



Oakland's Site-based decision-making & new small autonomous schools

An examination of schools' progress and central office participation (2001-2002)

An Occasional Paper

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Introduction

Between October 2001 and January 2002, the Oakland Education Cabinet and Oakland’s Cross-city Campaign for Urban School Reform Committee¹ commissioned an independent consultant to investigate implementation of Oakland’s site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools. This inquiry— an exploration and analysis not an evaluation— aimed to check the status of implementation, to identify early roadblocks and opportunities, and to recommend and prioritize next steps for deepening and expanding school and central office participation.

The idea for this report grew out of conversations among Oakland’s assistant school superintendents and program directors, school reform support providers, and school leaders who, by the end of 2001, believed that implementation had reached a critical juncture. Many leaders of Oakland’s 10 site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools could identify specific, external supports and constraints to their progress. School and district central office leaders alike called for greater clarity about how to define “flexibility” and “autonomy” for participating schools. A partnership between school support providers including the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools, Oakland Community Organizations, the Urban Strategies Council, and the Oakland Education Cabinet had solidified and remained poised for further action. These events suggested to Oakland leaders that the time was ripe for independent advice about how to make sense of implementation to date and how to proceed. Leaders agreed that any assessment of whether site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools had improved students’ school performance would be premature. Rather, leaders asked: to what extent has Oakland created the conditions necessary for full implementation?

The resulting report, *Implementing Oakland’s site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools*, provides a first-ever synthesis of the experiences of both groups of schools and crosscutting policy recommendations. Other reports and initiatives have suggested changes in schools necessary for implementation.² This report focuses specifically on changes in district central office roles, rules, and procedures that can help schools advance their locally developed school improvement plans.

This report highlights:

- Site-based decision-making schools and new small autonomous schools represent two sides of the same coin— a movement toward greater flexibility, autonomy, and responsibility for schools and the transformation of the school district central office into a school support provider. A coherent approach to supporting both groups of schools will likely enhance implementation of each policy strategy.
- Oakland’s educational leaders find themselves building a plane while flying it— establishing basic agreements and securing core resources after schools have already begun implementation. As a result, participating schools to date have operated primarily under the same rules as regular public schools.
- Barriers to implementation stem largely from this absence of basic, starting agreements about what new authority, if any, the two policies confer to schools.

- For the most part, schools do not want to engage in activities beyond what they believe the enabling policies already allow. Schools likely would not opt out of many regular central office services if the district central office provided those services efficiently and otherwise as intended.
- Strengthening communication among school leaders, among central office staff, and between schools and the central office will go a long way to building the knowledge base and buy-in essential to implementation.

Given the absence of starting agreements and resources and the extent to which the participating schools operate as regular public schools, an observer might argue that implementation of site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools has not actually begun. Some will consider a report about even early implementation premature. Accordingly, readers should consider this report an overview of what truly launching the two initiatives entails and the challenges these policies pose for schools and the district central office.

The Oakland Education Cabinet and Cross-city Campaign Committee hope that at a minimum this report will:

- Establish a set of shared understandings. Even though schools began implementation under less than optimal conditions, schools nonetheless began. All participants need clarity about accomplishments to date and next decisions.
- Provide the basis for integrating separate efforts into a coordinated movement toward greater school-site flexibility and autonomy.
- Reassure Oakland's educational leaders that a core group of school leaders and central office administrators remain enthusiastic about the potential of site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools as levers for district-wide improvement.
- Create a new urgency for immediate decisions about flexibility/autonomy, resources, staff, and other supports for implementation.

The 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.

Background

Throughout the 1990s, Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools, Oakland Community Organizations, and other educational leaders in Oakland pursued an ambitious, institution-changing agenda for Oakland’s public schools: the shift of significant decision making over school operations to school sites. These goals culminated in two specific policy initiatives. Oakland’s School-Site Decision-Making Policy passed the Oakland Board of Education in June of 1999 and the New Small Autonomous Schools policy received approval in May of 2000. While each policy differs in original impetus, initial supporters, and participating schools, both initiatives rest on similar school reform principles:³

- Schools improve not by adding discrete services on to existing school programs but by fundamentally reforming the context of teaching and learning in both schools and the district central office.
- Teachers and students reach high academic standards in part when schools create personalized learning environments for adults and students.
- Giving schools primary control over educational decisions improves the relevance of those decisions, increases school investment in implementation, and otherwise facilitates fundamental reform and the creation of learning communities.

New policies depart from traditional roles and relationships

OUSD’s central office and schools have struggled with early implementation. These struggles should come as no surprise. Both policies call for fundamental changes in roles and relationships for the central office and participating schools. Consider that both policies advance schools as primary decision makers and district central office administrators as partners and support providers. By contrast, school district central offices typically have been set up and their administrators trained to monitor schools’ compliance with federal, state, and school district decisions.⁴

Nationwide, experience with school-site decision making, decentralization, and devolution for decades has been uneven at best and marked by a lack of clarity about what new, supportive roles for school district central offices entail and whether and how schools can build the capacity for increased decision making.⁵ Schools and districts operate in a tangle of state and federal rules that can frustrate local attempts at fundamental reform and limit the discretion of both district central offices and schools.

Adding to Oakland’s challenge, the two policies that originally authorized the initiatives outline only broad goals for participating schools and the central office. Characteristic of the decisions of various elected boards, Oakland’s policies leave others to develop specific, subsequent policy changes to advance implementation. In particular, the two policies promote “maximum flexibility” and “autonomy”—concepts fundamental to implementation but typically undefined and potentially in conflict with other district goals such as accountability and equity.

Oakland's challenge: Building policy from practice

Oakland, then, finds itself building a plane while flying it— developing and clarifying new rules for implementation after schools have already begun implementation. Such post-hoc policy development is often par for the course when policymakers want to build policy from schools' practice and experience. However, building policy from practice raises several, urgent questions: How should administrators and other policymakers understand schools' experiences to date? What formal rules, roles, and other changes for OUSD's educational leaders might help advance the shared goals and promise of Oakland's site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools?

Report overview

This report takes up these questions by presenting findings from two months of interviews with participating school leaders and central office administrators. Questions focused primarily on barriers to implementation not the range of resources available for implementation. Findings and analyses were also informed by reviews of policy reports and the authors' previous, two-year examination (1998-2000) of local, collaborative decision making in Oakland.⁶

The findings and discussion highlight commonalities across both groups of schools, shared challenges, and communication lapses that likely derail implementation. Recommendations and next steps for OUSD's central office stem from these findings.

