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Integrating Accountability With Choice: Implications for School Governance

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As school choice policies continue to gain momentum in the American system of public education, a push for increased accountability by different levels of government has occurred. In some instances, policymakers have begun to pair public-school choice and performance-based accountability mechanisms within the same initiative (e.g., the Florida A+ Plan). Theoretically, whereas school choice is supposed to release schools and their potential for innovation and improvement from bureaucratic control, prevailing forms of educational accountability have arisen from politically negotiated, bureaucratically administered standards for school success. The purpose of this article is to explore the consequences of integrated choice/accountability policies for the organization and governance of schooling on purely conceptual grounds. In so doing, it exposes what may be a fundamental tension.

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David Tyack (1995) observed that "when Americans grow dissatisfied with public schools, they blame the way they are governed ... There is too much centralization or too little, too many actors involved in policy formation or too few" (p. 1). As early as the 1970s, scholars argued that the discourse surrounding school governance to which Tyack alluded occurs in cycles and that policy responses often follow suit. Today, however, people are *at the same time* calling for more local autonomy and greater national uniformity (Elmore, 1990). To get it, they are looking toward school choice, like charter schools and voucher plans, and performance-based accountability policies, specifically content and performance standards, assessment systems linked to those standards, and incentives and sanctions, to motivate school improvement. In Florida, for example, an "integrated" choice/accountability plan is being implemented in which students can qualify for vouchers to attend a private or better-performing public school when their assigned school fails to meet improvement goals 2 years in a row (Figlio & Page, in press).

Theoretically, whereas school choice is supposed to release schools and their potential for innovation and improvement from bureaucratic control, prevailing modes of educational accountability, arising from politically negotiated standards for performance, are "rooted in external controls and bureaucratic relationships" (Adams & Kirst, 1999, p. 465). By most accounts, the accountability movement originated from pressures from the business community to support only those expenditures that contributed to measurable educational improvement. Standardization and accountability, according to McNeil (2000), were "implemented from the top of the state bureaucracy, through the district bureaucracies, and subsequently imposed on schools" (p. 4), and seemed to reinforce customary approaches to school governance "which regards the 'school *system'* [emphasis added] as the key policy-and-management unit" (Finn, 1990, p. 9). Parental choice plans, on the other hand, are expected to activate school-level autonomy and discretion. Specifically, parents will choose schools; and schools, in an attempt to retain them, will exhibit some level of responsiveness to meet the various needs and preferences of their "clients" (Chubb & Moe, 1990).

Does the bilateral press for choice and performance-based accountability work to create a fundamental tension for school governance? Scholarly attention has been paid to the political ramifications of choice inside schools. Fewer studies exist, however, that consider the governance consequences of accountability. Efforts to understand the implications of integrated choice/accountability policies for schools are hampered by a lack of empirical evidence. My purpose here is to explore the consequences of choice and performance-based accountability for school governance on conceptual grounds. I begin with a brief review of school governance, examining the constitutional context in which school authority is situated, identifying historical trends in the exercise of that authority by various stakeholder groups, and presenting a model for understanding the governing of schools today. I then go on to describe the two policy strategies, school choice and performance-based accountability, and the theoretical underpinnings of each. In the final section, I construct a heuristic framework that attempts to advance the understanding of school governance in the context of integrated choice and accountability policies. In so doing, I expose what may be a fundamental tension.

Historical Trends in School Governance

Rooted in constitutional law and tradition, a multitiered, multicentered governance structure has been a constant in America's K–12 public system of education. Over time, however, there have been major shifts with regard to the power of each "tier" or "center." Historically, schools were "community institutions, run under lay or religious control, funded by a mix of town and private funds, and managed in whatever manner each community thought best" (Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, 2000, p. 54). However, in the first half of the 1800s, frustrated by the illiteracy that such a system produced, and worried about the potential for political strife resulting from interclass conflicts, Horace Mann inaugurated the common school movement. Schooling was to be public in the sense that it was administered by local public officials; funded by public coffers; espoused a common ideology; and included all children regardless of class, ethnicity, or sect.

Then, at the beginning of the 20th century, a group emerged from the urban business community and professional elite whose aim it was to remove from schools partisan politics and indulgent decentralization, which they believed had led to educational inefficiencies. Corruption, they claimed, ran rampant in this environment, where teachers got jobs through pull and contracts were awarded as political favors (Spring, 1982). The group aimed their reforms at revising the governance structure; its watchwords became "centralization, expertise, professionalism, nonpolitical control, and efficiency" (Wirt & Kirst, 2001, p. 32). Attention to Weber's (1947) work on ideal-type bureaucracy with its written rules and hierarchical division of labor furthered the call for educational efficiency. In the middle of the last century, large bureaucracies at the local and state levels were created. The hierarchy standardized many facets of the education system, from school financing to teacher practice:

> Superintendents, sometimes termed 'benevolent autocrats,' and their agents in management—the principals—occupied the top of [the] hierarchy. Until about 1960 teachers, lacking any collective bargaining power, had very little authority in the schools. In big-city schools a central-office bureaucracy dominated all decisions, including resource allocation. A seemingly democratic channel of popular views—the school board—was limited by its tendency to accept the definitions of problems and solutions offered by professionals. Parents had little interest in these matters ... [and] focused only on side issues, like a cookie sale." (Wirt & Kirst, 2001, p. 19)

School Governance Today: Its Reconstruction

Over the last 30 years, however, the traditional "steady state" of school governance with its reliance on professional expertise has been challenged (Wirt & Kirst, 2001). America's public schools have become increasingly more political as an influx of new actors has arrived on the scene. Despite the tradition of local control, federal and state authorities have become progressively more involved in the shaping of education policy. Parents and taxpayers have also increased their claims to the provision of public education in the name of choice and accountability, respectively. Moreover, teachers have acquired more power as a direct result of unionization. Truly, the governing of public education in the United States has been "reconstructed" (Chapman, Boyd, Lander, & Reynolds, 1996).

