

“Key Elements of a Successful School-Based Management Strategy”

Working Paper

Kerri L. Briggs

University of Texas at Austin

and

Priscilla Wohlstetter

University of Southern California

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Introduction

Since the 1960s, school-based management (SBM) has been a popular reform adopted by states and school districts across the country as a vehicle for improving schools. SBM has been used by states to increase school accountability; by local school boards to boost student achievement; by central offices to improve administrative efficiency; by teacher unions to empower teachers; and by community groups to involve parents. In one review of the SBM literature, researchers concluded that SBM was “a generic term for diverse activities.”¹ Indeed, today we see school-based management as a standard feature of many current reforms. Charter schools and a number of models of high-performance schools, to varying degrees, are founded upon the idea of empowering school-level participants to make decisions about staffing, budget, curriculum and instruction.²

A key issue for both policymakers and educators in the field is whether school-based management is an effective strategy for improving schools. In the past there has been a substantial body of research that suggests poorly designed and poorly implemented SBM plans have few positive effects. However, recent research suggests SBM can improve instructional programs and produce higher levels of student learning. The purpose of this article is to synthesize research findings from major studies of SBM to identify the core elements of a successful SBM strategy. Among the research we draw from are the large-scale studies conducted by the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools (CORS), the Chicago Consortium on School Reform (CCSR) and the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE). We first begin with a brief overview of research on the effects of SBM to suggest the relevant conditions for a school-based or decentralized management strategy.

Aims and Known Effects of SBM

Although its popularity has been steady across the decades, there have been some notable changes in reformers' views of the usefulness of SBM. Up until the late 1980s, SBM was most often adopted and implemented as a stand-alone reform to remedy a variety of ills of the school system. The implementation of SBM typically was in response to crises in the system or trends in management theories, and the expectation was that SBM was uniquely designed to bring about improvements.³ SBM was frequently adopted as a political reform that shifted the balance of power from the central office to the school community. SBM, from this perspective, helped generate ownership and commitment to school reform from the local community, reflecting the idea that a redistribution of power would increase energy for school improvement and force change.⁴ In a similar vein, many districts adopted SBM as a mechanism for empowering teachers. Teacher empowerment, furthermore, was thought to be central to developing teachers' professional communities. Alternatively, SBM was viewed as a reform for improving administrative efficiency. Proponents from this perspective argued that SBM enabled school participants, who were closest to students and staff, to tailor decisions to the community they served, thus promoting a more effective application of resources than was possible when a central office made system-wide decisions.

During this time, reformers generally viewed SBM as the end result, with the goal of implementing the "technology" of SBM. Questions arose quite quickly, though, about the purpose of the efforts and work required for successful SBM. The increased workload for teachers and pressure on principals associated with SBM suggested that the reform had to have a greater purpose if it was to withstand public demands for improvement.⁵ At the urging of state

and district policymakers, SBM efforts increasingly became focused on improving student achievement.⁶

With this adjusted perspective, the characterization and use of SBM changed. SBM was more likely to be embedded within a comprehensive approach to school reform rather than as a stand-alone reform.⁷ Advocates of systemic reform in the late 1980s, for example, argued that content and performance standards should be established at the top of the system but that schools needed flexibility to create strategies to help students reach standards. Thus, SBM entailed much more than a change in governance. When done effectively, it constituted a redesign of the whole school organization.

The empirical evidence supporting the claims of SBM to generate improvement has not been overwhelming.⁸ While varied, the reasons for the lack of evidence include: a) difficulties in measuring change and outcomes associated with SBM; b) complexities in implementing a management model that requires significant efforts from teachers, principals, district personnel to alter work practices; and c) the challenge of working in an environment that is shaped by local, state and national politics.⁹ Nevertheless, there are studies that conclude SBM leads to changes in school culture, classroom practices and student achievement.

