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Perspectives and Issues

School Restructuring in California

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What Is "School Restructuring," and How Can It Potentially Improve Educational Quality?

Summary

Concerns over current levels of educational achievement, combined with perceived limitations of current reform strategies, have resulted in proposals for new approaches to schooling. These new approaches are known collectively as "school restructuring." In practice, the term "restructuring" has been used by various groups to advance different visions of reform. However, boiled down to its essential components, school restructuring involves decentralization of authority and increased collaboration at the local level, in conjunction with enhanced accountability. School restructuring can involve making changes in many different areas, including instruction, school organization, and community relations.

There is some preliminary research which suggests that restructuring can be a useful strategy, especially if guided by strategic planning and focused on improving the content and delivery of a school's curriculum. Restructuring is, however, also subject to numerous "pitfalls," such as teachers not being given adequate release time or necessary training.

The Legislature recently established a statewide demonstration program in school restructuring in order to generate additional evidence on whether educators in California can make restructuring work. Other potential roles for the state include (1) experimenting with large-scale systems of accountability, (2) researching various state actions that would increase local flexibility, and (3) coordinating the state's education policy objectives with the model curriculum frameworks provided to schools.

In 1983, the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation At Risk*, warned that declining standards in many of the nation's public schools were jeopardizing the country's ability to remain economically competitive. Partly in response to this report, and also due to other factors, many states, including California, adopted a variety of measures aimed at improving the quality of K-12 education. One of the most recent of such measures, Chapter 1556, Statutes of 1990 (SB 1274, Hart), appropriated $6.8 million to begin establishing up to an estimated 350 "restructured schools."

Exactly what is school restructuring? Generally speaking, school restructuring involves decentralization of authority and increased collaboration at the local level, in conjunction with enhanced accountability. In this analysis, we examine the concept of school restructuring. Specifically, we (1) discuss current deficiencies in the performance of the state's school system, (2) explain the various components of school restructuring and how these components could potentially improve educational quality, (3) summarize the research on the effectiveness of this approach, and (4) discuss what the state's future role might be involving restructuring. The purpose of this piece is primarily to describe the concepts associated with restructuring, as opposed to making judgments about their efficacy or specific recommendations about their implementation.

Our analysis of school restructuring is based on an extensive review of the literature, interviews with experts in the field, and direct observation of various schools undergoing the restructuring process.

PROBLEMS WITH CURRENT LEVELS OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

In this section, we discuss deficiencies in levels of academic achievement by pupils in the state's school system. Although educational achievement may not be the only goal of the educational system, it is generally regarded as the most important, and so any evaluation of the current system should primarily be based on this factor.

Concerns About Different Skills

California employers, who observe first hand the proficiency levels of high school graduates when hiring for entry-level jobs, report widespread dissatisfaction with the skills possessed by most graduates.

Basic Skills. First, there is continuing concern among employers regarding such basic skills as reading, writing, and

arithmetic. For instance, a recent survey of businesses that was sponsored by the California Business Roundtable found that (1) only an estimated 46 percent of individuals applying for jobs in California demonstrated satisfactory basic skills on written examinations and (2) 59 percent of the businesses surveyed either currently provide or plan to provide remedial instruction in these skills.

Problem-Solving Skills. Second, there is growing concern with the ability of high school graduates to solve complex problems. According to some reports, the U.S. ranks near the *bottom* among industrialized nations on most international tests of math and science ability. By contrast, Japanese, Canadian, English, and Finnish high school graduates score more than four grade-level equivalents ahead of Americans. In addition, the Business Roundtable survey indicates that, in a number of firms, job applicants often do not have the necessary skills to advance in the organization or learn new, complex techniques. Employers view problem-solving skills as especially important because they are increasingly calling upon workers to implement and "debug" new methods of production and service delivery.

Teamwork and Communication Skills. Finally, several reports document that a growing number of companies are demanding workers with skills in teamwork and communication, and, specifically, an ability to use these skills in order to solve problems as part of a group. Many of these companies have "restructured" in order to become more competitive—specifically, by reducing the size and responsibility of middle management and delegating more responsibility to front-line workers. Whereas previously a worker might have had a very narrowly defined role (such as operating a machine), restructured firms often require employees to work with customers, suppliers, and other coworkers in order to customize production, maintain and repair equipment, and find ways to improve production processes. Thus, competency in teamwork and communication is becoming increasingly important for *all* workers, but teaching such skills has not typically been a large part of the curriculum of most schools.