To understand the ongoing reconstruction of public education, a model of school governance has been adapted from the work of Lundgren and Mattsson (1996). Like Lundren and Mattsson, I argue that the governing of any educational system is a function of two dimensions: locus and agency (see Figure 1). On the "locus" dimension, authority can be situated entirely within a school community, as is generally the case in American private schools. In contrast, schools can be steered almost entirely by outside agents. In France, for example, since their Revolution, schooling is under the direct jurisdiction of the state (La Bell, 1982). French schoolchildren in every school at any given hour and any given age are hearing lessons on the very same thing (Kirst, 1984). For American public schools, power is situated neither exclusively inside nor exclusively

		LOCUS	
		External to School Community	**Internal to School Community**
AGENCY	**Professional**	Unions Professional Associations	Teachers Principals-as-Leaders
	Bureaucratic	State Departments of Education School Boards Superintendents & District Staff	Principals-as-Managers
	Communal	National PTA Other Interest Groups	Individual Parents Local Parent Groups Local Community Groups

Figure 1. Two-dimensional model of school governance.

outside of the school community. Instead, a balance is struck in which education policy emerges from sources both internal and external to the organization.

The second dimension of the school governance model, "agency," highlights the conflict between professional and political control over education. In the first row of Figure 1, "Professional," referring to the idea that school reform and improvement efforts should emerge from within the teaching profession, emphasizes the need for teacher autonomy and juxtaposes a political view of school governance (Lortie, 1975). Newer conceptions of professionalism regard teachers as a self-regulating, self-disciplined group who together are responsible for evaluating the quality of their own practice (Forsyth & Danisiewicz, 1985). Central to these ideas are reform efforts that emphasize teaching teams over hierarchies, mentoring over supervision, and professional development over in-service education (Hargreaves, 1994).

The first cell in Figure 1, external–professional control, contains teacher unions. Outside the school house, teachers, now nearly 3 million strong, work through unions to improve working conditions and affect education policy change. Inside, individual teachers play a role in school governance, as they ultimately determine what goes on in America's classrooms. They occupy the internal–professional cell. As Figure 1 illustrates, principals occupy two cells in the model. Decades of research on the principalship indicate that principals can operate either as leaders (professionals) or as managers (bureaucrats; Spillane, 2001; Wirt & Kirst, 2001). In the principal-as-leader role, principals do not defend the existing order of resources, but instead prioritize their values and work toward the adoption of new school goals. When principals act as leaders, the control they exercise is represented by the internal–professional cell.

In contrast to professionalism, political control relies on the communication of directives from elected officials or their agents down through educational bureaucracies. According to management theorists (e.g., Weber, 1947), bureaucracies produce organizational effectiveness through rules and regulations and a pyramidal chain of command. Unlike professionalism, which is rooted in a reliance on teachers for expertise, bureaucratic control requires teachers to comply with the formal goals and directives of the organization. As Figure 1 illustrates, external bureaucracies include state departments of education, local school boards, superintendents, and district staff. Inside the school, the principal-as-manager functions as an agent of the bureaucracy. Unlike the principal-as-leader, these principals, occupying the internal–bureacratic cell, remain within existing channels of the organization, operate "by the book," and work to promote compliance with rules and regulations (Wirt & Kirst, 2001).

Figure 1 also illustrates a second form of political control. In addition to bureaucratic control, "communal control" emphasizes the participation of parents, students, and community members in school decision making (Strike, 1990). Political historians have shown that an increasingly more-educated population of parents, frustrated by the unresponsive nature of the educational bureaucracy, has emerged in the latter half of the 20th century—influencing every facet of public schooling from hiring decisions to the content of classroom lessons (Wirt & Kirst, 2001). The model's inclusion of "communal" control acknowledges that education policy is to some extent shaped by parents and community members, not only through their voting preferences (school board elections), but through more direct forms of control such as school choice and parent councils. In the external–communal cell of Figure 1, nonprofessional organizations that represent parents (e.g., National Congress of Parents and Teachers, National PTA, American Association of University Women, Council for Basic Education), much like their teacher counterparts, lobby for broad-scale educational change. As represented by the internal–communal cell, parents and neighbors inside a school community voice their individual concerns with educators and at school board meetings; work to build power blocs by co-opting the energies and talents of other parents; raise funds to establish or buttress pet projects; and, in some cases, sit on parent advisory boards.