As noted earlier, states and districts adopting a decentralized style of governance expected that releasing schools from centralized control would enable them to make decisions that better serve the needs of their students.¹⁰ This expectation summarizes an understanding that improving student outcomes involves a process of change—a process that entails numerous steps before reaching the goal.¹¹ Changes in school culture and classroom practice are two such antecedents to improved student achievement. Studies of SBM schools have documented that SBM can facilitate this change process. Marks and Louis, through their work with CORS,

investigated teacher empowerment in SBM schools and concluded that participation in school decision-making promoted a strong feeling of professional community when the focus of decisions went beyond individual classrooms but were still directly related to student learning.¹²

In a recent review of the SBM literature, Leithwood and Menzies concluded that teachers tended to be positively affected by SBM and they cited evidence of increased teacher commitment and morale. Studies they reviewed also suggested that SBM led to collaboration among teachers, a greater school-wide focus on professional development and a greater sense of accountability, all indicators of a strong professional community.

A second strand of research on SBM has focused on the relationship between SBM and classroom practices. Research by Robertson et al. through CPRE assessed the relationship between SBM and the adoption of new classroom practices, concluding that higher levels of curriculum and instruction reform took place when SBM was more fully implemented at a school. SBM was used as a means for restructuring classroom practice. Another study, focused on schools in Chicago and conducted through CCSR, provided substantial support for the conclusion that teacher participation in decision-making in SBM schools was related positively to improved instructional programs and to increased student learning.¹³

Indeed, in recent years, research on SBM has investigated the link between SBM and student achievement. This work, focused on the Chicago Public Schools, has been carried out primarily by CCSR. Studying SBM in Chicago since its inception in 1988, CCSR recently presented evidence of learning gains for students during the period of governance change.¹⁴ A second smaller study of fourteen Chicago schools corroborated CCSR findings that changes in student achievement were linked to changes in the governance structure of schools resulting from Chicago's reforms in the late 1980s.¹⁵

For this article, we draw on findings from research and evaluation studies of SBM. Our review of the research generated eight elements of schooling that were associated with successful SBM.

?? A vision focused on teaching and learning that is coordinated with student performance standards

?? Decision-making authority used to change the core areas of schooling

?? Power distributed throughout the school

?? The development of teachers' knowledge and skills that is oriented toward change, a professional learning community and shared knowledge

?? Mechanisms for collecting and communicating information related to school priorities

?? Monetary and non-monetary rewards to acknowledge progress toward school goals

?? Shared school leadership among administrators and teachers

?? Resources from outside the school

In the discussion that follows, we highlight comparisons between schools that successfully used SBM to restructure school and classroom practices— what we call successful SBM schools – and schools that were struggling to implement SBM. Given the popularity of SBM in current reform initiatives, we believe the eight elements reflect principles that are generalizable to many schools interested in bringing about significant improvement in student achievement.

Eight Key Elements of Successful SBM Schools

- 1. Successful SBM schools have an active, living vision focused on teaching and learning that is coordinated with district and state standards for student performance.**

A school's vision sets a purpose and a direction and can create high expectations for academic achievement. Admittedly, schools do not need school-based management to create a relevant vision that is coordinated with state and district standards and that is focused on teaching and learning. However, research on decentralized management found that successful SBM schools were likely: a) to have a vision that was linked with district and state standards; b) to use that vision to direct decisions; and c) to revisit the vision periodically to ensure its relevance to school operations. CCSR emphasized that the vision was central for promoting “a student-centered learning climate” – one that was safe, orderly, and respectful, as well as academically challenging and personally nurturing.¹⁶

Several studies on SBM emphasize the importance of a vision that is locally defined and connected to high expectations for student learning, or more formally, an instructional guidance mechanism. An instructional guidance mechanism may be state curriculum standards (e.g., Virginia learner standards), national subject matter standards (e.g., National Council for Teachers of Mathematics standards) or a state assessment, such as the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP). Such mechanisms directed the development of curriculum and instruction at the school, as well as conversations in decision-making forums. Newmann and Wehlage found that high standards were critical to school restructuring for their contribution to the core of the vision. Further, several studies reported that the standards were not too constraining: SBM participants felt they were flexible enough to be adapted to the school context. According to CPRE researchers, standards and other instructional guidance mechanisms tended to specify the “what” or content of the curriculum, but left the “how” or pedagogic issues up to individual schools.