Methods

The findings and discussion below come from interviews with key school leaders, district central office administrators, and school support providers. Other sources included school and district policies and implementation plans, research, national site-based management experts, and feedback on early report drafts. A list of Oakland respondents appears on page 24. I chose schools with reputations of being well advanced with implementation. “Well advanced” meant the schools’ leaders could identify specific internal and external barriers and supports for implementation based on their direct experience. All but one school that had discontinued participation received at least two strong recommendations for inclusion. Due to time constraints that prevented consultation with all schools, I chose schools with different grade levels as indicated in Table 1. At each school, I conducted an initial interview with the school principal, asked the principal to recommend other school staff for interviews, and followed up with staff when possible.

Table 1. Participating schools

| SITE-BASED DECISION-MAKING SCHOOLS | Study Participants |
|---|---------------------------|
| Melrose Elementary School | ✓ |
| Cole Arts Magnet [4-8] | |
| Bret Harte Middle School | ✓ |
| Oakland Technical High School [9-12] | |
| Edward Shands Adult School | ✓ |
| NEW SMALL AUTONOMOUS SCHOOLS | |
| Escuela Internacional de la Comunidad [pre K-5] | |
| ASCEND [K-8] | ✓ |
| Urban Promise Academy [6-8] | |
| Melrose Leadership Academy [6-8] | ✓ |
| Life Academy [9-12] | ✓ |

School interviews focused on implementation experiences to date with the specific goal of identifying concrete implementation barriers and supports. Questions concerned respondents’ expectations and early plans, past and current supports and obstacles, and recommended next steps. I counted as barriers those issues reported by at least half the schools with at least one site-based decision-making school and one new small autonomous school represented. Using schools’ reported barriers as a guide, I then interviewed those district central office administrators whose responsibilities most directly related to those barriers. Central office interviews focused on strategies to overcome barriers and enhance schools’ supports. Of all the people invited, no one declined to participate in this study.

This set of respondents represents only a fraction of the individuals and organizations that participate in site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools. However, the convergence of responses in the interviews suggests that the information presented here may represent a broader set of viewpoints.⁷

Findings and Discussion

Interviews and conversations yielded three sets of findings:

- Site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools have commonalities and differences that seem productive for advancing implementation of shared reform goals.
- Both groups of schools identify particular, common issues that frustrate implementation.
- Various communication lapses throughout Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) pose significant implementation barriers.

I. PRODUCTIVE SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SCHOOLS

Schools share commitment to common school-improvement goals

Site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools emerged as separate initiatives under different circumstances. Site-based decision making became Oakland Board of Education policy in 1999 as Oakland changed mayors, shifted to an interim superintendent, and otherwise experienced significant political and fiscal uncertainty. Early champions included Oakland Sharing the Vision, the Urban Strategies Council, and the Oakland Coalition of Congregations. New small autonomous schools emerged through a broad-based grassroots movement among school leaders and prominent, non-governmental organizations such as the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools, Oakland Community Organizations, and the Oakland Education Association. The Oakland Board of Education approved the New Small Autonomous Schools Policy in 2000 after Oakland already secured funding for the initiative from the Gates Foundation.

Despite such distinctions, school principals, support providers, and district administrators almost unanimously view the two policies as parts of a common movement toward greater school-site flexibility, autonomy, and responsibility regarding budgets, curriculum, facilities, and other core aspects of school operations. All respondents suggested that a fully implemented site-based decision-making school and new small autonomous school would share particular features: experienced, distributed leadership; a legitimate, school-level structure for school-wide decisions; and a guiding school-wide mission, goals, and strategies.⁸ The new small autonomous schools policy explicitly builds on provisions in the site-based decision-making policy.

Rather than duplicating efforts, these two policies likely expand the number and range of schools and other organizations willing and able to participate in this common movement toward greater school-site flexibility, autonomy, and responsibility. For example, Oakland's site-based decision-making policy focuses on existing public schools and has attracted schools with long-time principals or teacher-leaders. These leaders primarily wanted new decision-making opportunities. The new small autonomous schools policy targeted teams of educational leaders interested in creating new schools with small learning communities and school-wide missions, goals, and strategies. Each policy provided a distinct rallying point for different community groups to voice support for greater school-site flexibility, autonomy, and responsibility.

School leaders welcome opportunities to meet as a group of 10 pioneering schools for peer assistance and to develop common proposals for additional funding, resources, and policy changes. School leaders want more regular contact with district central office administrators to teach about their experiences and to help create district policy that supports the shared school reform principles. Specifically, leaders of site-based decision-making schools say they want “to be at the table to influence district decisions” in ways that expand new authority to more public schools. Other leaders highlight that they pursued new small autonomous schools instead of charter or private schools because they wanted a connection to a public system for financial stability and to improve the performance of urban schools district-wide.

Distinct policy avenues add up to differences in schools’ starting points and progress

Each group of schools brings a particular set of strengths and needs to the implementation process and reports different achievement:

Experience of school leaders:

- Site-based decision-making schools are long-standing public schools with typical school enrollments. These schools tend to have experienced principals and/or teacher leaders.
- New small autonomous schools are new public schools with limited school enrollments and typically have principals new to school administration and to Oakland. Several current principals originally relocated to Oakland specifically to participate in this initiative. A few have several years of administrative experience, but overall, new small autonomous school principals have less experience than principals of site-based decision-making schools.

Progress establishing a site-based decision-making body:

- Site-based decision-making schools have received instructions and technical assistance to establish broad-based decision-making structures as their first step in implementation. By the start of the 2001-2002 school year, all the schools still participating in the initiative had achieved this goal.⁹ Schools’ accomplishments include resolving staff conflicts, filling leadership voids, and strengthening teachers’ sense of professional community.
- The new small autonomous schools opened their doors to students and staff at the start of the 2001-2002 academic year. Early assistance provided primarily by the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools has focused on establishing educational missions, goals, and strategies and building consensus among school design team members. Principals plan to convene decision-making bodies but have been preoccupied with various start-up challenges such as securing a school building, hiring staff, establishing a curriculum, and developing a school budget. The original school design teams may become the operational decision-making bodies at some schools.