Of course, interstakeholder relationships exist that can and do affect the real and perceived authority of individual stakeholder groups. Education stakeholders build networks and cooperate with one another. Principals, for example, may work to develop partnerships with high-status parents, gain the support of faculty members by promising professional favors, and weaken oppositional forces by dividing their factions. Indeed, theorists have for decades recognized that informal structures arising from the natural social interactions among members of an organization affect organizational business and administration (Goldring, 1985). Therefore, the cell walls in the model are depicted as broken lines to symbolize the potential for what might be referred to as "influence pooling." The perforations also indicate that individual stakeholders do not operate in any one cell or role at all times.

Although the focus here is on a school's proximal environment, I recognize that there is a larger, distal policy environment surrounding a school. Macropolitical and economic factors, legal context, business interests, and the media all affect the ways in which schools are governed and run. On the political front, less-traditional education stakeholders like mayors and governors have in some areas become major players in the shaping of education policy. Judicial activism in certain districts or states, on occasion, requires the implementation of court-mandated reforms. Businesses and business groups at all levels of government work to shape vocational education and graduation requirements.

Before turning to the implications of school choice and performance-based accountability for school governance, I describe each reform strategy in more detail.

School Choice and Accountability: Trends and Guiding Theories

School Choice

The concept of school choice in this article refers to any institutional arrangement whereby some opportunity exists for parents to choose the school their child attends in lieu of policies that assign students on the basis of catchment areas. That parents should be able to choose the schools their children attend is not a new idea. "Catholic parents have long sought alternatives to secular schooling; immigrant parents and working-class progressives, since the early nineteenth century, have resisted upper-middle-class domination of school politics" (Fuller, Elmore, & Orfield, 1996, p. 4). Furthermore, for more than 100 years, wealthy Americans have been paying to send their children to prestigious preparatory academies.

Nevertheless, when in the mid-1950s, the Nobel prize-winning economist Milton Friedman suggested that the government should not be providing educational services directly and offered instead a competitive model of schooling, the educational community was stunned. Under Friedman's plan, families would receive a certificate or voucher from the state for a specific amount of money that could be used to enroll at any school approved by the state. To summarize Friedman, "failing institutions would be forced out of business by market pressures that would also motivate mediocre schools to higher performance levels" (Finn et al., 2000, p. 65). The school choice movement was born.

The movement did not gain widespread publicity or recognition, however, until 1980 and the inauguration of President Ronald Reagan. Reagan legitimized an antigovernment, probusiness ideology that challenged school governance as it was known (Cookson & Schneider, 1995). His presidency corresponded with what Cookson and Schneider called a cultural revolution in the United States in which consumption and personal fulfillment replaced older values of family, savings, and personal denial, and in which social commitment to public institutions characteristic of the post-Roosevelt era was replaced with commitment to individual gain. The result was state legislation expanding the "right" of parents to choose the schools their children attend. In 1988, Minnesota passed a statewide choice program, followed 1 year later by similar legislation in Arkansas, Iowa, Nebraska, and Ohio. By 1992, 37 states had passed or introduced choice legislation, the most common of which involved vouchers and interdistrict enrollment plans (Cookson & Schneider, 1995). As early as 1994, one in five districts offered nonmagnet school choice (Steel & Levine, 1994). Today, with the exponential growth in charter schools, that ratio has become definitively lower.

Despite their various approaches, magnet schools, interdistrict transfers, charter schools, and even public and private voucher school programs "share a basic chain of assumptions about how parental choice will stimulate educational reform and improvement" (Ogawa & Dutton, 1994, p. 275). First, advocates contend, by incorporating market forces in the administration of public services, educators will be motivated to do a better job. In the conventional, bureaucratic system of public education, critics claim, "there is little incentive to 'try harder'" (Pierre, 1995, p. 66) because the process by which funds are distributed to schools is not directly related to the quality of services they are providing. In many choice plans, financial resources follow the student.

Another assumption suggests that schools, acting largely as autonomous units, will become more efficient, innovative, and responsive to parental preferences. As they do, the role of bureaucracies will be reduced (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Critics of traditional public institutions point to their expensive, rigid, and unresponsive nature: "Instead of being responsive to the recipients of these services, public institutions are responsible and responsive only to the preferences and ideals espoused by policy makers and elected officials" (Pierre, 1995, p. 66). Accordingly, the public system of education is an "open system" in which special interests have, over time, expanded regulations to protect their political gains. Only if schools are freed from the heavy hand of public bureaucracy and made to compete for students, proponents claim, will improvements in the quality of education result.

Counterstories have been published that find little responsiveness by teachers, administrators, or districts to school choice programs. Case studies of Milwaukee, Cleveland, and Edgewood, Texas, for example, found that administrators do not react to competition by emphasizing productivity or efficiency. Instead, they respond symbolically, expanding public relations efforts and occasionally relaxing rules for public schools in their districts (Hess, 2002).

Performance-Based Accountability

Even as the relationship between government, schools, and parents is seemingly reformulated toward governance structures that favor school autonomy and parental choice, new national and state education goals have been and continue to be introduced. Such policies "became a defining theme of the [late 20th century], engaging politicians and technicians, legislators and judges, leaders in government and business, bureaucrats and professionals, and parents" (Adams & Kirst, 1999, p. 464). Prior to the mid-1980s, the politics of education focused on values such as access and equity in the form of desegregation, compensatory programs, and resource equalization (Adams & Kirst, 1999). Since the release of *A Nation At Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), which reported a "rising tide of mediocrity" in our nation's public schools, however, whole political systems have "adopted student performance as the primary social objective of schooling" (Adams & Kirst, 1999, p. 464). Adding fuel to performance-based policies, test scores remained relatively flat at the same time that educational spending rose dramatically. President Reagan's attack on public education mobilized powerful national forces toward improved academic performance, tougher standards, hard content with a focus on inquiry and knowledge production, and even national tests (Cohen, 1996; Porter, Archbald, & Tyree, 1990).