A vision that was coordinated with an instructional guidance mechanism produced goals and a common understanding of the school's status that was more likely to be accepted by teachers, administrators and parents. Odden and Busch found that the integration of outside goals with local values focused the efforts of school professionals and helped them identify what was most essential for student success.¹⁷ The vision found in successful SBM schools was more likely to highlight the importance of teaching and learning and less likely to be filled with unrelated issues. Newmann and Wehlage argued that schools with a vision or focus built around student learning became stronger professional communities.

Finally, the vision of successful SBM schools was relevant, active and living. CPRE researchers found that such schools used the SBM processes to generate input and feedback from faculty about the vision. As a point of comparison, struggling SBM schools were more likely to have restricted the number of participants in the vision-creation process, and as a result, were left with a statement that had little value or that caused confusion because its source was not understood.¹⁸ Both the Chicago and CORS researchers also established the importance of consensus among stakeholders over the school's mission. Successful SBM was most often associated with general agreement about the school's mission—each school had a common understanding of what the school was to become.

2. Successful SBM schools have decision-making authority in the areas of budget, curriculum, and personnel, and they use that authority to create meaningful change in teaching and learning.

In some SBM plans, the reform process had only limited effect because schools lacked the authority to make changes in important areas or they did not use the authority that was available. Where SBM was successful in initiating change, the authority was available and

applied in areas that mattered to teachers and students. When teachers, principals and others were empowered to make decisions that directly influenced students, there was motivation for involvement in SBM.

One critical area of authority for schools was budget authority. This is an area commonly delegated to schools in SBM plans, yet there were impediments that constrained its potential for change.¹⁹ For example, schools may have authority over only a limited amount of funds or face obstacles from the district or state about how those funds can be used. Even so, successful SBM schools found ways to redirect funds to support their plans for student academic improvement. This authority to allocate funds that support school decisions and initiatives is, as Odden and Busch conclude, a key element in making changes.

In the CPRE research on SBM, the evidence suggests that successful SBM schools used their authority to make significant curricular changes, particularly in the area of how content was delivered to students.²⁰ For instance, one school, after seeking the hard-fought approval of community and parents, changed the length of the school day to provide for common instructional planning time. Guskey and Peterson, in their work through CORS, found similar practices in their study of SBM schools where schedules were rearranged to allow planning time without disrupting regular classroom instruction.²¹ Odden and Busch concluded that one critical area was the authority to recruit and select personnel: SBM was more successful when schools used their decision-making authority to recruit and select staff who supported and agreed with the school's vision.

Schools that struggled with SBM were less likely to focus on teaching and learning in their discussions and instead focused on procedures.²² In these struggling schools, the content of discussions was much more likely to be about the distribution of power and housekeeping issues

(such as revising the SBM handbook) and less likely to be about curriculum and instruction. CPRE's research on SBM highlighted a school that spent a year debating procedural matters about voting, proxy representation and the principal's authority to veto decisions. Some discussions such as these are part of a group's natural progression, but to remain at this state is to miss the opportunity for making meaningful change. Other groups, even if they moved past discussions about group norms, got stuck on secondary issues. For instance, Hill and Bonan found that SBM discussions were often focused on adult working conditions, such as parking and telephone use, to the exclusion of thinking about the needs of students.²³

In conclusion, research on SBM revealed that the most successful SBM schools had high levels of authority to act, both in terms of autonomy from the district and teacher influence. However, the research also suggested that autonomy, alone, was not sufficient. SBM schools that used their autonomy productively emphasized high quality learning in their vision, had strong staffs and some capacity to act collectively. By contrast, schools without a focus on student learning and the resources to act collectively, were ineffective at using their authority to create meaningful change in teaching and learning.