Status of establishing broad ownership over a school-wide mission, goals, and strategies:

Most public schools typically report that they have an educational mission and a set of goals and strategies. This readiness criterion specifically relates to whether a broad group of stakeholders actively and continually develops, uses, revisits, and revises essential school operations.

- Many of the site-based decision-making schools have spent the past 12-18 months building a site-based decision-making body.¹⁰ However, experience ranges. Some school teams have just begun to participate in school-wide decisions. Other, more established teams actively and continually translate their long-standing missions, goals, and strategies into curriculum, instruction, and learning supports.¹¹
- The Oakland Board of Education selected the first new small autonomous school teams in large part because they had developed and established a cadre of teachers with ownership over a guiding school-wide mission, goals, and strategies.

Differences suggest no one size fits all when it comes to school support

Table 2 summarizes these different reports of starting points and progress. These differences do not indicate that one reform process has been superior to the other or that one group of schools is more prepared for flexibility, autonomy, and responsibility than the other. All participating schools have made progress in their initial, focal areas, and, to varying degrees are turning their attention to others. Variations within and between groups suggest that site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools policies involve a highly differentiated set of schools. While the common reform principles suggest that responsibilities and opportunities extended to one group of schools should be extended to another, schools will need supports appropriate to their individual starting points. Such school-by-school coaching likely will pose significant challenges for school support providers accustomed to providing broad, universal assistance across large groups of schools.

Table 2. Reports of starting points and progress

| | Site-based decision-making schools | New small autonomous schools |
|---|---|--|
| Experienced, distributed leadership | HIGH | LOW |
| | Experienced principals with personal and professional contacts throughout the district central office | Young principals with limited administrative and Oakland experience |
| Legitimate decision-making infrastructure | HIGH | LOW |
| | The Oakland Board of Education selected schools based in part on their capacity to establish or extend a site-based decision-making team. Two years later, participating schools have established such bodies with by-laws, rules for membership, and work plans. | Representative planning teams collaboratively constructed initial school designs. Given other start-up concerns, most schools have not convened an operational decision-making body. |
| Guiding school-wide mission, goals, and strategies | LOW | HIGH |
| | Most decision-making teams have just begun to develop or incorporate school-wide missions, goals, and strategies into their responsibilities. | The Oakland Board of Education selected schools based in part on their established mission, goals, and strategies. Schools attracted design team members and others with ready commitments to their school-wide plans. |

II. POLICY CHANGES TO ADVANCE IMPLEMENTATION

Both initiatives, pilot efforts by design, aim to use the experience of initial schools to guide the creation of new district policies and procedures to take the pilots to scale—to deepen the progress of participating schools and expand participation to other schools. As intended, school leaders can now identify specific district changes they believe will advance implementation. This section summarizes barriers to implementation related to OUSD central office policies and procedures.

Overview: Barriers suggest that implementation has not truly begun

The discussion and tables below summarize a number of core implementation barriers reported by schools and various school support providers. These barriers suggest that Oakland has barely begun implementation. That is, Oakland has only recently started to establish the resources and basic agreements schools need to take on new responsibilities. In particular, Oakland’s system of support for site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools:

- Does not significantly differentiate participating schools from non-participants. Schools’ status as site-based decision-making schools has not conferred any new flexibility regularly or systematically across participating schools. The new small autonomous schools largely attribute their accomplishments to date largely to their newness and their size; whatever autonomy these schools may have attained so far does not differ noticeably from that of other schools. This negligible transfer of authority makes it difficult to identify implementation barriers particular to these schools. The issues in Tables 3 (start-up concerns) and Table 4 (basic district inefficiencies) likely affect all Oakland public schools and include limited facilities, tight budgets, over-committed leaders, and central office unresponsiveness.

OUSD has begun to explore whether to seek “alternative schools” status for the new small autonomous schools and any other schools willing to meet state criteria for the designation. Schools so designated may receive waivers of state Education Code requirements from the state superintendent of public instruction (per Education Code section 58500). Even with a change in status, OUSD will need to create its own policies and procedures to ensure that schools can *use* the special status to advance their school improvement efforts. Since most barriers listed in Tables 3-5 stem from district rules, state budget decisions, and federal mandates, alternative schools status likely will provide only the first of what will need to be many alternative designations by various local, state, and federal authorities.

- Relies on individual relationships and beliefs, not a strategic set of agreements and plans. Site-based decision-making schools generally have had to create their own flexibility by relying on previously cultivated personal/professional relationships with central office staff. For example, many principals attribute occasionally rapid responses by central purchasing and buildings and grounds to positive histories and established trust with individuals in those departments. Strong relationships also increase school leaders’ knowledge of district procedures from which to seek exemptions. These relationships tend to depend on a principal’s length of tenure and reputation in the central office, not on new formal flexibility, autonomy or responsibility conferred to participating schools.

Reliance on individual relationships and decisions in a central office with significant staffing limitations means that even short absences of division directors have significantly lengthened the response time of the central office to various requests. Schools typically do not know which decisions have been made with regard to other schools and whether decisions apply to their school.

- Places the onus for creating flexibility on schools. Schools have enjoyed new flexibility when they have requested and justified the need for exemptions from specific rules. Such flexibility-by-waivers places the burden on schools to understand which district (and sometimes state and federal) rules they want waived and to expend time and other resources to compose lengthy requests. For example, one school reports writing a 40-page justification for a one-year exemption from OUSD's mandate that all elementary schools use Open Court as their primary reading program. As in this example, waivers typically offer short-term flexibility, begging the question whether the benefits of the exemptions outweigh the costs of crafting various requests. More importantly, any Oakland school can request a waiver, and, in some cases, receive a waiver; accordingly, this arrangement does not depart significantly from business-as-usual for regular Oakland public schools.
- Does not strategically promote school innovation. Experience teaches that waivers tend not to produce dramatic changes in school practice. For example, one national study of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act's Title I found that schools typically use waivers to come into compliance with federal laws not to depart significantly school business as usual.¹² Likewise, in the context of this report and formal requests to the central office, Oakland's schools have not expressed strong interest in drastic departures from familiar school options. Most schools have requested flexibility, autonomy or responsibility to improve the efficiency of basic central office procedures. For example, most school principals say they want to hire their own staff and make purchases on the open market specifically to avoid the delays and mistakes they consider typical of central office operations.

