrator and other district central office leaders in understanding the roots of these reforms and their potential to achieve federal, state, and local school improvement goals.

Readers should note that no single report can capture all dimensions of Oakland’s accomplishments and challenges. The author and the Oakland Cross-city Campaign for Urban School Reform Committee urge readers to treat any omissions as unintentional and as an invitation to work with the Committee to share those ideas in future reports and other ways.

Methods

This report is based on interviews and conversations with school leaders, district central office administrators, school and community support providers, and community organizers conducted between July 2002 and September 2003. Other sources include observations of implementation, written school and district policies, academic research, and feedback on early report drafts.

School respondents included those school principals interviewed for the first report because of their participation in the first cohorts of participating schools and because of their reputations of being well advanced in implementation. (See Table 1 below for participating schools.) This pool does not include representatives from the approximately 11 school design teams planning to launch new small autonomous schools in 2003-2004 or from the new small, interconnected high schools. School respondents were limited in this way given the purpose of this inquiry as a follow-up to the previous report, the focus of the annual reports on district central office reform, other schools' limited experience with implementation, and time constraints. School interviews focused on schools' progress to date and specific, current implementation barriers and supports.

Table 1. Participating Schools

SITE-BASED DECISION-MAKING SCHOOLS
Melrose Elementary School
Bret Harte Middle School
Edward Shands Adult School
NEW SMALL AUTONOMOUS SCHOOLS
ASCEND [K-8]
Melrose Leadership Academy [6-8]
Life Academy [9-12]

District central office administrators were identified for interviews based on their degree of responsibility for the site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools or issues that significantly impacted those schools. These respondents included the superintendent, deputy and assistant superintendents, directors, and the entire professional staff of the Office of School Reform. Two school board members also were interviewed. In all, 15 individuals affiliated with the district central office were interviewed. These interviews focused on implementation progress with specific emphasis on the role of the district central office. Interviews also were conducted with representatives from the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools, Oakland Community Organization, and the Urban Strategies Council to capture their roles in implementation and their perceptions of progress to date.

These respondents represent only a fraction of the individuals and organizations that participate in site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools. However, the convergence of

respondents' responses suggests that the information presented here may represent a broader set of viewpoints.⁴

Findings and Discussion

This inquiry yielded three sets of findings:

- Implementation has advanced significantly for the new small autonomous schools
- Challenges remain; in particular, certain implementation support activities may be more trouble than they are worth and supports for the site-based decision-making schools remain unclear at best
- Certain developments both help and hinder implementation

I. Implementation advancements for new small autonomous schools

Over the past two years, Oakland has made significant progress with implementation of new small autonomous schools in terms of day-to-day work in participating schools, district central office participation, and perceptions of these schools as levers for school and central office improvement. Table 2 (p. 9) summarizes these developments “then” (2001-2002) and “now” (2002-2003).

One of the most dramatic changes has been the increase in district central office administrators’ participation in implementation of the new small autonomous schools. Specific developments include the following:

Office of School Reform.

As of the spring of 2003, the district central office’s Office of School Reform remained the main central office point of contact for the site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools but it had been transformed from an office of one with a limited scope of work to an office of six dedicated staff with short- and long-term implementation support goals and plans. Specifically:

- The management of the office shifted from one assistant superintendent who oversaw site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools only part time to an assistant superintendent responsible for these schools full-time.
- Three new full-time staff people replaced the Director. These staff brought with them a range of new, non-traditional central office experiences vital to implementation including organizational development and community organizing.
- The roles of two clerical staff people expanded to include trouble-shooting with school principals and activities to increase schools’ access to the superintendent and other district central office resources.

These staff provided direct support for new small autonomous schools implementation at school and district central office levels including:

- Coaching for high school teams concerning the development of new small autonomous and interconnected high schools.
- Convening prospective new small autonomous schools design teams with district central office staff to educate both parties about each other’s work and to explore future

directions for supporting school implementation. At the invitation of Office of School Reform staff, most major district central office departments delivered presentations to the prospective teams. District central office presenters were asked to elaborate school autonomies as defined by them and their offices. Presentations ultimately included reviews of state and federal laws, information regarding district central office procedures, and presenters' own advice about launching a new school.

- Assistance to the Assistant Superintendent of Facilities in developing a facilities master plan appropriate to the new small autonomous and interconnected high schools.
- The provision of staff to the “writing teams” (see below) to inventory current district central office rules and procedures and to recommend changes that might advance implementation.
- Development of a long-term plan to transform the district central office into a school support provider.

A number of district central office and school staff reported that they held individual Office of School Reform staff in high regard. For example, when asked to comment on the performance of the office, one district central office administrator reported, “I love them. I know them. They are smart.”

Superintendent.

During the 2002-2003 academic year, the superintendent assumed responsibility for directly supervising principals in the first cohort of new small autonomous schools. School principals generally praised this new reporting structure as an extremely positive development—that having regular, direct communication with the superintendent increased their knowledge of district central office procedures and their capacity for implementation. Principals and others referred to the superintendent as highly skilled in fostering principals' personal growth and reported that their regular, one-on-one conversations typically focused on improving their own leadership practice and that of their staff.

Other district central office departments and divisions.

Interactions between other district central office administrators and new small autonomous school leaders had become significantly more frequent. As noted above, directors and staff of most major departments were invited by the Office of School Reform staff to make presentations to the prospective new small schools design teams. In addition, many high ranking administrators could identify a significant strand of their work that directly or indirectly related to the implementation of new small autonomous schools. For example:

- The data and evaluation unit began to develop a plan to measure the “added value” of new small autonomous schools.
- Finance staff established an annual budget for the new small autonomous schools based on a per pupil allocation formula. In addition, finance staff began to examine site-based budgeting as a possible strategy for increasing budgetary autonomy at the site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools in the short term and at all schools over the long term. The new Chief Financial Officer became the point person for the site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools and reported that she has been taking steps to develop procedures for school site-based purchasing.