Rather than monitoring inputs like class size, performance-based accountability—what Elmore, Abelmann, and Fuhrman (1996) called "new educational accountability"—focused education policy on student performance. Varying somewhat from state to state, the building blocks for these performance-based accountability policies included content and performance standards, assessment systems linked to the standards, public reporting systems like school report cards, rewards to schools for exemplary performance or performance gains, and probation or state takeover for schools with poor performance records (Ladd, 1996; Macpherson, 1998). Today, there is a political consensus, reflected in the overwhelming, bipartisan support of the Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994 and No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, that world-class standards are required in education if America wants to compete in an increasingly global economy and that federal support and direction are required if the goals are to be met. Recently, the federal government has mandated annual state assessments in grades 3 through 8 as well as increasingly tough penalties for poor performance. States are required to oblige if they want to maintain their Title 1 funds.

Performance-based accountability is based on the premise that rewards, sanctions, and the public disclosure of test scores comparable across schools will give educators the incentive to refocus their energies toward student achievement. According to Elmore (1996), only about one fourth of the teaching population possesses sufficient intrinsic motivation to undertake the hard work of reform. Accountability policies provide extrinsic motivation by focusing public attention on high- and low-performing schools and districts. Such attention is "highlighting model practices and ensuring that poor practices begin to change. Low-performing districts want to get out of the spotlight" (Elmore et al., 1996, p. 96).

There is a less-heralded belief, however, that external performance-based accountability generated at the system level may actually be "inconsistent with important attributes of teaching and teachers' motivation and, therefore, ... alone limit the potential of accountability to stimulate substantially higher levels of student learning" (Adams & Kirst, 1999, p. 465). Unless these macro-level policies have been developed at least in part by practitioners and have gained legitimacy locally, they will not, according to this view, work to motivate educators to improve student achievement (Cibulka & Derlin, 1998; Newmann, King, & Rigdon, 1997). In the very least, they must be augmented with capacity-building measures to enhance the ability of educators to respond constructively to reforms (Cohen, 1996).

Coupled School Choice and Performance-Based Accountability

Over the last decade, the propagation and use of school choice and accountability strategies to reform public education signifies a transformational shift in education policy (Boyd, 2001). School choice, prior to this time, was largely reserved for those who could afford private school tuitions or relocate to neighborhoods with better-quality schools. Moreover, public schools and their districts were not liable for student performance. Today, however, choice is becoming more widely available and publicly funded in the form of interdistrict choice, charter schools, vouchers, and tuition tax credits. Districts and schools are being held accountable for student test performance and absenteeism. Individual teachers and students are also affected through performance reviews and exit exams, respectively.

Indeed, both strategies have recently been packaged within the same initiative. The integration of choice and accountability policies first appeared in England during the Thatcher administration. In 1988, the Education Reform Act introduced an open enrollment system of pupil assignment; assignment by catchment area was replaced by a system in which students chose the schools they would attend. This act, and another 4 years later (1992 Education Schools Act), also reasserted the regulatory power of the state. State control came in the form of a national curriculum, testing, the publication of "league tables" that enabled school-to-school comparisons, and the "most ambitious" program of inspections mounted in the world (Feintuck, 1994; Whitty, Power, & Halpin, 1998). The tight coupling of market-based reforms and accountability mechanisms has now been imported to the United States.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 stands as an example. The law requires states to administer annual reading and mathematics assessments to students in grades 3 through 8, and requires them to develop rewards and penalties for districts that meet or fail to meet performance standards, respectively. Additionally, the law provides students with vouchers for supplemental services or the option of transferring to another public school when their school fails to meet performance goals (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001). At the state level, Florida passed legislation that distributes vouchers to students in "failing" schools that can be used at participating private institutions and better-performing public schools (Bush/Brogan A+ Act of 1999).

A dual focus on choice and accountability in education seems to signal a shift from traditional patterns of school governance that relied exclusively on professional expertise to those that emphasize parental power and state oversight. The section that follows evokes the two-dimensional governance model and presents a framework for understanding governance consequences for schools subject to both choice and accountability reforms.