Research and experience regarding organizational innovation teach that significant change arises not in the absence of rules but when organizations are encouraged to depart from a basic set of rules.¹³ Lacking such basic structures, organizations will seek out rules and models of appropriate behavior.¹⁴ In Oakland, the granting of unspecified flexibility, autonomy, and responsibility to schools without delineating basic understandings or new rules of operation created a void in schools' structure for innovation. In their search for basic structure, many participating schools and central office administrators have deferred to standard operating procedures governing regular public schools.

These observations should not suggest that central office administrators have not paid considerable attention to these issues. To the contrary, many central office administrators know about the barriers listed below and have made attempts— sometimes quite significant attempts— to resolve them. However, to date these efforts had not resulted in specific changes in rules and roles for schools and the central office.

The specifics: Implementation barriers fall into three categories

School leaders were virtually unanimous about several core barriers to implementation. These barriers fall into three categories: predictable start-up issues, basic inefficiencies, and fundamental changes to realize school visions.

Predictable start-up issues

Schools struggle with early implementation due to predictable start-up issues— challenges that a knowledgeable observer could have identified in advance of implementation, based solely on a careful reading of the school board policies, but that were not resolved before implementation began.

Table 3 identifies and describes these predictable start-up issues. New small autonomous schools in particular report fundamental start-up barriers. After all, the new small autonomous schools initiative involved the complete creation of schools. Site-based decision-making schools had less apparent start-up concerns because they were already operating, they had a basic set of resources at the outset, and they could develop site-based decision-making teams without additional changes in central office rules. However, none of the participating schools received the funding, flexibility or other resources they believed the enabling legislation promised.

All the examples in Table 3 stem from a common implementation gap: key leaders in OUSD have not made specific decisions about what special allowances the site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools policies provide to schools. This gap likely results from several factors:

- Leaders aimed to build policy from practice. To maintain momentum, address various political pressures, and await early implementation lessons, OUSD selected participating schools before they established staff or rules for implementation.
- Ability and commitment varies. Individual central office administrators, for lack of time, interest or other reasons, have not sought or secured resolution of persistent implementation challenges.
- New central office administrators needed time to learn district rules. The most recent directors of the two initiatives for OUSD are new to central office administration and to Oakland. These administrators had to learn basic district policies, procedures, and chain of command while also developing essential relationships within the central office and negotiating changes for schools— all *after* OUSD had chosen schools and implementation had begun.
- Oakland leaders may disagree about how much autonomy/flexibility to allow. Some want to provide maximum local discretion in return for improved results. Some want assurances that schools meet certain capacity requirements before any authority transfers to schools. Others in the central office do not support the

initiatives on the groups that the policies create a dual school system that effectively doubles their workload.

- Lines of responsibility remain blurry and the need for complex coordination runs high. Both policies operate under the direction of a single, high-level central office administrator. However, most specific start-up gaps fall under the purview of multiple central office directors who typically do not report directly to the administrative point-people. Accordingly, point-people generally must coordinate the actions of many additional central office staff over whom they have limited formal authority or influence.

Regardless of the specific cause, the bottom line is that OUSD has only begun to establish a set of basic understandings about the implementation of site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools.

Table 3. Predictable start-up issues

| Category | Issues | Status |
|-------------------|---|--|
| BUDGET | <p>Schools experienced budget delays:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site-based decision-making schools did not receive their new discretionary funding until their third year of implementation. • New small autonomous schools opened before OUSD had determined the size and sources of their budgets. Interim budgets were not loaded until weeks before the opening of school. This delay frustrated planning activities and led to misdirection of certain resources. | <p>OUSD Department of Finance, under the leadership of a new (June 2001) director, has studied the new small autonomous schools' first-year budgets and developed a budget report. This report will serve as a framework for new small autonomous schools' budgets and as the basis for a business plan that OUSD can use to seek additional, outside funding. The budget will provide only a rough estimate of costs given schools' difficulties with start-up in year 1.</p> <p>Site-based decision-making schools' budget: status unknown.¹⁵</p> |
| FACILITIES | <p>Late assignment of space for new small autonomous schools led to delays in planning and wasted time and resources. (E.g., One school purchased furniture for a library and auditorium not available in their designated school building.)</p> | <p>A new Assistant Superintendent of Facilities will revise, coordinate, and implement the district's various facilities plans. The new assistant superintendent faces broad barriers to finding new facilities including high real estate costs and a weakening regional and national economy.</p> |

Basic inefficiencies

Implementation also stalls because of “basic inefficiencies”—central office operations that would help implementation if they proceeded expeditiously. These issues likely frustrate not only the site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools but also regular Oakland public schools. However, particularly because leaders of the participating schools expected exemptions from traditional procedures, they have found these inefficiencies particularly frustrating and time-consuming. For example, several schools report they would not have sought alternatives to central office purchasing if they did not believe the enabling policies entitled them to such exemptions. Because participating schools have launched reforms that hinge on new funding, facilities, curriculum, staff, supplies, and other services, these schools seem to have spent a disproportionate amount of time monitoring the follow-through of the district central office in these areas.

Addressing basic inefficiencies does not require changes in district central office policy. Rather, these issues result from the slow or poor performance of existing responsibilities. Improving the basic operations of the central office would likely go a long way to advancing implementation. In fact, the sheer number of inefficiencies and significant time spent compensating for them led school principals and district central office administrators alike to raise the question: if the central office provided efficient, high-quality services would schools pursue alternatives?¹⁶

Table 4. Basic inefficiencies

| Category | Issues | Status |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| BUDGET | Schools report the following frustrations with OUSD’s on-line budget system (OBARS): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budgets are difficult to read. • Budgets change daily without notice. • Dollar values do not always reflect available funds. | OUSD will adopt a new budget system, BITECH, with a clearer interface. Changes in the budget system will not resolve poor communication about budget changes or compensate for school principals’ lack of familiarity with budget processes. |
| BUILDINGS & GROUNDS | Schools have faced significant delays in central office responses to their requests for repairs and installations. All requests must go through the central office. | Schools establish relationships with individuals in the central office to facilitate service delivery. This practice favors site-based decision-making principals who have relatively long tenures and strong relationships district-wide. The superintendent has recently conducted focus groups with a variety of school principals about these concerns. |
| CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTION | Schools frequently receive inadequate notice about required professional development sessions, which disrupts schools’ own time for training. | (See Table 5 regarding schools’ exemptions from central office professional development.) |
| HUMAN RESOURCES | Applicants’ paperwork has been processed so slowly that schools face prolonged teacher vacancies or lose favored candidates. | Status: Unknown |