- Human Resources dedicated an analyst to serve the needs of the site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools. School principals reported that their experience with human resources over the past year had been “excellent” and “vastly improved”.

Table 2. Significant Strides in Implementation

	Then... (2001-2002)	Now... (2002-2003)
School implementation	<p>Uncertain The first cohort of new small autonomous schools had just been selected and many respondents expressed uncertainty about whether these schools would survive their first year.</p>	<p>Established</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>First cohort moves ahead.</u> These new small autonomous schools have completed two years of operation. Compared to students at similar traditional schools, students at the new small autonomous middle and high schools have scored higher on standardized tests and have had significantly lower absentee rates. New small autonomous middle schools posted lower rates of suspensions. Individual new small autonomous elementary schools have shown achievement gains.⁵ • <u>New schools on board.</u> In the spring of 2003, the Oakland School Board in conjunction with the Fiscal Crisis Management Assistance Team (FCMAT) approved applications to launch seven new small autonomous schools. • <u>High school restructuring underway.</u> At least two traditional high schools had begun planning to reinvent themselves into new small autonomous and interconnected schools.
Involvement of district central office in school support	<p>Limited The Office of School Reform operated with limited staff resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The office included one director and one clerical support person who reported difficulty in meeting their goals at this staffing level and limited success with engaging other district central office administrators in implementation. • The assistant superintendent assigned to this office split his time across various competing work demands including supervision for all high school principals. 	<p>Significantly expanded</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Additional Office of School Reform staff.</u> As of the end of the 2002-2003 academic year this office operated under the direction of an assistant superintendent assigned primarily to support the site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools. Three new staff coached schools and developed plans for district central office reforms to advance implementation. • <u>Other units.</u> Office of School Reform staff engaged other district central office administrators from curriculum and instruction, facilities, human resources, and finance in sharing information with prospective new small autonomous school design teams. Various district central office divisions dedicated staff to work specifically on projects related to implementation of the new small autonomous schools. <p>(See below for changes since spring, 2003.)</p>

Implications for other public schools	Threat Many respondents expressed significant concerns that the site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools would drain resources from traditional public schools.	Impetus for change Most district central office respondents indicated that new small autonomous schools are here to stay and that they wanted to help decide how to support those schools. Several traditional high schools began planning to transform themselves into new small autonomous and interconnected schools.
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Fueling the fire: Influences converge to support implementation

A number of developments at local, state, and national levels fueled these changes.

Schools have forged ahead.

New small autonomous schools advanced implementation by doing it—by throwing their doors open to students and families, devising and deepening strategies for curriculum development and teacher support, and otherwise working at their own pace rather than, in the words of one school leader, “waiting for everyone else to come along. We need to show them [the district central office and others] where we are going so they know where they should be headed.” This perspective, shared by many other respondents, stands in sharp contrast to the prevailing sentiment captured in 2001-2002 that initial school implementation required central office rule changes. In 2002-2003, respondents were more likely to indicate that school implementation could begin and proceed absent extensive district central office rule changes and that schools should forge ahead with implementation and demonstrate their potential to improve student learning. One respondent captured this new view when he commented that implementation advances over the past two years have stemmed in large part from the “commitment of parents, communities, teachers, and board to advance new small autonomous schools.... The resolve of small schools parents is deeper than I have seen in my other work.”

Reconceptualization of autonomy.

A widespread reconceptualization of “autonomy” has helped drive schools’ progress. In 2001-2002, many respondents described autonomy as an end goal of the site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools that would be achieved for these few schools through technical/legal changes in district central office rules (i.e., school board resolutions, administrative bulletins, and other formal statements regarding school decision-making authority); because technical/legal changes had not been accomplished, some described implementation as stalled. In 2002-2003, respondents were more likely to frame autonomy as a means for achieving the end goal of districtwide school improvement that could not be conferred primarily by technical/legal changes. Rather, any school could assume more autonomy by building the requisite capacity for decision-making, improving student learning, and enhancing accountability. In tandem with these definitional shifts, schools began to focus on building their capacity for implementation as noted above.

To elaborate, many respondents indicated that early in implementation they were mainly concerned with increasing school autonomy as the main end goal of site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools based primarily on the principle that schools *should* have

additional autonomy. They also noted that increasing autonomy required reform of district central office administrative and legal procedures to shift particular responsibilities from the central office to schools. One year later, respondents converged on a new conceptualization of autonomy as:

A means not an ends.

As one district central office administrator commented, “The goal is not autonomy. The goal is student achievement and creating a school community... where kids feel nurtured and supported.”

According to another, autonomy is “a capacity and a mindset. It’s a means to school empowerment.” One school principal explained, “Autonomy is about efficient and effective systems.”

A reflection of schools’ capacity and attained primarily by building school capacity not changing administrative procedures or laws.

Increasingly, participants defined school autonomy primarily as the product of schools’ practice not legal or technical actions; school autonomy increases when schools develop their capacity to make decisions and choose and implement strategies that strengthen student achievement. According to one district central office administrator, “We were thinking of autonomies as something to be given and that things [policies and procedures] had to change to make that possible. Now we are viewing autonomies more as a capacity.” In this view, district central office actions to increase school autonomy include increased supports to schools to help them develop capacity for student achievement.⁶

A status that all schools should achieve.