Has the School Reform Movement Helped?

Since the early 1980s, many states—including California—have attempted to improve academic achievement by imposing state requirements on schools (such as increased graduation requirements) or providing schools with financial incentives to operate in a particular way (such as lengthening the school day and year). As such, many of these reforms have reflected a "top-down" approach to school reform (in contrast to the more "bottom-

up" approach in school restructuring, which we will discuss in the next section).

To what extent have these initial reform efforts worked, as measured by improvements in student test scores over time? Our review indicates that, on tests administered to a national sample of students, there has been some modest improvement in basic skills but no improvement in problem-solving abilities over the last eight years.

In California, statewide test scores have been generated through the California Assessment Program (CAP)—which measures both basic skills and some problem-solving abilities. Trends in CAP scores for the last eight years for which data are available are shown in Figure 1. The figure shows that the scores have increased, depending on the grade level in question, by from 3 percent to 5 percent in reading, by about 4 percent in writing, and from 4 percent to 9 percent in mathematics.

Figure 1

Trends in Average Test Scores
California Assessment Program

1982-83 and 1989-90

Test		Scores		Change	
Grade	Subject	1982-83	1989-90	Amount	Percent
Grade 3	Reading	263	275	12	4.6%
	Writing	266	277	11	4.1
	Mathematics	267	283	16	6.0
Grade 6	Reading	253	261	8	3.2
	Writing	259	268	9	3.5
	Mathematics	260	270	10	3.8
Grade 8	Reading	250[a]	257	7	2.8
	Writing	250[a]	259[b]	9	3.6
	Mathematics	250[a]	271	21	8.4
Grade 12[c]	Reading	242	248[d]	6	2.5
	Mathematics	236	256[d]	20	8.5

[a] Scores are for 1983-84, as this was the first year that eighth-graders were tested.
[b] Score has been adjusted to reflect change in writing exam in 1986-87. Figure is based on 1988-89 data (which is the latest year available).
[c] Writing tests were not administered to twelfth-graders until 1988-89.
[d] Figure is based on 1988-89 data (which is the latest year available).

These figures suggest that the reform movement has had *some* effect on student achievement in California. In fact, the scores may understate actual improvement achieved. This is because California has experienced rapid growth in children from groups that currently have the lowest test scores. These include an increasing number of children living in poverty—including children of single mothers—and a growing number of limited-English-proficient students from a wide array of ethnic groups. These demographic changes have tended to partially "mask" the true effects of school reform on test scores.

Nevertheless, concerns about the reform movement remain. First, the amount of improvement that California has achieved to date has been limited. Specifically, the amount of improvement is equivalent to only about one-half to one year of learning in mathematics (depending on the grade level examined) and about one-quarter year in reading. As noted previously, school graduates in many other countries score the equivalent of as much as four grade levels ahead of the United States in some areas.

Second, it is unclear whether the reforms to date will be adequate to deal with the demands placed on the state's school system by the aforementioned demographic changes.

Limitations of Previous Reform Efforts

Why have the reform efforts that California and other states initiated in the early 1980s had only limited success in improving academic achievement?

As mentioned previously, many of these reforms reflected a "top-down" approach to school reform, where the state imposes certain requirements on schools (or provides them with financial incentives to operate in a particular way). Proponents of restructuring argue that a "top-down" approach does not necessarily result in the effective delivery of the curriculum. For instance, requiring that a student take two years of mathematics before graduating does not necessarily address the effectiveness of those courses—such as whether the content of the courses is both sufficiently rigorous and contains instruction in thinking skills.

Although the State Department of Education (SDE) has attempted to improve the quality of instruction by upgrading its "curriculum frameworks," which provide general suggestions on both what schools should teach and how, it is too early to tell whether this move, by itself, will solve these problems.