Table 4. Continued

| Category | Issues | Status |
|-------------------|--|--|
| PURCHASING | Delays at the central office warehouse mean delays for schools in receiving purchased equipment and supplies. | Schools establish relationships with individuals in the central office to facilitate service delivery. This practice favors site-based decision-making principals who have relatively long tenures and strong relationships district-wide. |
| | Central purchasing can cost more than purchases on the open market | School principals occasionally make their own purchases and request reimbursement. Principals highlight that they will need additional, on-site resources for budget management if such reimbursements become standard operating procedures. |
| | Approvals for purchases can take considerable time. School principals spend considerable time following-up on purchase requests. | The director of small schools has made it her personal policy not to require her approval for purchases. Schools deal directly with central purchasing. This skipped step does not remedy delays that stem from the central warehouse. A new executive task force has adopted this issue among its charges. ¹⁷ |
| | Some central office staff respond only to principals, not to the wider range of school leaders at both schools. | Status: Unknown |

Fundamental changes to realize school visions

This category includes new flexibility, autonomy, and responsibility that schools feel they need to implement their approved plans. In principle, the site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools policies already provide schools with new discretion in most of the areas identified below. Oakland's site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools policies promise a broad range of new flexibilities with regard to budgets, curriculum, personnel, and other areas.¹⁸ However, the central office has not created new administrative procedures to translate the policy into practice.

School and central office leaders alike identified these barriers to implementation. Despite such consensus about the need for specific changes, none of the issues identified below has been resolved and delays persist. For example, for over six months, schools have requested and central office administrators have investigated issuing schools credit cards for basic purchases. Some central office administrators argue that delays stem from the unavailability of a vendor. School support providers, the Site-based Decision Making Committee, and others say they have identified a local bank and established a preliminary, informal agreement that would allow the 10 participating schools to open checking and credit card accounts; they argue that delays result from the reluctance of central office administrators to take on the additional work of managing multiple school accounts. No one seems to know who has the ultimate authority to decide whether and how schools may apply for credit cards.

Some leaders in Oakland argue that the central office cannot manage all at once the sheer volume of changes that implementation requires and call for a prioritization of areas for new flexibility, autonomy, and responsibilities. However, needed changes may defy prioritization because most of them are fundamentally interrelated; even if OUSD prioritizes one issue below, staff necessarily will become involved in other areas. For example, genuinely granting schools more control over hiring teachers—providing the full complement of rule changes such a shift requires—involves significant changes in budgeting and personnel (to enable schools to hire the number of teachers they want into the classifications they desire). Changes in curriculum will require new flexibility with regard to budgeting, purchasing, and personnel to ensure schools have resources and staff appropriate to their chosen course of instruction.

The list below should signal that, with implementation underway, schools' calls for particular types of flexibility/autonomy stem not simply from broad, normative arguments about the importance of local control. Rather, schools have set out with school board approval to implement particular improvement plans and have been frustrated by other, contrary central office rules.

Table 5. Fundamental changes

| Category | Issues | Status |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| BUDGET | <p>Several central office administrators typically must approve school expenditures before schools can access funds.</p> <p>OUSD loaded schools' budgets into traditional categories with limited flexibility.</p> | <p>OUSD's attention to budgets primarily involves establishing a core budget for new small autonomous schools and improving the on-line budget system.</p> <p>A new OUSD executive task force has adopted this issue among its charges.</p> |
| CALENDAR | <p>At least one school wants the option of having fewer longer school days and counting average daily attendance (for funding purposes) by semester hours not hours per day.</p> | <p>State laws prohibit these changes to the calculation of average daily attendance.</p> |
| CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTION | <p>Schools want freedom to develop curriculum and instruction appropriate to their board-approved plans. Their rationales include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Open Court mandate conflicts with some school goals, particularly with regard to second language learners. • Teachers have been required to attend professional development sessions offered by the district central office even if schools do not believe such sessions contribute to their school plans. These requests divert teachers from other professional development opportunities. • Some schools want to offer multi-grade classrooms but district textbooks focus on individual grade levels. | <p>Schools generally report a lack of communication with central office staff in Curriculum and Instruction.</p> <p>One school wrote a 40-page waiver for an exemption from the Open Court requirements in year 1. No waivers were available in year 2. Central office administrators argue that all schools understand that Open Court is the one non-negotiable policy in the school district. Most schools say they would seek a waiver from Open Court if given the opportunity.</p> <p>Central office staff say schools may excuse themselves from central professional development if they can demonstrate the quality and appropriateness of the alternatives. Most schools seem unaware of whether this decision constitutes formal district policy.</p> <p>The district highlights state barriers to change including restrictions on SB813 state funds for textbooks and state requirements for core curriculum.</p> |

Table 5. Continued

| Category | Issues | Status |
|------------------------|--|---|
| HUMAN RESOURCES | <p>Schools want freedom to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hire and fire all personnel • Develop staff categories • Determine number of staff • Hire staff on a tentative contract pending central office approval <p>(A minority of schools wants freedom to hire non-credentialed teachers.)</p> <p>Schools' rationales include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools need principals, teachers, and staff who understand and support their missions and who have the special skills their approaches demand. • A school with two custodial positions wants to save money by hiring one custodian and meeting remaining custodial needs in other ways. • A school wants to maintain a personnel category essential to their local goals and strategies but the central office abolished the category. | <p>PRINCIPALS: The superintendent appoints all principals per Administrative Bulletin 4020. The new small autonomous schools director has a personal commitment to make recommendations according to schools' interests and preferences.</p> <p>TEACHERS: Pilot schools currently have freedom to interview and hire their own teachers within existing personnel categories and according to the provisions in the teachers' union contract. Candidates must add their name to central OUSD personnel lists for consideration and meet OUSD certification requirements for hire. Schools generally do not dispute these roles and responsibilities but want a stronger, formal guarantee of their freedom to select teachers.</p> <p>STAFF: OUSD has initiated negotiations with the custodial union. Negotiations with other unions: status unknown.</p> <p>A new executive task force has adopted this issue among its charges.</p> |
| PURCHASING | <p>Schools want to make purchases on the open market. For example,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One school wants to strengthen community relations by using local businesses and services for supplies and repairs. • By making purchases on the open market, most schools believe they can reduce costs and save time otherwise spent monitoring their orders. | <p>An approximately six-month effort to find a vendor to provide credit cards for schools has not yet produced results.</p> <p>The new small autonomous schools director has made it her personal policy not to require her approval for purchases, thereby removing one step in the approval process. New small autonomous schools now deal directly with purchasing department where they typically experience significant delays.</p> |