Respondents’ comments reflected strong consensus that all schools should develop the capacity to operate with some degree of autonomy. One district central office administrator captured this view in the comment: “The question should be [not what autonomy should a select group of schools have but] what processes should all schools have in place to improve school-level decision-making?” Specifically, many school principals and district central office staff agreed that all schools should oversee their own purchasing and receiving provided they are accountable and have a secure location for receiving orders. Whereas several district central office administrators previously reported that allowing schools to purchase supplies and services on the open market would threaten accountability, jobs, and union contracts, the consensus among respondents in 2002-2003 emphasized that such school-level decision making would strengthen both school and district central office performance. One district central office administrator captured this perspective: “Central office will only do well in this set up because they have experience, inside knowledge.”

Key roles for school and community support providers and community organizers.

Organizations outside the jurisdiction of the district central office continue to play vital roles in implementation by helping to reconceptualize autonomy, raising funds, and providing other ongoing supports to schools and communities organizing for reform. Several respondents reiterated their comments from 2001-2002 that they doubted Oakland would have a site-based decision-making or new small autonomous schools “movement” without the leadership of the

Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools, Oakland Community Organization, and the Urban Strategies Council. In 2002-2003, respondents also highlighted the Oakland Cross-city Campaign for Urban School Reform as an important reform champion. For some respondents, these organizations represent the staying power of the site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools irrespective of district central office participation.

The Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools (BayCES).

BayCES has expanded been recognized nationally for the assistance it provides to teams interested in launching new small autonomous schools through their small schools “incubator”, a series of workshops and other activities that help teams design new small autonomous schools. In the incubator’s first year BayCES focused its assistance on encouraging teams, in the words of many respondents, “to dream”— to invent school designs that did not necessarily fit conventional notions of “school” and that promised to bolster students’ opportunities to learn. Many respondents praised BayCES for its past work and added that the second incubator greatly improved on the first because it emphasized not only how to develop school designs but also how to craft detailed implementation plans. Many attributed school-level advancements to this shift in the incubator’s focus.

Oakland Community Organization (OCO).

OCO continues to organize parents and other community members to develop and promote new small autonomous schools. Its executive director reported that between May and November of 2002, OCO conducted nearly 50 meetings about the implementation of new small autonomous schools that drew approximately 2000 parents and community leaders. Many respondents continued to credit OCO with generating high levels of community support for implementation, focusing significant media attention on the new small autonomous schools, and helping to organize a first-ever series of school board hearings on school autonomy.

Urban Strategies Council (USC).

USC also has helped champion implementation of these reforms. Its activities have included ongoing research and advocacy around the site-based decision-making policy. USC leaders also have raised significant fund from national private philanthropic foundations to support the work of the Pilot Schools Committee, a group that develops and implements plans to support site-based decision-making schools and school autonomy more broadly.

Oakland Cross-city Campaign for Urban School Reform Committee.

Oakland’s Cross-city Campaign for Urban School Reform Committee has emerged as a primary supporter of the site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools. Over the past year, the Committee hosted a three-day visit by the superintendent and a school principal from Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. During that week, these visitors met with approximately 175 people including Oakland’s superintendent, the superintendent’s cabinet, various other district central office staff, school leaders, and community members to share their experience implementing their internationally recognized district-wide school site-based budgeting plan. The Committee facilitated a series of Oakland school board presentations by national Cross-city staff on site-based budgeting and hosted a presentation by national small schools expert, Deborah Meier, for district staff and the broader Oakland community. They

also sponsored a team from the Goldman School of Public Policy to write a report on the performance of Oakland's new small autonomous schools.⁷

Anecdotal evidence from other districts (and past Oakland initiatives) suggests that the presence of so many strong independent organizations at work on the same school reform strategy might lead to duplication of efforts and conflicts among the organizations. To the contrary, these organizations seem to have bucked those trends. Each plays a distinct role in implementation and leaders of each organization report that they are in regular communication with each other about how they might work together to support implementation.

District central office capacity-building related to basic operations.

In 2001-2002, a weak district central office infrastructure for budgeting, personnel, and other basic central office services constrained central office administrators' responsiveness to site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools and created confusion and frustration among school principals regarding district central office rules and school autonomy. In 2002-2003, the district central office took substantial steps to establish that infrastructure. For example:

Budget/purchasing.

The district central office launched a new on-line budgeting system, which users reported was significantly easier to use and more likely than the previous system to include accurate and up-to-date budget figures.

Buildings and Grounds.

A new master plan for district facilities in progress promised to address the needs of new small schools and the new small autonomous and interconnected high schools.

Curriculum and Instruction.

The associate superintendent worked with her staff to streamline state and federal reporting requirements to limit school-level paperwork and strengthen the use of federal and state requirements as tools for site-based planning and capacity building. Two newly hired directors each brought with them many years of experience leading schools, including creating small learning communities within schools.

Data and Assessment.

New staff within this unit began to develop a data system to track students' annual yearly progress districtwide. They also worked with the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools, school principals, and others to develop standards for assessing the value added of the new small autonomous schools.

Human Resources.

Many respondents credited the acting assistant superintendent with reassigning staff in ways that improved the performance of human resources.

Overall Organization.

District central office leaders worked with an independent consultant to develop a blueprint for reorganizing the district central office to realize high standards of learning and service. Key aspects of this plan include increased school autonomy, quality central office support services, and accountability for student performance. In practice, this blueprint guided the reorganization of some central office staff into Area Service Teams. Teams included one representative from each major division of the central office and aimed to provide one-stop shopping for principals in accessing central office services.⁸

Many attributed this infrastructure development to particular, new district central office staff people they viewed as particularly skilled. The comments of one respondent captured this view: “My biggest surprise was how good these [new] people in central office are.”

Improved communication throughout the district.