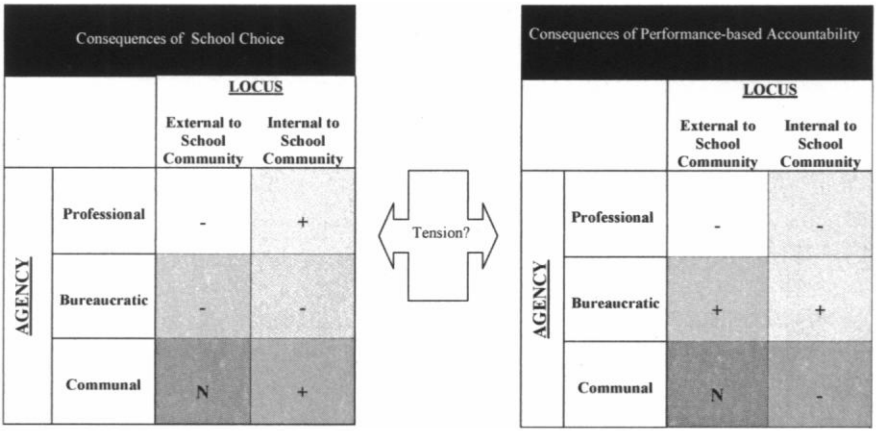
A Conceptual Model: Governance Consequences of School Choice and Accountability

Heuristic models, informed by the literature, present the theoretical linkages between school governance and choice and accountability separately. Turning first to predictions for public school choice, I draw primarily on studies of magnet and charter schools. I array my findings on the original, six-cell governance grid. In the same manner, I then address the predicted governance consequences of performance-based accountability policies.

All of the predictions are consolidated in Figure 2. The grid on the left represents school governance in the context of public-school choice; the right grid represents governance patterns in schools subject to performance-based accountability. The symbol in each cell indicates whether stakeholders in reform schools hold more (+) or less influence (–) than their counterparts in nonreform schools. For example, a negative sign (–) in the top left cell of the choice grid represents that professionals working outside of an individual school will likely have less influence over school and classroom decisions if the school is a public school of choice rather than a traditional public school.

Reducing Bureaucracy Through Choice?

School choice proponents contend that giving parents choice about where to send their children to school will result in school-level innovation and improvement. According to this view, as schools strive to attract and



Consequences of School Choice

AGENCY	LOCUS: External to School Community	LOCUS: Internal to School Community
Professional	-	+
Bureaucratic	-	-
Communal	N	+

Consequences of Performance-based Accountability

AGENCY	LOCUS: External to School Community	LOCUS: Internal to School Community
Professional	-	-
Bureaucratic	+	+
Communal	N	-

Figure 2. The predicted impact of school choice and performance-based accountability on a two-dimensional model of school governance.

retain students, they will need to exhibit some level of responsiveness to meet the various social and curricular preferences of their "clients" (i.e., students and their parents; Hirschman, 1970). Proponents theorize that the autonomy resulting from increased choice will ultimately lead to educational improvement. They wrote, "Autonomy from bureaucracy is crucial to effective school organization, and effective school organization is the key to superior student achievement" (Chubb & Moe, 1990, p. 277).

There is evidence that supports the assumption that public school choice moves schools away from bureaucratic control. Raywid (1983) documented a departure from the hierarchical structures characteristic of bureaucracies in public schools of choice. According to her research, these schools have staffs with "larger domains of responsibility and discretion" (p. 685) than do educators in conventional schools. Moreover, in a recent multistate survey of charter-school teachers, 74% indicated that "less bureaucracy" was a reason for their choice to teach in a charter school (Vanourek, Manno, Finn, & Bierlein, 1998). Studies of traditional (nonpublic) markets in education confirm these findings. Chubb and Moe (1990) compared the characteristics of schools with high and low bureaucratic constraints. Of the schools they classified as having high levels of administrative bureaucracy, only 8.7% were private. Private-sector schools made up 55% of schools with low bureaucratic constraints. To represent the move away from system-level bureaucracy as a result of school choice, a minus sign has been assigned to the external–bureaucratic cell in the "choice" grid of Figure 2.

Professionalism might be expected to flourish within schools of choice. Of course, educators in such schools may be subject to unique counterpressures such as the oversight of student assignment policies for racial balancing, a burden of proof, and a struggle for legitimacy and acceptance as a "real" school (Cohen & Spillane, 1992; Goldring, 1996; Metz, 1990; Woods, Levacic, & Hardman, 1999). Yet, researchers have found evidence that principals and teachers possess more influence and discretion when the schools in which they work enroll students who choose them. Raywid (1990) found, for example, that principals of public schools of choice function more as leaders than as school managers, acting primarily as articulators of school culture. Professional control is further evidenced in choice schools where teachers are given the opportunity to innovate, vary instructional strategies, and diversify the curriculum (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Moreover, teachers in schools of choice report higher levels of autonomy and more influence over curricula than their counterparts in nonchoice settings (Raywid, 1983; Smrekar & Goldring, 1999). Finally, charter-school educators apply their specialized knowledge and expertise to meet the individual needs of their students because they are free from the many regulations of traditional public school programs (Finn et al., 2000). A plus sign occupies the internal–professional cell in the "choice" grid of Figure 2.