III. COMMUNICATION GAPS IMPEDE IMPLEMENTATION

Reports about implementation in public services often stress the importance of communication and too often find communication lacking. Information does not always travel efficiently or clearly through public systems. In complex education policy strategies such as site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools, communication takes on a heightened importance. These initiatives require the timely flow of information between schools, central office departments, and across all levels to forge the strong relationships and accomplish the kinds of policy changes that can advance implementation. Consider that central office administrators cannot build policy from practice without timely, detailed knowledge about schools' decisions and experiences. Schools cannot take advantage of policy changes unless they know about the changes. Any radical new reform increases uncertainty and perhaps anxiety for central office administrators about changes in their day-to-day responsibilities. Clear, regular communication about the new initiatives can alleviate concerns and go a long way to building essential support throughout OUSD.

To date, limited or occasional communication about site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools has led to several, fundamental implementation challenges.

- Schools lack a clear understanding of district policies and procedures. Schools typically do not know what flexibility and autonomy regular schools have to implement local improvement plans let alone what the site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools policies allow. Central office administrators make decisions about participating schools primarily on an issue-by-issue basis as will happen when an organization shifts from a distributor of universal services to a provider of school-by-school coaching and support. However, issue-by-issue, school-by-school decisions, in a system with poor channels for communication, has resulted in confusion for school principals and others about whether decisions regarding one school also apply to other schools. As a result, some central office administrators and school principals wonder whether site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools conflict with OUSD's equity goals— even though in an equitable system each school would receive different resources and allowances according to its particular needs and strengths.
- Central office administrators need basic information about the policies and schools' progress. Central office administrators seem relatively unaware of what specifically the policies allow, the progress of participating schools, and how these policy initiatives fit with OUSD's strategic plan. For example, some administrators believe that the new small autonomous schools policy mandates the Open Court reading curriculum even though the formal policy does not mention Open Court. Incomplete or erroneous information— particularly information about the rationale for certain decisions— may contribute to a lack of central office responsiveness to schools. For example, as one administrator protested, “Why do I have to change what I do here [in my division to help those schools]? I mean, Curriculum and Instruction can mandate Open Court but I have to change my division around? That doesn't seem right.”

- Conversations between schools and the central office have become sporadic at best. Early in implementation of both initiatives, central office administrators met regularly with participating schools to clarify district procedures, receive feedback on new policy directions, and provide other assistance. Central office administrators report that they discontinued these meetings because of schools' poor attendance and administrators' desire to give school leaders time and space to work at their sites. Schools offer alternative explanations. Site-based decision-making schools continued to meet despite sporadic attendance by central office administrators. New small autonomous schools clarify that their attendance waned because central office concerns rather than their own questions dominated the agendas. Regardless of the explanation, the participating schools currently do not have regular opportunities to consult with central office administrators either through formal meetings or site visits. Schools convene in two separate groups to address their start-up challenges. (See Table 3.) These meetings typically surface challenges but provide limited opportunities for schools to follow-up on their concerns.
- Communication between the central office and schools depends on personal experience and relationships. An individual school principal's ability to access information about central office procedures depends significantly on the strength of that principal's relationship with particular central office administrators. Two school principals reported that they personally find central office administrators responsive because they have worked with particular administrators for years. However, principals report that even these administrators will only respond to principals' requests, not those of teachers and other school/community members with whom the principals want to share responsibility.
- Competing needs for clarity and flexibility may stall communication. Some school principals want clarification of district rules to better understand what their special status confers. Others, concerned that clarification will lessen flexibility, do not pursue improved communication. This dynamic indicates a familiar tension in organizational change efforts: schools fear that greater communication and clarity will make matters worse and prefer the personal, idiosyncratic system that allows them to slip through the cracks; however, the personal, idiosyncratic system significantly stalls implementation over the long term for most schools.
- Staffing may constrain communication. Site-based decision-making schools fall under the direct supervision of an assistant superintendent who also oversees all other OUSD school reform initiatives. A dedicated, full-time director oversees the new small autonomous schools. However, that director has a staff of only one half-time administrative assistant and frequently faces additional, crisis demands. This assignment of administrative responsibilities significantly limits the ability of central office administrators to facilitate the extensive communication that successful implementation requires.

Moreover, the nature of central office administrators' coordinating roles may send mixed messages to schools and other participants. Specifically, such central office point-people must support schools and monitor their progress; they facilitate change and participate centrally in that change. These dual roles typically do not add up to a coherent and consistent set of responsibilities for even the most effective and experienced administrator.

The good news is:

- School leaders want to meet with other school leaders and central office administrators. Schools welcome these meetings as opportunities to better understand and inform OUSD's strategic plan and to learn from other schools about best practices.
- When central office administrators have been invited as experts to invent new procedures for the participating schools, they have readily engaged the challenges. This observation is consistent with other attempts at system-wide change: frontline and mid-level staff become willing and ready participants in change when senior staff provide performance outcomes and new resources and ask staff to design approaches to achieve those goals.¹⁹

Recommendations and Cautions

These findings suggest that Oakland Unified School District can strengthen implementation of site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools in the following ways:

- Recommit OUSD’s central office to site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools.

The participation of OUSD’s central office in these initiatives to date suggests that implementation within the central office has not truly begun. The Oakland Board of Education designated site-based decision-making schools two years ago. However, since then, the central office has not provided basic, consistent support or the additional, promised funding. New small autonomous schools opened before OUSD established fundamental agreements and resources. Schools have made significant progress, often with the help of non-profit school support providers. However, schools’ experiences to date do not provide an accurate picture of schools’ costs, experiences or barriers had they the requisite resources for implementation.

Oakland now has an opportunity to commit to site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools in earnest. A restatement of commitment or, what some might call re-launching the two initiatives within the central office, would:

- Signal an acknowledgement by OUSD leadership that implementation to date has not proceeded as intended.
 - Help re-ignite the enthusiasm that initially fueled the two initiatives.
 - Communicate that site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools comprise two legs of a common movement toward greater school flexibility, autonomy, and responsibility.
 - Provide an opportunity for central office leadership to articulate and communicate how school-site flexibility, autonomy, and responsibility fit into OUSD’s strategic plan.
- Define “flexibility” and “autonomy” now, create a set of baseline rules, and set a schedule for regular review of agreements.