The degree and quality of communication about the new small autonomous schools dramatically improved from virtually no reported communication in 2001-2002 to the establishment of regular formal and informal channels for information sharing. The first cohort of new small autonomous schools principals in particular indicated that they had much more clarity about district central office rules and expectations in part due to their direct reporting to the superintendent and to their monthly meetings with each other and district central office staff. At these meetings principals observed classrooms and schoolwork at one featured school and heard brief presentations from district central office staff about state, federal, and central office requirements.

Many district central office administrators identified the Assistant Superintendent of the Office of School Reform as their regular source of information about implementation thanks to his regular phone calls and informal meetings. Some central office administrators received information directly from schools. As one commented, “Principals talk. They include me because I used to be one of them. That is where I get my information.” District central office administrators reported significantly more direct contact with the new small autonomous schools than in previous years if they included their interactions with the prospective new small autonomous schools design teams. Most district central office-new small autonomous schools interactions involved the prospective new small autonomous schools design teams not the first cohort of schools.

As evidence of increased communication, one district central office administrator indicated that teachers at many schools protested or otherwise expressed discouragement when in the spring of 2003 the district central office issued “March 15th letters”, letters indicating that they may be terminated or reassigned at the end of the academic year. According to this administrator, these letters have been standard practice in Oakland for years, they had been distributed in particularly large numbers in 2003 in part to provide the district central office with greater flexibility to address county and state pressures related to the central office budget, and they were not necessarily an indication that staff would actually be terminated or reassigned. This administrator noted that teachers at one high school who were working with her to develop a reorganization plan chose not to protest these letters because, in her words, “they were in regular touch with me and they trusted me and they understood that this is just a process.”

Small schools initiatives proliferate across the country.

Nationwide, various public and private funders and other education reform leaders hold an increasingly significant stake in successful implementation of small schools initiatives; these national trends likely bolster implementation of Oakland's efforts. For example, small schools initiatives now abound in districts nationwide including Chicago, Milwaukee, New York, and Sacramento. These initiatives receive funding from private philanthropic foundations (e.g., the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation) as well as public sources (e.g., the United States Department of Education's Learning Communities initiative). The Small Schools Workshop at the University of Illinois-Chicago, a national clearinghouse for information on small schools, estimates that most urban districts nationwide receive funding from private sources for small schools initiatives.

Overall, respondents report great progress with implementation of new small autonomous schools but cautious optimism about prospects for the future. Implementation seemed to have reached a critical juncture at which the reforms could either take deep hold within the district central office and schools districtwide or fold. One respondent reflected, "We are in a sort of autonomy purgatory between two worlds." Another added, "Everything that should be in play in terms of implementation is now in play. Its now a question of how these things get played out."

II. Challenges remain

Several specific challenges threaten the long-term viability of the new small autonomous schools. In addition, negligible progress with implementation of the site-based decision-making schools raised questions for many respondents about whether the district central office should continue or disband the initiative.

Perceived limited progress on granting schools specific autonomies.

Despite remarkable consensus that autonomy is a question of school capacity not the technical/legal granting of a particular status, many continued to report frustration that no new autonomies have been conferred to the site-based decision-making or new small autonomous schools—specifically, that the district central office had not changed formal central office rules vis-à-vis these schools. Such comments may represent concerns not with the absence of legal and technical changes per se but with the lack of other indications that site-based decision-making and new small schools have become institutionalized within the central office.

Implementation of site-based decision making.

Progress with implementing the site-based decision-making policy has been limited at best. Leaders of participating schools pointed to few district central office or other resources that supported their implementation. According to several district central office administrators, at least two of the original five site-based decision-making schools have dropped out of district-wide conversations about implementation due in part to the central offices' lack of progress with delineating school autonomy.

“The Credit Card”.

The district central offices’ continual failure to issue the promised debit or credit card to the site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools represents for some an egregious lack of basic support for implementation. Since at least the start of the 2001-2002 school year, site-based decision-making school representatives and others have assisted the district central office staff with the development of a program through which schools would make certain purchases on the open market with a credit card they managed at their school site rather than continue to negotiate all their transactions with a limited set of vendors through the district central offices’ purchasing and receiving department. Staff to Oakland’s Cross-city Campaign for Urban School Reform Committee found financial institutions willing to issue the credit card, provided district central office staff with a sample credit card handbook (that outlined procedures for card use) from another urban district, and researched other urban districts’ experiences with credit cards. Nonetheless, by the end of the 2001-2002 academic year, a credit card had not been issued. Some district central office administrators attributed early delays to the unwillingness of credit card vendors to work with public school districts. They also highlighted that changes in purchasing procedures added to staffs’ already overwhelming workloads and that new purchasing arrangements required negotiations with the teamsters union (that organized the purchasing department’s truck drivers) that district central office leadership had not even begun. Others charged that central office administrators stalled the process because they did not trust school leaders to make their own purchases.

At the start of the 2002-2003 school year the superintendent, deputy superintendent, and Assistant Superintendent of School Reform sought to overcome these delays and disputes by specifically directing district central office staff to issue the credit card and the companion handbook. District central office staff complied but school leaders reported numerous problems with the program. For example, school leaders indicated that the size of the spending limit (\$1300 per month) fell far below the schools’ reported spending needs. School leaders also indicated that use of the card involved cumbersome paperwork that limited their enthusiasm for the program. Several people who did use their credit cards received late charges and penalties on their bills when the credit card company sent the bills to the district central office’s purchasing department rather than to the school that initiated the purchase and when district central office staff subsequently returned the unpaid bills to the credit card company rather than forwarding the bills to the appropriate schools. In addition, the handbook issued to the principals did not reflect the latest changes to which both school and district central office leaders ostensibly had agreed.