3. Successful SBM schools disperse power broadly throughout the school organization by creating networks of decision-making teams.

CPRE research on SBM found that regardless of the particular form of SBM—principal-based, community or administrative decentralization—successful SBM schools distributed power beyond the principal or a single council to involve many stakeholders at the school in decision-making. In another setting, over 70 percent of the teachers in the Chicago Public Schools reported their schools offered a broad array of structures for teacher input.²⁴

Successful SBM schools creatively divided power among individuals by establishing networks, work teams, and ad hoc and permanent committees. Further, these schools created teams that were organized horizontally by grade level and vertically by subject area (e.g., math, science). Additional teams were focused on particular initiatives such as technology or professional development. Some work teams existed for only short periods of time while others were permanent. Because these teams were established to consider particular issues, members focused their attention and energies on specific tasks that were meaningful to the school. Site councils usually included parent membership, along with administrators, teachers and, at times, students. Curriculum-related work teams typically were limited to teachers, although CPRE researchers found that some successful SBM schools tapped into parent expertise for special tasks, such as technology development. Because many committees cut across grade levels and subject areas, there was wide awareness of the needs of the school as a whole, and participants talked about values and approaches that cut across subjects, grade levels and classrooms. This openness, according to Guskey and Peterson, was an important factor in building a school that was committed to improvement.

Aside from the important work of distributing power, site councils in successful SBM schools placed priority on building connections and coordinating activities across decision-making groups.²⁵ The councils worked to ensure that work teams were focused on the school's vision and that they had the resources for effective operations. A resource of particular importance to work teams was time during the school day for groups to meet. CORS researchers found that successful SBM schools were restructured to provide teachers significant periods of time to work together. Not surprisingly, high levels of cooperation and collaboration among faculty characterized these schools. The work structures, moreover, also proved to be essential in

facilitating the development of a shared commitment to the school's vision and a collective responsibility for achieving it.

Alternatively, CPRE found that schools struggling with SBM concentrated power within the council. This concentration of power not only overburdened council members with excessive demands on their time, but also generated conflict and distrust between the “haves” and “have nots.” Parent participation, moreover, was largely symbolic with parents exerting little influence over decisions. A common result was a lack of commitment to decisions made by the empowered few.

4. In successful SBM schools, the development of knowledge and skills is an ongoing process oriented toward building a school-wide capacity for change, creating a professional learning community and developing a shared knowledge base.

Successful SBM schools selected professional development activities that directly addressed their students' needs and fit in with the school's particular reform agenda. Professional development was offered on topics related to shared decision-making—interpersonal skills and management skills—as well as topics related to improving student performance. Further, several studies have noted that successful SBM schools provided training to an array of school-level participants, including parents and community members, to help them become more capable participants in the school's planning and decision-making efforts.

Professional development plans in successful SBM schools were designed to have school-wide impact, with an orientation toward building capacity to achieve collective goals rather than personal goals. In contrast, some struggling schools either lacked a plan for professional development or allowed staff to individually select and design their own training, regardless of its connection to school goals. Another characteristic of professional development

in successful SBM schools was its ongoing nature. Such schools were less inclined to design one-shot training sessions and more likely to organize multiple trainings that included follow-up sessions. At the extreme, CORS researchers found some examples of entire staffs immersed in continuous and coordinated professional development programs.

Where struggling SBM schools particularly differed from successful SBM schools was in the number of people at the school who were involved in professional development. CPRE researchers found that a lower proportion of staff participated in professional development at the struggling schools, compared to successful SBM schools. At times this was a design problem—schools did not open up sessions for the entire faculty. In other instances, it was an implementation problem—attendance was not required or faculty did not value the opportunity. In many struggling schools, the principal dispensed funds for training on a case-by-case basis and there was no school-wide involvement in decisions regarding who or what the training should involve.