OUSD must specifically define the flexibility and autonomy the two policies confer. No amount of new information about related experience in other school districts will minimize the risks inherent in this reform approach. Experience teaches more general but clear lessons: site-based management has languished in implementation for decades in part because central office administrators have failed to make early decisions about schools’ specific new responsibilities. New rules, not simply removing old rules, provide the platforms on which schools can improvise and innovate. Accordingly, Oakland’s leaders face an immediate, normative question: how much initial, new flexibility and autonomy is OUSD willing to confer to schools?

Oakland’s educational leaders are off to a good start in answering this question in several respects. For example, implementation stalls in other districts that limit school decision making

to single issues and thereby ignore how restrictions in one area (e.g., purchasing) curb flexibility in other areas (e.g., buildings and grounds). Oakland by contrast promises to confer a range of new responsibilities to schools. Whereas site-based management initiatives nationwide have had limited impact on student outcomes, Oakland's extension of school responsibilities to areas of curriculum and instruction bode well for bucking these trends.²⁰

OUSD's superintendent can capitalize on these strengths and facilitate implementation immediately by designating an advisory group to provide starting definitions of flexibility and autonomy. These definitions should include accountability processes appropriate to new central office and school responsibilities. A number of existing groups can serve as advisors including Oakland's Cross-city Campaign Committee (convened by the Oakland Education Cabinet). These groups have several assets important for this advisory role including staff support and the participation of school leaders, central office administrators, and non-profit school support providers.

Advisors should make strategic use of sunset dates to distinguish between short-term and long-term policy changes and create (and use) a schedule for reassessing and revising rules.

- Prioritize issues related to budgets and human resources.

The interrelationships among the implementation challenges identified in Tables 3-5 make their prioritization somewhat artificial. Furthermore, most of the issues identified here require immediate resolution for implementation to proceed as intended. If central office leaders must select one or two starting points, they should consider choosing issues that implicate a significant number of departments— such as budgets and human resources. These choices can focus work on a specific set of goals while engaging a broad range of central office administrators in implementation at the outset.

- Seek the help of an independent intermediary organization.

Currently, site-based decision-making and new small autonomous school principals find they must both develop school plans and identify new flexibility for implementation. In other words, school principals must develop the expertise of both excellent school leaders and knowledgeable central office administrators. Such capacity exceeds what anyone should reasonably expect of strong school leaders. Central office administrators also face unrealistic demands. Participating administrators have been asked both to support schools' decisions and to monitor schools' compliance with central office rules. Participating administrators find they need both to facilitate implementation and participate in implementation. Such dual responsibilities create role conflict and confusion for even the most capable administrators.

An independent intermediary organization can work between schools and the central office to help schools identify impediments to implementation, to communicate schools' challenges to central office administrators, and to assist central office administrators' in addressing implementation barriers. In particular, an intermediary could convene and facilitate meetings between central office administrators and school leaders, document and disseminate information about district policy and policy changes, research best practices in other districts, help Oakland

liaison with state and federal departments of education (see discussion below), and coordinate broad participation in the invention of specific central office policies appropriate to school-site flexibility and autonomy.²¹

Whereas the advisory group mentioned above would provide an initial set of recommendations about how to define “flexibility” and “autonomy”, the intermediary would work day-to-day to help the central office and schools translate those and other agreements into specific roles, rules, and responsibilities throughout OUSD. Accordingly, the intermediary would enable school leaders to focus on their implementation and allow central office administrators to specialize in central office reform by taking on the coordination and communication necessary between the two.

Many organizations in Oakland provide assistance to schools or lobby for policy changes. However, Oakland currently does not have an organization that has responsibility for continually bridging relationships between district central office administrators and school sites in the ways described here. Nor do any Oakland organizations specifically coach central office administrators in becoming school support providers.

- Keep site-based decision-making schools in the conversation.

Any group convened to address district policy related to the new small autonomous schools should also formally address policies and procedures for site-based decision-making schools. Clearly, each school brings different experience and capacity to implementation and each requires individualized assistance. However, research for this report surfaced no reason why *changes in central office policy* extended to one group of schools would not apply to or help implementation of the other group and many reasons why formally joining the two initiatives would bolster both. This recommendation specifically refers to the scope of work set out by the Cross-city Campaign Committee, the Partnership for Small Autonomous Schools, and the Site-based Management Pilot Schools Committee, and the superintendent’s new executive taskforce to support new small autonomous schools.

- Engage the state and federal government as partners.

Most state and federal barriers to implementation do not stem from provisions within the State Education Code but from budgetary and programmatic decisions. Accordingly, pursuing alternative school status through the California Department of Education is one part of what must be a broader effort to engage state and federal agencies in strengthening OUSD’s ability to confer new roles and responsibilities to schools. OUSD leadership should meet with the state superintendent of public instruction directly to discuss the range of ways the California Department of Education could facilitate implementation. For example, experience with the state’s former Challenge District’s initiative might suggest avenues for flexibility more appropriate to Oakland’s goals than the administrative waivers available with alternative schools status.

OUSD can connect with the federal government by forming a partnership with the regional director of the United States Department of Education. Alameda County’s participation in

California's AB 1741 Youth Pilot Project (which included a close working relationship with the director of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Region IX) might provide one model for such a federal-local partnership specifically around flexibility for local decision making.

- Staff these initiatives adequately.

Site-based decision-making and new small autonomous schools likely will not reach their full potential at their current levels of district central office staffing particularly since support for implementation involves labor-intensive, school-by-school assistance. The assignment of a full-time director dedicated to the site-based decision-making schools might help. However, given the importance of linking the two policy efforts, the superintendent should consider creating a new position to oversee site-based decision-making schools and new small autonomous schools with additional support staff.

Who should fill these central office administrative positions? When school districts launch initiatives that aim to be school-responsive, they typically promote a school leader to the helm. These practitioners-turned-policymakers bring important school expertise to the central office but often have limited knowledge of the central office itself. Accordingly, these leaders tend to know what challenges to address but not how to address them. Administrators with deep experience in both schools and central office administration are few and far between. Given a choice, OUSD should ensure that the central office directors understand the importance of supporting schools but defer to candidates with extensive experience with central office operations. Particularly if OUSD identifies or forms an intermediary organization to assist schools to bridge relationships between schools and the central office, the central office directors can truly specialize in central office transformation.