The site-based decision-making schools appeared particularly hard-hit by these developments. Leaders of these schools had spent a significant number of hours negotiating about the credit card with district central office staff through the Pilot Schools Committee and other avenues. Virtually every monthly Pilot Schools Committee meeting during the 2002-2003 academic year involved discussion concerning the credit card; in some cases, the Committee convened specifically to address credit card implementation delays. The credit card also was one of the relatively few activities underway that promised specific benefits to the site-based decision-making schools, particularly when compared with the various public and private resources that had been marshaled to advance the new small autonomous schools. Accordingly, “the Credit

Card” for some had become emblematic of the district central office’s lack of support for the implementation of site-based decision-making schools.

Persistent district central office staff overload.

District central office staff continued to report professional responsibilities that far exceeded their available time and resources. In this context, support for the site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools occasionally appeared as an additional, unmanageable work demand. As one district central office administrator described, “We have layers of jobs. We are spread pretty thin. Small schools are an added responsibility.” Another commented, “I have four people who totally believe they are my main boss.”

The Office of School Reform and budget staff appeared particularly strained. Office of School Reform staff had been hired to develop and supervise other district central office staff. However, due to their limited time and funding, Office of School reform staff operated rather than managed their own projects. One Office of School Reform staff person explained that they tended to participate in activities apparently unrelated to the new small autonomous schools because these activities provided opportunities for them to learn about the district central office and to build relationships with other district central office administrators essential to their assigned work. However, as a short-term consequence, these additional activities mean that the Office of School Reform’s time was diverted away from the new small autonomous schools. Likewise, district central office finance and budget staff reported that during the 2002-2003 academic year they were consumed with multiple county and state mandated audits. As a result, these staff reported significant difficulties responding to any schools request let alone the frequent questions from new small schools principals about appropriate uses of funds.

Lack of productive union engagement.

For at least the past four years, champions of the site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools have identified new agreements between the district and the districts’ various unions as essential to implementation on the grounds that most union contracts potentially did not support conditions conducive to school autonomy. Despite widespread identification of this potential implementation barrier, progress in this area has been limited at best. Site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools were discussed during negotiations over the most recent teachers’ union contract and the superintendent secured a provision that under some circumstances contract rules could be waived to enable implementation of school plans. However, most respondents reported either no knowledge of this waiver provision or no instances of having utilized it for site-based decision-making or new small autonomous schools. As of the summer of 2003, formal negotiations with other key unions such as the custodial union and the teamsters had not even begun.

Writing Teams.

Convened in the summer of 2002 “writing teams” have been charged with documenting district central office rules in particular arenas such as budget and human resources and with proposing specific rule changes that might advance implementation of the site-based decision-making and

new small autonomous schools. The Office of School Reform staffed these teams and convened the budgeting and human resources teams periodically during the 2002-2003 academic year. One writing team participant recalled that when the writing teams first convened, they were “the first hopeful thing”—that finally the site-based decision-making schools in particular had a regular forum to engage district central office staff in supporting their implementation.

Most respondents were less sanguine about the promise of the writing teams and reported that in practice the writing teams have been more trouble than they are worth. One participant called the writing teams “a legislative approach” that may perpetuate the outdated perception that school autonomy is a technical and legal matter not a capacity-building challenge. Another participant commented that the writing teams have been “frustrating, political, and not well planned out. I’m not sure the writing teams make sense.”

Neither of the two convened writing teams developed any written products and participants reported significant barriers to their work. For example, the human resources writing team met only several times before district central office representatives found their time consumed with managing potential teacher layoffs and simultaneous threats of a teacher shortage. One participant commented that district central office representatives were vital to the productivity of the group because, in this person’s words, “when [person from the district central office] is not at the meetings, the conversation turns to rights”—what autonomy schools *should* have rather than how to advance school implementation in specific terms.

The budget team met periodically during the 2002-2003 academic year. However, during that year, the district central office also convened a separate group of school principals and others to examine the viability of implementing school site-based budgeting in Oakland. Some clarified that the *budget writing team* addressed short-term budgeting issues for the site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools while the *site-based budgeting team* focused on long-term plans for all schools. Many found this distinction confusing. Some highlighted that the convening of the site-based budgeting team signaled the district central office’s lack of investment in the budget writing team and, by extension, the site-based decision-making schools in particular. One person suggested that because district central office budget staff organized the site-based budgeting team, they had more interest in that group than in the budget writing team which the Office of School Reform convened.

New small autonomous schools’ capacity.

Several district central office administrators expressed significant concerns about the capacity of certain new small autonomous school design teams to launch new schools. These administrators noted that at their presentations to the prospective teams, the prospective school principals did not ask questions about curriculum and instruction—issues that the district central office staff expected to hear as any new principals’ primary concern. Many indicated that the prospective principals needed basic information and skills that, in the words of one district central office administrator, “any principal should already have”.

Equity.

Equity concerns permeated many interviews. First, some still reported concerns that benefits conferred to the site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools would take resources away from other schools. For example, when the school board approved a special agreement with one middle school to formalize their discretion over the hiring of their teachers, participants in other schools protested that this agreement would strip other schools of their “best teachers”. Second, some respondents reported that new small autonomous schools received more resources than site-based decision-making schools. For example, they pointed to support provided by BayCES as an indication of the additional resources available to the new small autonomous schools. Third, some perceived that the first cohorts of new small autonomous schools disproportionately served Latino students—a perception supported by a recent review of new small autonomous schools’ demographics.⁹ Equity concerns are not uncommon in the implementation of complex social policy change initiatives that call for the gradual spread of reform benefits. However, in Oakland such concerns seem to have been aggravated by the absence of clear, widely publicized information about how and when non-participating schools might join the two initiatives and how the initiatives overall related to the broader strategic direction of the district central office. As one respondent comment, “One of the greatest needs [to ensure equity in implementation] is to be clearer about how a school gets to become one of these schools.”