There is little empirical research to inform what might happen to union influence in the context of school choice. Most research in this area has focused on the impact of teacher unions and administrator groups on educational reform, not vice versa (Kerchner, Koppich, & Weeres, 1997; Lieberman, 1997). Institutional theory suggests, however, that unions, like any organization, will respond with resistance, fearing a diminution of influence as new actors enter the system seeking a larger role in the delivery of school services. From the unions' perspective, *certain* choice plans, like vouchers, contracts, and tuition tax credits, could pose a threat to their influence if customary collective bargaining agreements and certification requirements were cancelled:

> [Teacher unions] envision scenarios in which teachers lose the right to bargain collectively, in which their membership in a bargaining unit becomes voluntary, where they are forced to become part of a separate bargaining unit, or where they lose rights of transfer by joining charter schools. Moreover, to the degree that choice policies strengthen the hands of parents, particularly vocally dissatisfied ones who demand better "qualified" teachers, choice poses a further threat to union protection of teachers' jobs. (Cibulka, 2000, p. 161)

Indeed, some charter school laws have no requirements that teachers be certified, and, as of 1999, 24 states with a charter school law do not require that teachers remain part of the district collective bargaining agreement (Center for Education Reform, 1999). Additionally, charter schools are exempt from state tenure or due process laws in most states. As a result, recent evidence shows that charter schools in those states offer "fewer job protections, less attractive benefits, and more demanding work schedules to their non-unionized workers" (Boyd, Plank, & Sykes, 2000, p. 205). A predicted reduction in union influence is shown by a minus sign in the external–professional cell in the choice grid of Figure 2.

Fundamentally, arguments for school choice hinge on the belief that choice gives parents wider say in the schooling of their children. Research seems to support the idea that school-choice arrangements empower parents beyond the choice of a school. Metz (1986) found that "Parents ... develop increased power at every level" when they choose the schools their children attend. Parents who exercise choice report higher levels of satisfaction with their schools than do nonchoosers (Martinez, Goodwin, & Kemerer, 1995). Moreover, parents of children attending magnet programs are more involved and feel more welcome and supported than nonmagnet-school parents (Smrekar & Goldring, 1999). The plus sign in the internal–communal cell reflects these findings.

At 6.5 million members, the National Parent–Teacher Association (PTA) may be the largest membership organization in the country; the National Education Association (NEA) is just one third its size. As governments expand parents' ability to exit conventional schooling arrangements, many might reason that groups representing parents will be granted greater say at the state and national levels. Although their representatives may occupy positions on legislative task forces, their ability to voice a unified message may be constrained by the movement's focus on local control and individual choice. No studies were identified that address the impact of school choice on the activity and influence of organized parent groups. It is not expected that choice reforms will substantially alter the place of such interest groups in the politics of education. The external–communal cell is assigned an "N" for neutral.

All told, public-school choice may loosen the hold of external bureaucratic agents and, at the same time, boost internal professionalism and parental control (see Figure 2).

Accountability—A Return to Bureaucracy?

As we have seen, performance-based accountability relies on scientific knowledge and empirical research in the adoption of teaching and learning practices, the deployment of technologies to enable the production of specified results by certain types of students, and the belief that schools can produce much greater outcomes for a given level of input. According to this view, incentives for student performance, in the form of rewards, sanctions, and performance reporting, not additional resources, should improve schools by focusing teachers' attention on the learning outcomes of a wide range of students and by cleaning the system of "bad" teachers and schools (Cibulka, 1990; McNeil, 2000). Implicit in the language of accountability—"allocation," "management," "measurement," and "enforcement"—is a re-emphasis on central control and system hierarchy (Adams & Kirst, 1999). Indeed, McNeil (2000) contended that accountability reconstructs governance by "locat[ing] the authority for educational decisions at the state level" (p. xxv). But, what does the evidence tell us about school governance in the context of accountability?

The little evidence that exists, in case studies and a few recent examinations of schools on probation, seems to show that performance goals, incentives, and public reporting lead to further bureaucratization of schools. In other words, there is an agency effect created by performance-based accountability policies. The consequences of accountability reforms in Chicago serve as illustration. In an attempt to insert more accountability into Chicago's public schools, the Illinois legislature passed the Chicago School Reform Amendatory Act of 1995 giving direct authority over the public schools to the mayor. As a result, new district administrators were granted more power, especially over financial and management matters, and bureaucratic layers were added as probation managers and external partners were inserted into low-performing schools to assist in the development of school improvement plans (Wong & Anagnostopoulos, 1998). To represent the tendency toward bureaucracy as a result of performance-based accountability reforms, there is a plus sign in the external–bureaucratic cell in the "accountability" grid of Figure 2.

Other findings suggest that performance-based accountability encourages bureaucratization inside the school. Where schools are on probation, research suggests that principals respond with organizational rigidity characterized by a reining-in of control and a focus on compliance with state and district rules (Mintrop, 2002). Similarly, principals under threats of sanctions establish more formalized systems to oversee decision making formerly left to individual teachers. Principals, in sum, adopt the principal-as-manager role. Thus, to indicate a predicted expansion of influence, a plus sign occupies the internal–bureaucratic cell of Figure 2.

Professionalism seems to be compromised in the context of new performance-based accountability measures. Through her case study of public schools in Texas before, during, and after the implementation of a state accountability framework, McNeil (2000) showed that standardization and accountability shift "decisions regarding teaching and learning away from communities and educational professionals and into the hands of technical experts" (p. 10). She further maintained that the technocratization of accountability "silences those professionals who want to stay in public education because it takes away the legitimacy for any other, counter language to shape school practice" (McNeil, 2000, p. 263). In other words, when, as in the case of Texas, penalties are added to a system that also prescribes content, teachers are locked into compliance if they want to stay. In this context, professional control over policy and practice deteriorates:

> Curricular and assessment mandates developed without teacher input often violate professional standards and judgments. State and district testing systems in particular often create constraining conditions for teachers and students alike, in the name of public accountability. Some state legislatures are even beginning to mandate instructional methods around literacy instruction for example, where phonics-based approaches have gained favor over so-called whole language methods. (Boyd et al., 2000, pp. 202–203)

Subsequent to Chicago's accountability policy, schools redirected classroom activity toward the use of test-taking materials, providing "teachers with these materials, mandat[ing] their use, and monitor[ing] teachers' compliance" (Wong, 1995, p. 40). This type of routinization at the school level was further illustrated when some Chicago schools scheduled time for weekly vocabulary and reading tests and sample essay exercises.