SBM schools to varying degrees had authority to design learning opportunities that were tailored to the needs of faculty and students. In some SBM districts, schools had the flexibility to purchase training from nontraditional sources (e.g., private sector company). CCSR further found that teachers in successful SBM schools participated far more extensively in school-based professional development activities than in professional development outside of the school (e.g., district-sponsored workshop, or college or university course). Successful SBM schools also arranged learning opportunities that were focused on continuous improvement and linked to reform efforts. Through these purposeful choices, professional development bolstered the school's capacity for change, created a community of professionals that valued learning, and developed shared knowledge. Schools that were struggling with SBM tended to view

professional development as disconnected from their classroom work or as a perk for only a few staff. CCSR research in the Chicago Public Schools found that teachers in struggling schools participated rarely in professional development, regardless of whether it was school-based or sponsored by an outside organization, with over half of the teachers in struggling schools reporting they did not participate in a single external professional development activity over the course of a full academic year.

5. Successful SBM schools have multiple mechanisms for collecting information related to school priorities and for communicating information to all school stakeholders.

Successful SBM schools collected and disseminated considerable information to a variety of stakeholders both within the school and to its surrounding community. Successful SBM schools collected some kind of information related to school operations and performance. Further, these schools also spent time collecting information related to their school goals, such as identifying innovative approaches to boosting student literacy or assessing student performance. Not too surprising, channels for accessing and communicating information were strongly developed in successful SBM schools, and data were used routinely to make thoughtful and informed choices about teaching and learning.

As noted earlier, successful SBM schools had access to a wide variety of information, some of which the schools collected themselves and some of which the district's central office provided. Information about school operations, including financial data, about student performance (e.g., attendance, test scores), about stakeholders' satisfaction with the school, and about curriculum and instructional innovations were important elements of school-level information systems. David, in her research of Kentucky, found that SBM schools concentrated

data collection on information that could guide actions for the purpose of improving learning. Successful SBM schools, studied in the CPRE research, also were more likely to collect information in areas that were a priority. One secondary school, for instance, compiled the grade distributions for every class to monitor teacher and student performance. Other schools made concerted daily efforts to collect attendance and tardy data, and provided this information to parents on a regular basis. Struggling schools were less likely to expend time and other resources collecting information. Further, participants in struggling schools tended to be isolated from one another and from the community. They had little interest, for instance, in finding methods other schools were using to solve problems similar to their own.

Successful SBM schools relied on both formal and informal communication channels to manage information flow across the school and out to the community. Of particular importance were the decision-making structures, such as site councils and work teams, that helped to disseminate information systematically. Frequent conversations around specific projects meant information was shared with little lag time, and problem solving and adjustments occurred as needs arose. In struggling schools, there were fewer communication channels (such schools tended to have fewer decision-making teams) and struggling schools also tended to rely on formal documents, such as newsletters and memos. CORS research suggested, moreover, a strong relationship between effective parent participation and information. When professional educators controlled the flow of information, parent participation was largely symbolic. By contrast, in successful SBM schools where power and information were dispersed broadly, parents became involved in significant decisions regarding curriculum, instruction and assessment.

Many successful SBM schools were also characterized by a strong customer service orientation. Such schools made it a point to gather satisfaction data from parents and other community groups about school performance. At the high school level, business groups often were solicited to ascertain their satisfaction with students involved in internships and with the skills of graduates. Successful SBM schools also shared performance data with the community through frequent public reporting events. The combination of all these efforts built trust within the school and between the school and its surrounding community. In addition, the assessments helped the schools to evaluate their progress on an ongoing basis; in other words, they learned from their experiences.

6. Successful SBM schools use both monetary and non-monetary rewards to acknowledge individual and group progress toward school goals.

SBM requires extra effort from teachers, administrators and staff. Rewards can be used to acknowledge individual and group efforts, and to recognize improvements in teaching and learning. We found, however, that even successful SBM schools struggled to provide rewards to participants. Without rewards for participants, observers have questioned the sustainability of reform. The argument that intrinsic rewards are sufficient to motivate and reinforce teachers for engaging in SBM over the long haul may be too optimistic.