Fiscal strains and state receivership.

Respondents expressed hope that site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools would not be thwarted over the long term by fiscal challenges and state receivership. However, certain short-term developments threatened this optimism. For example, the state Fiscal Crisis Management Assistance Team froze all school budgets in the spring of 2003 and removed any unspent funds. This decision resulted in significant budget cuts for some schools. In addition, the cuts were instituted in specific categories rather than as a percentage of the schools’ budget, which some new small autonomous schools leaders perceived as a sign that they would not have discretion over cutting their own budgets. Also for example, the district central office sent “March 15th” layoff notices to individual teachers at the site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools (as well as other schools district-wide). Some new small autonomous schools supporters reported that these notices dealt a particularly hard blow to staff moral and performance at these schools because many of the effected teachers had originally helped design the schools and had significant personal and professional investments in their own schools’ futures. Some added that if the district central office followed through on the layoffs, their schools would be stripped of staff fundamental to their schools’ survival. For example, 7 out of 11 teachers in one new small autonomous schools received “March 15th letters”. As one person commented about this situation, “[School name] will just cease to be without these people. There will be no point in having a school if all those people go.”

Many recognized Superintendent Dennis Chaconnas as a primary and enthusiastic champion of the new small autonomous schools and viewed his departure upon the commencement of state receivership as a threat to the future of new small autonomous schools. Exacerbating such concerns, at least one private funder withdrew fiscal support for the Office of School Reform and other district central office activities upon Chaconnas’ withdrawal. The Office of School

Reform's other time-limited grants that supported this office expired at the end of the 2002-2003 academic year and the state administrator subsequently disbanded the office. The state administrator did retain one former Office of School Reform staff person and hired several school leaders to provide at least part-time support to new small autonomous schools. However, for some respondents, the district central office's decision not to extend the contracts of the 2002-2003 staff raised concerns about the district central office's institutional commitment to the new small autonomous schools.

In sum, respondents reported significant implementation gains but also persistent gaps in implementation supports for the new small autonomous schools. Most strikingly, limited district central office and other support for the site-based decision-making schools did not bode well for their implementation over the long-term.

III. Cross-cutting tensions

District central office administrators' participation in implementation of the site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools has been riddled with tensions—developments that simultaneously bolster and challenge implementation.¹⁰ District central office administrators found these tensions challenging and reported that they felt pressure to reconcile them, even though many understood that these are dynamics to be managed not problems that necessarily can or should be eliminated in the short term.

The pros and cons of closer district central office-school interactions and improved communication.

On the one hand, stronger interactions and communication have helped advance implementation of new small autonomous schools by infusing schools and the district central office with new knowledge and other resources. Overtime, these developments may increase district central office administrators' trust in schools' local decisions about a range of school functions. At the same time, at least in the short term, stronger interactions and communications also strain district central office-school relationships. For example, one consequence of increased communication has been that district central office administrators have gained first hand knowledge of what some consider the new small autonomous schools' limited capacity for implementation.

The benefits and limitations of Mountain Boulevard.

The relocation of the Office of School Reform out of the main district central office headquarters to Mountain Boulevard—a separate location approximately six miles from headquarters—meant expanded opportunities for the district central office to support implementation. In this alternative location, staff reportedly found more time and flexibility to establish the new non-traditional relationships with schools and district central office divisions that implementation demanded. At the same time, this distance threatened staffs' ability to connect to the rest of the district central office in ways also essential to implementation. One district central office administrator captured this view when she commented that outside the main district central office headquarters “they operate in a vacuum. No one really knows what they do.”

Direct involvement by the superintendent strengthens and weakens school-central office relationships.

The superintendent's decision that all new small autonomous school principals report directly to him rather than to a designated staff person has been a blessing and a curse when it comes to engaging the district central office in implementation. School principals typically viewed this direct reporting as a boon for their work both personally and organizationally and cited several examples of the superintendent providing immediate assistance to reconcile difficult and, in some cases, long standing implementation concerns. Other district central office administrators suggested that because school principals reported directly to the superintendent, these principals tended not to contact other district central office administrators, even when their expertise and experience promised significant benefits for schools.

The development of formal agreements helps and hinders implementation.

Some respondents reported that they were relieved that the writing teams and negotiations with the unions did not result in specific new formal agreements. Specific proposals to change rules were quickly outdated and a focus on formal rules threatened to distract attention from the school capacity-building that participants increasingly believed autonomy required. At the same time, formal rule changes for some are powerful symbols of implementation support. As noted in the previous report, the absence of specific district central office rules created significant confusion for schools and others in ways that curbed implementation.

Recommendations

These findings suggest that Oakland Unified School District in many respects is on the edge of reform. The implementation advancements above reveal that Oakland is on the brink of using at least the new small autonomous schools policy to achieve significant changes in school and central office operations districtwide. At the same time, the complexity of these efforts combined with unprecedented state and district budget shortfalls and other challenges threaten Oakland's progress. In the short term, certain reform developments such as increased communication between schools and the district central office have helped and hindered implementations and, at a minimum, have created dynamic tensions that will either further fuel or frustrate implementation over the long term.

These findings suggest that Oakland's district central office may strengthen implementation of site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools by taking the following steps:

Provide a clear statement that the new small autonomous schools remain a district central office priority and catalyst for change.