As an alternative to a "top-down" strategy towards school reform, some analysts have proposed that states adopt more extensive "bottom-up" strategies. California has, in fact, previ-

ously implemented several such programs, such as the School Improvement Program (SIP), which provides schools with funds to plan and implement improvement efforts. These types of programs, however, have not been uniformly used to improve teaching methods or curriculum, and have been criticized for often not resulting in fundamental institutional change, especially at the high school level.

SCHOOL RESTRUCTURING PROPOSED AS AN ALTERNATE APPROACH

Given the above, there is increased interest for states to promote a broad, "bottom-up" strategy, known as "school restructuring." This is a strategy which is intended to create extensive change in the nature of schools.

The concept of school restructuring is modeled, in part, on the restructuring efforts in private industry. This is not to suggest that operating schools is necessarily identical to running a factory or a bank, but only that there are some general principles underlying the operation of any effective organization.

The essence of restructuring is the *decentralization* of power, decisionmaking, and resources in an organization, so that frontline "workers" (students and teachers, in the case of schools) have (1) more input into how the organization functions and (2) a greater flexibility to *collaborate* with one another and with groups outside the organization, in order to achieve the organization's goals. The underlying assumptions are that decentralization and collaboration will unleash the creativity and expertise of such "workers" in finding the best ways of achieving the organization's goals, and will increase workers' commitment to these goals.

Restructuring also involves, however, combining decentralization with greater amounts of *accountability*, where accountability is defined as a mechanism for ensuring that the organization's goals are being met. Thus, when the National Governors' Association called in 1987 for a restructuring of states' educational systems, it described the process as "a good old-fashioned horse trade," where states would exercise less control over schools in return for stronger accountability.

Although many separate parties have called for school restructuring, in practice the term "restructuring" has become used by various groups to advance different visions of reform. For instance, some versions of "restructuring" focus on changing the organization and delivery of instruction (for instance, by encouraging students to *discover*, rather than simply acquire, knowledge); others focus on reforming how schools are governed (for

instance, by involving teachers more in decisionmaking); and still others focus more on altering existing systems of accountability (for instance, by allowing parents and students to choose —based on their personal interests and goals—which school they would like to attend).

These various versions of restructuring, however, are not necessarily mutually exclusive; a school or school district could adopt all or some combination of them. The focus of these various proposals differs, however, because each is attempting to change a different aspect of the existing educational system. For this reason, it may be helpful to think of the concept of restructuring as having different components, all of which support reform of the system. We now turn to describing these various components in more detail.

THE COMPONENTS OF SCHOOL RESTRUCTURING

Figure 2 summarizes the various major components of school restructuring. It shows that the components address two central themes—(1) decentralization and collaboration and (2) accountability. Each of these themes is discussed in more detail below.