CPRE researchers found few SBM schools that used financial rewards. When rewards were given, they generally were in the form of additional compensation for assuming increased responsibilities—grants to reimburse teachers for time beyond the school day and, in one case, money for participation on the site council. In Victoria, Australia differentiated staff positions provided teachers who assumed additional responsibilities with compensation that included an increased salary and a reduced teaching load. In Denver, teachers recently approved a pay-for-

performance plan that ties rewards (teachers' pay) to student test scores and increases in teacher professional development activities. In the SBM research, we found few, if any, examples of teachers being rewarded for acquiring new knowledge and skills related to their jobs, such as taking a course in alternative assessment methods.

Non-monetary rewards were also used in successful SBM schools. Principals routinely recognized individuals and groups for extra efforts. These rewards included thank-you-notes, recognition at faculty meetings, appreciation luncheons hosted by parent organizations, and parties organized to celebrate achieving school goals. Guskey and Peterson found that non-monetary rewards helped encourage involvement and also helped direct efforts toward school goals.

Rewards were far less prevalent in struggling SBM schools. Such schools lacked consensus around a school vision and so faculty found it difficult to identify exactly which efforts were worth rewarding. Rewards, in these schools, at best, were indirect and unfocused. Despite the difficulties, it seems worthwhile to keep searching for mechanisms to reward efforts. As Odden and Busch conclude, rewards send the message that results are important and when part of a well-designed system, they help schools define their focus.

7. In successful SBM schools, school leadership is shared among administrators and teachers. Principals often take on the role of manager and facilitator of change, while teacher leaders often take on responsibilities around issues of teaching and learning.

An underlying assumption of SBM suggests that shared leadership will expand the engagement of local participants in the school's work which, in turn, will help sustain attention and provide substantial support for improvements in classroom instruction and student learning.

Successful SBM schools discovered ways of sharing authority that helped schools achieve their goals and that utilized the skills and abilities of many individuals. Leadership was no longer the sole responsibility of the principal. SBM researchers have examined the dynamics among three sources of leadership: the principal, school site council and the school faculty.

Across many studies of SBM, the research suggests that when leadership is shared the role that principals and other school leaders assume likewise changes. Principals of successful SBM schools were actively engaged in managing and facilitating change. CCSR researchers concluded that principals were the single most important factor in promoting reform in schools. Principals were likely to be focused on distributing power, generating agreement around the school goals, encouraging all teachers to participate in school improvement efforts, collecting information and distributing rewards. Thus, principals in successful SBM schools worked to create opportunities and remove barriers so that others could assume leadership positions.²⁶

In struggling schools, some principals did not have the skills needed to work in a decentralized environment. Their management style conflicted with norms of shared decision making. For instance, a few principals limited site councils to trivial issues and limited the input of school faculty on other important matters (such as the school vision).

Leadership in successful SBM schools was vested among site councils, subcommittees at the school, and teachers as formal leaders (e.g., department head) or informal leaders (e.g., champions of a reform). In most cases, nontraditional leadership tapped into the special skills or interests of individuals (e.g., curriculum development, proposal writing). For instance, school site councils in Chicago contributed most significantly to leadership in the area of school operations, including issues related to facilities and safety. In schools struggling with SBM, the

CPRE research found fewer instances of leadership beyond the traditional roles of administrator and formal teacher leader (e.g., department head or grade-level leader).

Teachers and other school leaders, aside from the principal, tended to assume leadership in areas related to teaching and learning (e.g., curriculum, professional development, and instructional practices). Teachers worked to identify new instructional strategies and guided others in adopting the strategies in their own classrooms. Other examples involved teachers initiating efforts to create curriculum documents for the school or championing efforts to adopt a new curriculum. CCSR further found that parents and community members tended to defer to the principal and teachers for leadership in these areas.