Adequate staffing of these initiatives also means that key directors from across the district central office are willing and able to assist individual schools as needs arise. Developing this central office capacity will take time and a multi-pronged effort. In the short term, all central office directors need the superintendent to provide detailed information about what these initiatives entail, an explanation of how these initiatives fit into the district's strategic plan, and a specific invitation to help solve the challenges identified here. Particularly since traditional administrative training focuses on regulatory relationships and broad distribution of universal services, all administrators need professional development in intra-agency collaboration and work with caseloads of individual schools. The City Manager's Office has been grappling with similar issues in the implementation of Geographic Service Delivery Teams (neighborhood decision making regarding city services) and may serve as an important partner and resource.

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Endnotes

¹ “The Oakland Education Cabinet, formerly the Mayor’s Education Cabinet, brings together leaders in a citywide civic organization committed to comprehensive school improvement to enrich education for Oakland students.” For a full description, see: Oakland Education Cabinet (2002). *The Oakland Education Cabinet: Summary*. Briefing paper written by the Oakland Education Cabinet. The Oakland Education Cabinet also facilitates Oakland’s participation in the national network, Cross-city Campaign for Urban School Reform.

² For example, in 1999, RPP International assessed schools progress in implementing site-based decision making and prioritized next steps for building school capacity for implementation. See: Chambliss, D., Moses, A., and Sprehe, H. (2000). *School site decision-making: Analysis of pilot site implementation*. Emeryville, CA: RPP International. The Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools has raised funds, held conferences, provided on-site consultation, and developed rubrics and definitions of readiness for implementation of new small autonomous schools.

³ These policy summaries come from the following sources:

- 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.

⁴ For a literature review and discussion of challenges to central office administration in becoming support providers, see:

- Honig, M.I. (2001). *Managing ambiguity: The implementation of complex education policy*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Stanford University School of Education.
- Honig, M.I. (2002). Where’s the “up” in bottom-up reform? Policymakers’ roles in complex policy implementation. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association. New Orleans, LA. April 3.

⁵ Malen, B. Ogawa, R.T., & Kranz, J. (1990). What do we know about school-based management? A case study of the literature—A call for research. In W. Clune and J. Witte (Eds.) *Choice and control in American Education, Vol. I: The practice of choice, decentralization and school restructuring*. New York, NY: Falmer Press (pp. 289-342).

Wohlstetter, P. & Odden, A. (1992). Rethinking school-based management policy and research. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 28(4), 529-549.

⁶ Honig, M.I. (2001). *Managing ambiguity: The implementation of complex education policy*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Stanford University School of Education.

⁷ Given the small number of participating schools, no sample could be representative in a scientific sense.

⁸ Research supports these features as characteristic of schools with capacity for local decision making. Relevant studies include:

- Bryk, A.S., Sebing, P.B., Kerbow, D., Rollow, S., and Easton, J.Q. (1998). *Charting Chicago school reform*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Newman, F.M. & Wehlage, G.G. (1995). *Successful school restructuring*. Madison, WI: Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, University of Wisconsin, Madison.
- Westheimer, J. (1998). *Among schoolteachers*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

⁹ For confirmation of this implementation progress, see: Chambliss, D., Moses, A., & Sprehe, H. (2000). *School site decision-making: Analysis of pilot site implementation*. Emeryville, CA: RPP International. According to several respondents, at least one of the original five site-based decision-making schools did not pursue implementation.

¹⁰ This experience is consistent with that in other school districts that solidifying collaborative decision making bodies can take at least one year even under the most supportive of circumstances.

¹¹ An exception of note, Melrose Elementary School's fifteen-year-old school governance body has been deeply engaged in curricular decisions for at least the last several years. Some national experts believe that site-based decision making does not improve teaching and learning unless the decision-making team participates in the development, implementation, and review of curriculum and instruction. For further information, see: Wohlstetter, P. & Odden, A. (1992). Rethinking school-based management policy and research. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 28(4), 529-549.

¹² See:

- 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.
- United States General Accounting Office. (1998). *Elementary and secondary education: Flexibility initiatives do not address districts' key concerns about federal requirements*. Washington, DC: Author.

¹³ See:

- Hatch, M.J. (1997). Jazzing up the theory of organizational improvisation. *Advances in Strategic Management*, 14, 181-191.
- Honig, M.I. (2001). *Managing ambiguity: The implementation of complex education policy*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Stanford University School of Education.

¹⁴ March, J.G. (1994). A primer on decision making: How decisions happen. New York, NY: The Free Press.

¹⁵ "Status unknown" means either:

- a. The issues have not been addressed.
- b. I could not access relevant information.
- c. I did not have time to seek relevant information.

¹⁶ The state Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT) conducted an audit of Oakland Unified School District at the end of the 1990s. FCMAT's 2000 report likewise found the central office ill prepared for school site-based decision making in part because of profound inefficiencies in basic central office operations. See: Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (2000). *Oakland Unified School District Assessment and Recovery Plans*. Sacramento, CA: Author.

¹⁷ On January 22, 2002, the leadership of Oakland Unified School District appointed a sub-group of the superintendent's executive cabinet to coordinate support to the new small autonomous schools. Because the new small autonomous schools policy depends on provisions in the site-based decision-making policy as described above, some believe this taskforce will necessarily consider support to site-based decision-making schools as well. However, site-based decision-making schools currently do not comprise a formal responsibility of this group.

¹⁸ For a review, see:

Malen, B. Ogawa, R.T., & Kranz, J. (1990). What do we know about school-based management? A case study of the literature—A call for research. In W. Clune and J. Witte (Eds.) *Choice and control in American Education, Vol. I: The practice of choice, decentralization and school restructuring*. New York, NY: Falmer Press (pp. 289-342).

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ Wohlstetter, P. & Odden, A. (1992). Rethinking school-based management policy and research. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 28(4), 529-549.

²¹ For information about the role of intermediary organizations in complex education policy implementation see:

- Honig, M.I. (2001). Managing from the middle: The role of intermediary organizations in complex education policy implementation. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association. Seattle, WA. April. EDITOR'S NOTE: This document has been published as: Honig, M.I. (2004). The new middle management: Intermediary organizations in education policy implementation. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 26(1), 65-87.
- Honig, M.I. (2001). *Managing ambiguity: The implementation of complex education policy*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Stanford University School of Education, Chapter 5.