Clearly recent developments in Oakland including the departure of the superintendent and other district central office administrators and the persistent statewide budget and political crises threaten various participants' confidence in the district central office's commitment to the new small autonomous schools. At the same time, many key school and district central office leaders reported that they intended to remain on the job through these developments in part because of their belief in the promise of these schools to strengthen students' school performance district-wide and their hope that the new state administrator will support implementation. A restatement of district central office commitment to these two initiatives may go a long way toward keeping school implementation on track. As indicated above, schools have demonstrated that when they forge ahead, regardless of district central office developments, implementation advances. Oakland's district central office leaders may bolster implementation even through its current transition by providing clear statements of their support for these schools.

Embrace or disband site-based decision making.

District central office leadership should decide now either to dedicate specific new resources to implementation of the site-based decision-making policy or to end district central office participation in implementation officially and unambiguously. As discussed in the previous report, Oakland's site-based decision-making policy provided an important avenue for some schools to participate in a movement toward greater school autonomy and accountability. However, for over five years the district central office's attention to implementation has been minimal at best. Schools and school and community support providers have contributed resources to these schools significantly disproportionate to the district central office's investments and returns on these efforts have been limited. If implementation continues in this vein, the district central office risks straining important relationships with schools and school and community support providers. Remaining and future resources for the site-based decision-

making schools might be better directed at individual school's efforts to build a site-based decision-making infrastructure or to expand the small autonomous schools initiative or the site-based budgeting pilot to include the site-based decision-making schools.

Develop and implement a district central office staffing plan appropriate to the central office's commitment to these initiatives.

A restatement of district central office commitment to the site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools will only be as strong as the central office's plan for staffing these initiatives. Despite the drawbacks of its peripheral position within the central office organization, the Office of School Reform during 2002-2003 communicated that at least the new small autonomous schools were district central office priorities. In practice, that office showed clear signs of becoming a catalyst for district central office change in support of implementation. It's non-traditional and, by many reports, highly skilled staff were in the process of establishing important relationships throughout the district central office vital to such a change process. By dissolving this office, district central office leaders may have jeopardized the momentum and the confidence generated by those staff.

The district central office leadership might consider several avenues for re-staffing the site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools initiatives within the district central office. First, the district central office might do well to reinstate an office focused on these schools. The district central office could fund/staff this office in several ways.

- Private fund raising. Private foundations may be willing to renew their grants to staff this office if the new leadership clearly commits to sustain and grow site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools.
- Redirection of public funds. Because these reforms are consistent with the goals of many state and federal programs, administrative funding from those programs might be redirected to the new office.
- Redirection of staff. The district central office could re-create this office with staff redirected from each major central office division. Unlike representatives to a cabinet or committee who convene occasionally in addition to their main professional responsibilities, these staff would serve as full-time staff of the Office of School Reform and as key liaisons between that office and their home departments. The experience of the site-based budgeting working group suggests that if assistant superintendents and directors sponsor staff to participate in these ways, implementation advances on more solid ground than when staff participation is mandated or encouraged by an outside group and added on to their other responsibilities.

Alternatively, the new district central office leadership could charge each assistant superintendent and director to develop a plan for how their units might reorganize to support the site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools as an integral part of their day-to-day work. This option reflects lessons learned from the experience of district central office staff who were invited to develop and deliver presentations to the prospective new small autonomous teams—namely, their experience revealed that district central office staff are willing and able to participate in devising strategies for supporting these schools. This option also reflects research highlighted in the previous report that large public bureaucracies can

improve their performance in part by empowering staff to develop their own solutions to new demands.¹¹

These options are not mutually exclusive. Taken together, they may provide a viable staffing pattern in the short and long terms. For example, in the short term, the district central office could create a separate office whose work, over the long term, becomes integrated into operations across the district central office.

Disband the writing teams and focus available resources on building school and district central office capacity for implementation.

Respondents were virtually unanimous that while the writing teams may have appeared promising at the outset, advancements in conceptualizing autonomy have obscured the benefits of these teams. Persistent district central office staff demands and limited returns on the investment of staff time to date make it increasingly unlikely that district central office staff will sustain their participation in meetings. District central office leadership might consider alternative strategies for the ongoing engagement of central office staff in implementation—a strategy that emphasizes school and district central office capacity-building. The suggestions for district central office staffing outlined above may provide important avenues to this end.

District central office leaders and others should take care to manage the process of disbanding the writing teams especially if they intend to pursue implementation of site-based decision-making. The site-based decision-making schools in particular may take the termination of the writing teams as a sign of waning central office support for their work. Clear communication about alternative strategies to meeting writing team goals can go a long way to maintaining confidence about and momentum in the implementation of this initiative. Participants can manage the dissolution of the teams in part by demonstrating that some of their goals have already been met. Specifically, these teams were charged in part with documenting current federal, state, and central office rules concerning school decision-making. While the writing teams never fully developed this document, other central office staff may have collected this information as part of their presentations to the prospective new small autonomous schools teams. Before they disband, the writing teams might consider how to preserve that work and use it as the basis for ongoing planning about district central office support for implementation.

Establish a timeline and a strategy for engaging all relevant unions—especially unions for teachers, clerical staff, custodial staff, and truck drivers—in dialogue and decisions about how to support implementation.

Union contracts remain significant barriers to implementation. As noted above, Oakland’s leaders may not know with confidence which specific changes in union contracts might advance implementation. Nonetheless, engaging union leadership in dialogue and debate now can help establish strong relationships essential for future decisions. At a minimum the district central office might consider designating a specific district central office staff person or staff team to take responsibility for building these relationships.

Encourage school and community support providers and community organizers to continue their work.