Other research has explored how teachers cope with accountability systems that threaten probation, reconstitution, or closure. In these environments, risk taking, experimentation, and innovation are discouraged (McNeil, 2000). Ironically, teachers respond with decreased attention to instruction (Abelmann & Kenyon, 1996; Kelley & Protsik, 1997). Their practice remains teacher-centered to control classroom time and content, and group research projects and writing about literature take a back seat to test-taking practice activities (Wong, 1995). A minus sign is placed in the internal–professional cell of the accountability grid indicating the deterioration in professional control (see Figure 2).

Union reaction to new performance-based accountability has typically been of a defensive nature: "The traditional union stance allocates teacher evaluation to management and protection of workers to the union" (Boyd et al., 2000, p. 202). Even in the context of "second-wave" reforms highlighting teacher professionalism, case studies have demonstrated that unions have failed to promote teacher development or address teacher incompetence, holding instead to traditional bread-and-butter issues (Wong & Moulton, 1998). Through their unwillingness to play a major role in the standards and accountability discussion, organized teachers are in a relatively weak position to promote their ideas. In fact, by not joining the charge, unions may have inadvertently supported a climate in which politicians find it politically advantageous to attack them (Boyd et al., 2000). To reflect this, a minus sign occupies the professional–external cell.

With regard to parental and communal control, McNeil (2000) contended that the emergence of "accountability" as "the dominant language of educational policy" is more political than educational (p. 261). In this view, accountability has little to do with motivating school improvement and a lot to do with shifting the power relations governing public schools. It "reifies both a resource dependency and a hierarchical power structure which maintains that dependency. It further undermines both the public voice in public schooling and the public role of schools in democratic life" (McNeil, 2000, p. 10). In Illinois, notwithstanding the fact that citizen action was the argument for the reform, performance reporting led to "remarkably little direct pressure on school officials from parents" according to principals and superintendents interviewed (Cibulka, 1990). The minus sign occupying the internal–communal cell in the "accountability" grid points to the influence diminution in parental and communal.

External parent and community interest group activity in the context of accountability reforms seems largely unaffected. Occasionally, real estate agents refer their clients to performance reports, generating pressure in a few places. In Illinois, when the task force established to spearhead the implementation of a state law requiring districts to disseminate school report cards became mired in controversy, it was augmented with supporters like the Illinois League of Women Voters (Cibulka, 1990). Such instances, however, are described as the exception, not the norm. Notably, "pressure from business leaders due to the report card was almost nonexistent" (Cibulka, 1990, p. 192). An "N" for neutral is therefore placed in the external–communal cell.

In sum, studies of performance-based accountability systems furnish several important findings regarding their likely impact for stakeholder influence and behavior. First, bureaucratic structures dominate in schools with performance-based accountability. External bureaucrats gain influence, and principals refocus their activities on promoting and maintaining compliance with outside directives. Second, teachers seem to respond to performance-based accountability policies by standardizing practice "and teaching to the test." Finally, individual parents' and community-members' influence may become weakened in schools subject to accountability reforms.

Coupled Public School Choice and Performance-Based Accountability: A Fundamental Tension for School Governance?

At first glance, coupling public school choice and accountability policies may seem mutually supportive with respect to triggering school improvement efforts. Both are purported to motivate schools toward the provision of higher quality services. From one perspective, these policy streams are part of a broader accountability framework, which aims to insert oversight into the American system of public education. In terms of the implications for school governance, however, public school choice and performance-based accountability may be inconsistent, or what Susan Fuhrman (1993) calls "incoherent," education policies.

When predictions about the individual impacts of choice and accountability on school governance are presented side by side, Figure 2 reveals what may be a fundamental tension. With the exception of the external–professional and external–communal cells,[1] the predicted direction of the effects in the two grids of the governance model are opposed, suggesting that the reform strategies send mixed messages to stakeholders about who is in control.

Few studies address the consequences of layering public school choice and performance-based accountability policies within schools. In a purely conceptual piece about the impact of coupled choice and performance-based accountability, Macpherson (1996) seemed to substantiate the tension illustrated in Figure 2, writing, "The general result appears to be one of policy incoherence; professional control within schools; political or systemic control of external accountability criteria and processes; and continuing low levels of public legitimacy" (p. 84). Similarly, Elmore (1990) argued that the technical and client models of accountability hold schools accountable not only by different mechanisms, but also to different interests. Technical accountability highlights the role of external, expert agents who set content and performance standards, measure results, and tie those results to high-stakes consequences. The client model of accountability rejects policy efforts as an avenue for school improvement. Instead, it makes schools account to the parents of enrolled students through market control (Fuhrman, 1993).