8. Successful SBM schools cultivate resources from outside the school through involvement in professional networks and through entrepreneurial activity in the local business community.

The existence of additional resources, such as grant money, at SBM schools was not necessarily connected to more or less successful efforts. Both successful and struggling SBM schools had resources from outside sources. Successful SBM schools, however, seemed to benefit the most when resources were focused on particular innovations or initiatives. Schools were less effective with additional resources when they pulled the school in multiple and competing directions. The CORS study highlighted one school that used foundation and state funding to support their restructuring process—from the planning to the implementation phase. The additional resources supported “a rich dialogue that forged consensus around the intellectual goals of the school and the kinds of practices that would promote them.”²⁷

Another important resource for restructuring schools were educational resources such as national teacher networks or networks associated with particular reform designs. These kinds of

connections, particularly in the area of teaching and learning, provided much needed support for teachers who were implementing particular reforms. According to the CORS work, schools that used these resources most effectively were those that perceived a need for the resources. In other words, the resources were selected *by* the school as opposed to selected *for* the school.

Another helpful resource was the connection that principals made with outside organizations, such as business groups. Principals in successful SBM schools built relationships with specific purposes in mind. For instance, principals approached newspapers to help with public relations, universities to provide professional development, and businesses for support with technology. One principal utilized an existing district relationship with a local corporation to provide training for faculty in conflict resolution. The principals in schools struggling with SBM were less inclined to seek out these relationships.

Conclusion: What's Next

As we approach the new century, policymakers are focusing on improving student achievement and using SBM as a tool to attain that goal. Further, we see new policies featuring SBM along with curriculum and instruction reforms, as part of the reform but not the whole.²⁸ Indeed, federal support for comprehensive school reform designs, along with continued district adoptions, suggest that school-site autonomy will remain an important feature of educational reform, particularly in urban school districts with large Title I populations.

As we take stock of trends in education, many seem logically to support the implementation of the eight elements of successful SBM. States, with support from the federal level, are promoting higher standards for education. The Fordham Foundation recently reported that 47 states now have curriculum standards for, at least, one core subject area.²⁹ We expect that

school visions will increasingly be influenced by state standards, prescribing what students should know and be able to do.

Along with an increased focus on high standards has come a greater emphasis on professional development to ensure that teachers have the knowledge and skills to teach to the higher standards. While we suspect such a trend will facilitate the adoption of classroom reforms, we wonder how schools will handle the trade-off between the need to participate in professional development related to curriculum and instruction and the need for training that would help participants operate effectively in a decentralized system.

In addition to state activity, school-level accountability is increasing in importance. On the positive side, this trend—which has been accompanied by an influx of technology and standardized assessments into schools—has greatly enhanced school-level access to management, financial and performance-related information. Schools can get more information faster about how students are progressing from year to year. Principals especially are becoming more sophisticated in their understanding and use of data. We also observe that the role of the district office is changing in the high stakes accountability environment. District offices have beefed up their technical assistance capacities. At the same time, the more advanced school districts have developed and begun to implement a range of intervention strategies from professional development offerings to takeovers and reconstitutions. Thus, accountability increasingly is tied to student achievement and has consequences. Unfortunately, we have seen more movement in the area of sanctions than rewards, although recently some districts have been experimenting with school-based performance rewards.³⁰ As state-level reward systems develop and become more commonplace, we would also expect that school-based performance rewards will become more prevalent.

From the research of the previous decade, we have a good understanding of how school-based management and other school restructuring mechanisms can support school efforts to improve student achievement. Along with that understanding, we are even more certain that this is not a quick or an easy process. Even so, the experiences of successful and struggling SBM schools have revealed that SBM must move beyond the creation of a school council to encompass multiple elements of schooling if students are to be positively affected by the efforts. As the educational system continues to be shaped by these trends, schools working with school-based management, either as a primary or embedded reform mechanism, will likely be more successful when the key elements are present.

Endnotes

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28. Leithwood and Menzies, "Forms and Effects."
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