Oakland's district central office leadership might consider formally recognizing the vital roles its community partners have played in implementation and encouraging them to continue their participation over the coming years. Particularly with the departure of key district central office staff, these organizations hold institutional memory of these initiatives essential to their sustainability and growth and they can serve as important teachers for the new incoming district central office staff. Lessons learned from Oakland's past experiences with formal district central office-community partnerships also may help the district central office make productive use of this next phase of central office-support provider relationships.¹²

Invest in documenting school implementation.

The new small autonomous schools in particular are making great strides with implementation that can inform decisions in Oakland and elsewhere about how to enhance students' opportunities to learn and strengthen Oakland's ability to marshal additional new funds for implementation. These lessons may be lost, however, if Oakland's leaders do not take steps to document schools' experiences. BayCES has expanded its research staff and goals in ways that promise to enhance this knowledge base. Oakland also might consider a long-term partnership with another organization such as a university, think tank or consulting firm external to the reform initiative for additional and independent documentation of these efforts.

Clearly communicate how schools and teams may become site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools.

Equity and other concerns about these initiatives may be alleviated in part if the district central office, BayCES, and other reform leaders develop specific criteria that schools must meet to participate in these initiatives and a schedule for accepting applications.

Engage the state and federal government.

Obviously Oakland leaders are in regular communication with federal and state leaders concerning Oakland's budget recovery plan. Oakland would do well not to limit its conversations with state and federal officials to recovery but to seek out regional representatives, program staff within the California Department of Education, and others at state and federal levels who can help advance implementation of site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools.

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Endnotes

¹ The Cross-city Campaign for Urban School Reform is a national network of urban school reform leaders dedicated to the systemic transformation of urban public schools. The Campaign measures success in terms of improved quality and equity of urban public schools and the preparation of urban youth for post-secondary education, work, and citizenship. The nine-city network consists of Baltimore, Chicago, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, Oakland, Philadelphia, and Seattle. Each participating city convenes a local board or committee to develop and implement plans that realize the goals of the national Campaign within their own district. The Oakland Cross-city Campaign for Urban School Reform Committee includes leaders from community organizations, parent groups, local government, and the Oakland Unified School District (schools and the central office).

² Please see:

- Oakland Unified School District (2000). *New small autonomous schools: District policy*. Adopted by the Oakland Board of Education on May 24, 2000.
- Oakland Unified School District (1999). *School site decision-making policy*. Adopted by the Oakland Board of Education on June 9, 1999.

³ The idea for these annual implementation snapshots grew out of conversations among Oakland's district central office superintendents and program directors, key school and community support providers (e.g., the Oakland Cross-city Campaign for Urban School Reform Committee, the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools, the Urban Strategies Council, and Oakland Community Organizations), and school principals and teachers. These leaders viewed the passage of the site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools policies as major steps toward creating the conditions necessary for all students to achieve high standards and sought an ongoing independent analysis of the district central office's role in realizing that goal.

⁴ Given the small number of participating schools, no sample could be representative in a scientific sense.

⁵ Data on student achievement may be found in:

Durant, S., Eng, L., & Naughton, S. (2003). *Comparing New Small Autonomous Schools to Traditional Schools in the Oakland Unified School District*. The Oakland Cross-city Campaign for Urban School Reform Committee and the Goldman School of Public Policy: Oakland, CA.

⁶ This perspective also reflects research that indicates schools are a primary barrier to implementing autonomy and school site decision-making by other names because schools tend not to have the capacity to take advantage of legally conferred discretion. See, for example:

- Fuhrman, S. H., & Elmore, R. F. (1990). Understanding local control in the wake of state education reform. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 12(1), 82-96.
- Honig, M.I., & Hatch, T.J. (2003). *Crafting coherence: How schools strategically manage multiple external demands*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association.
EDITOR'S NOTE: This paper has been published as:
Honig, M.I., & Hatch, T.C. (2004). *Crafting coherence: How schools strategically manage multiple, external demands*. *Educational Researcher*, 33(8), 16-30.
- United States Department of Education. (1998). *Waivers: Flexibility to achieve high standards*. Washington, DC: Author.
- United States General Accounting Office. (1998). *Elementary and Secondary Education: EdFlex states vary in implementation of waiver process*. Washington, DC: Author.

⁷ Durant, S., Eng, L., & Naughton, S. (2003). *Comparing New Small Autonomous Schools to Traditional Schools in the Oakland Unified School District*. The Oakland Cross-city Campaign for Urban School Reform Committee and the Goldman School of Public Policy: Oakland, CA.

⁸ For further information, please see: Fagbayi, M. (2002, October). *Oakland Unified School District 2002-2007 Strategic Alignment Plan*. Oakland, CA: Author.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ For a discussion and analysis of similar tensions during the implementation of school-community partnerships in Oakland, please see:

- Honig, M.I. (2002). Where's the 'up' in bottom-up reform? Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Association, April. EDITOR'S NOTE: This paper has been published as: Honig, M.I. (2004). Where's the 'up' in bottom-up reform. *Educational Policy*, 18(4), 527-561.
- Honig, M.I. (2003). Building policy from practice: Central office administrators' roles and capacity for implementing collaborative education policy. *Educational Administration Quarterly* 39(3), 292-338.

¹¹ See, for example:

- Barzelay, M. (1992). *Breaking through bureaucracy*. Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press.
- Osborne, D. & Gaebler, T. (1992). *Reinventing government: How the entrepreneurial spirit is transforming the public sector*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

¹² Honig, M.I. (Forthcoming 2004). Central office-community partnerships: From contracts to collaboration to capture. *Theory and Research in Educational Administration*, 3. EDITOR'S NOTE: This paper has been published as: Honig, M.I. (2004). District central office-community partnerships: From contracts to collaboration to control. In W. Hoy & C. Miskel (Eds.) *Educational administration, policy, and reform: Research and measurement*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.