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[1] It seems that unions (external–professional) are no longer the formidable players they once were at least in part as a result of choice and accountability reforms. Regarding external–communal control, there is no strong conceptual or empirical argument that groups that represent parent and community interests at the national or state levels are politically advantaged or disadvantaged in postreform environments.

Only one empirical analysis was identified that examined whether these models and their respective policy manifestations seem to empower different groups of educational stakeholders. McNeil's (2000) case study of magnet schools facing new state-level accountability reforms evidences a tension. To demonstrate the consequences of public school choice and accountability in Texas, McNeil (2000) described teaching and learning in magnet schools before, during, and after the "Perot reforms":

> The magnet schools [before the accountability reforms were imposed] proved to be schools where teachers and students, free of the constraints of the state textbook adoption list and from state and local prescriptive rules governing curriculum, co-constructed rich academic environments in a multiracial setting... As the controls were imposed, and the regulations increasingly standardized, the quality of teaching and learning at even these exemplary [magnet] schools began to suffer. Teaching, curriculum, and students' roles in classrooms were transformed. ... Within the observational data began to emerge phony curricula, reluctantly presented by teachers ... to conform to the forms of knowledge their students would encounter on centralized tests. (McNeil, 2000, p. 5)

In light of the limited scholarly attention to the impact of integrated choice and accountability for schools, three key lessons can be drawn from the larger literature on school reform. First, public policies in general are unlikely to "be congruent, to send the same messages, and to avoid contradictions" (Fuhrman, 1993, p. xi) because coherence is not rewarded politically (Cibulka, 1990). A second and related lesson comes from research examining organizations in which different reform efforts are operating simultaneously. In such contexts, effort will be diffused, school organization will be complicated, and different members of a school's staff will be accountable to different units of the central office (Hill & Bonan, 1991). Although these lessons suggest that integrated choice and accountability may in fact complicate school-level governance, a third lesson teaches that expanded policy-making influence by one group of stakeholders does not necessarily eviscerate the power of others; in other words, there is no zero-sum game. Cohen (1982), in one of the first efforts to consider how policy affects school organization, argued against assumptions that growth in state and federal education policy activity limits the power of lower level agents. Instead, power accumulates in all levels at once because higher level governments have to rely on districts to implement their ideas. Districts then implement the ideas by setting up subunits to handle some of the administrative work and "delegat[ing] most of the difficult problems to those below" (Cohen, 1982, p. 489). With the responsibility of policy coordination left to schools, teachers and principals become "street level bureaucrats" amassing influence, improvising responses, and discouraging uniformity. Therefore, readers should be reminded that plus signs assigned to cells in Figure 2 possess no relative value and do not imply that authority was amassed at the expense of another stakeholder.

Conclusion

In an era of expanding choice in American public education, a "phenomenal" growth in charter schools (Hassel, 1999), and a heightened focus on accountability for performance, understanding the consequences for school governance is central. Empirical research is needed to test these predictions about the effects of integrated choice and accountability reforms on how and by whom schools are run. Although market theory and early evidence suggest a relationship between school choice and increased parental power and the reduction of bureaucratic constraints, performance-based accountability policies appear to point to an expanded role for government and state officials in particular.

Ultimately, the nature of the relationship between integrated choice and accountability and school-level governance will reflect the specifics of policy design, the political context in which the policies are enacted and implemented, and the responses of educational stakeholders to the reforms. First, the way governance structures respond to choice reforms is likely to differ as a function of choice type, for example. The governance patterns in charter schools, with their regulatory exemptions, are likely to differ most dramatically from those of nonchoice schools; magnet schools may differ less so as they operate as part of the district and because, in many cases, they are subject to additional regulations over admissions procedures (e.g., race-based lotteries for desegregation purposes). Second, state-to-state differences in political tradition, available resources, and gubernatorial leadership will interact to shape the relationship (Cibulka, 1990). Finally, educational stakeholders are active recipients of reforms, continually reevaluating their positions and strategies in an effort to strengthen their own influence. Some union affiliates, for example, may take measures to maintain their place at the table. Recently, the national office of the NEA has adopted a conciliatory, even proactive stance on such things as teacher quality, standards-based curricula, and greater accountability for performance, making itself once again "a credible voice in the politics of education" (Cibulka, 2000, p. 172).

If, in practice, choice and performance-based accountability policies empower different stakeholders as the heuristic here predicts, the possibility for coherent school structures is marginalized. With a sense that "no one is in charge," the ability of school systems to leverage public support and gain political legitimacy to implement their educational visions is constrained (Wirt & Kirst, 2001; Wong, Dreeben, Lynn, & Sunderman, 1997). In Elmore's (1990) words, if "schools are buffeted and pulled in conflicting directions by numerous forces demanding accountability ... their very responsiveness to these forces makes a coherent internal structure problematical" (p. 8).

Researchers that critique power relations in schools also raise questions about "whose interests and cultures are represented by the knowledge and ways of knowing institutionalized in schools" (McNeil, 2000, p. 7). Metz (1990) pointed out that district administrators, teachers, community members, and parents may all have different visions for their schools, some that highlight individual achievement, others that focus on social integration, community cohesion, or character development. As stakeholder power and governance patterns shift, so too will the various visions accommodated in the culture and practice of the school.

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