Components Related to Increased Decentralization and Collaboration

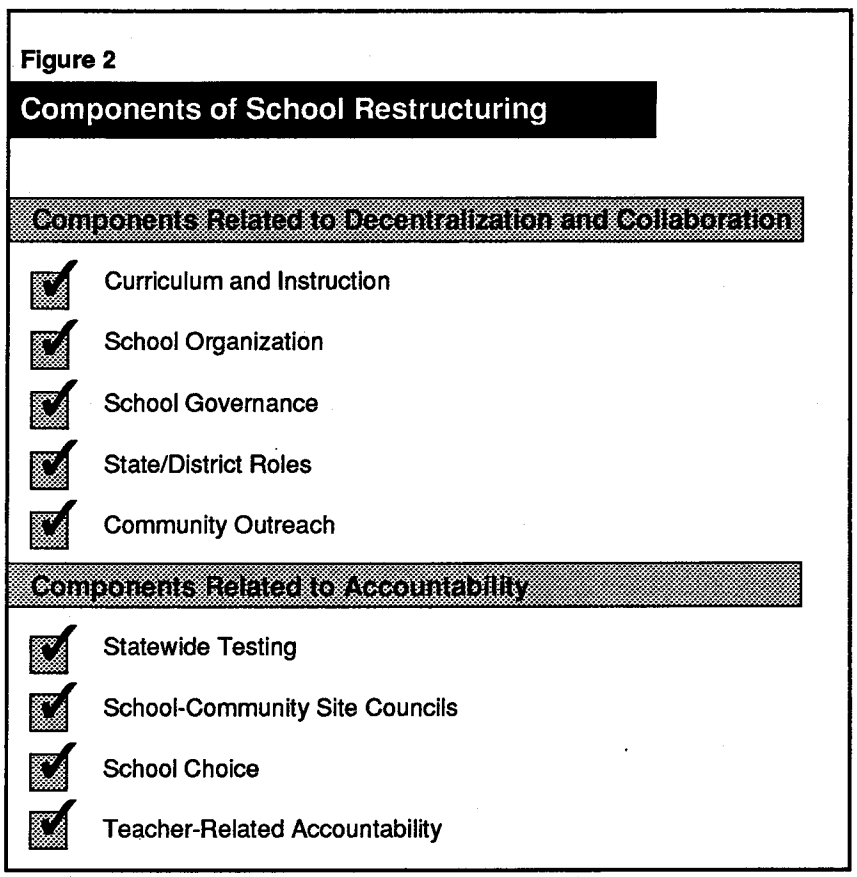
As discussed above, school restructuring entails decentralizing power and resources, and, as part of this decentralization, allowing individuals greater freedom to collaborate with one another. Educators may move power and resources down to various levels within school systems: (1) from the level of the district to that of the school, (2) from the school to that of the teacher, or (3) from the teacher to that of the student. We begin our discussion of school restructuring by considering what is involved at the most immediate level—the relationship between teacher and student. We then consider how restructuring would work at other levels within schools.

Curriculum and Instruction. In many cases, school curricula emphasize the memorization of factual knowledge over the development of creative and critical thinking. In such cases, students assume a passive role, in which teachers lecture to students or require them to memorize facts from a textbook.

Those who advocate a "restructuring" of curriculum and instructional methods argue that not only does this approach neglect the development of thinking skills, but that it also tends to bore students. As a result, they may acquire only a superficial understanding of the material's content.

Figure 2

Components of School Restructuring



Proponents of restructuring advocate the use of more "active learning," which requires students to use the knowledge that they have acquired to solve problems or, to some degree, to discover knowledge themselves. Use of more active learning does not necessarily mean that teachers abandon lecturing, but only that they supplement such approaches more often with student activities, such as science experiments, written essays, or group projects. In addition to active learning approaches to problem solving, teachers can specifically use group projects to reinforce teamwork and group communication skills.

The restructuring of curriculum and instructional methods thus reflects the principles of decentralization and collaboration because students (1) take a more active part in exploring ideas and solving problems and (2) are encouraged to collaborate with one another in this process.

Specific strategies that teachers may use in an active learning approach include: (1) interdisciplinary projects, (2) centering the curriculum around themes, and (3) focusing the curriculum on fewer topics that can be explored in greater depth.

School Organization. Some restructuring advocates argue that, in order to better enable teachers to deliver a rigorous curriculum based on active learning, educators must change the way schools are organized. Specifically, supporters of restructuring contend that educators must put in place organizational structures that (1) encourage teachers to experiment and (2) allow teachers to share ideas and insights on useful strategies.

One suggested way to promote such collaboration is to implement teacher mentoring programs. In this type of program, schools designate certain experienced teachers with exemplary skills as mentors, and encourage them to assist other teachers, particularly new teachers. While many states, including California, have previously implemented such programs, restructuring advocates argue that states need to strengthen and expand these programs, such as by linking the mentor role to a well developed career ladder.

Another way that schools—specifically secondary schools—can create organizational structures that foster experimentation and collaboration is to employ teacher teams and block schedules. Under this system, the school divides its faculty into interdisciplinary teams, with each team consisting of from two to six teachers. The school then assigns a particular group of students to one team for a block of time, ranging from two to six hours. During this period, the faculty team is allowed to vary the length of time that it devotes to particular subjects (such as science or English). Schools may also provide these teams with autonomy over the design of curriculum, as well as the type of instructional materials that shall be used. The approach therefore illustrates the dual themes of decentralization and collaboration.

School Governance. School governance relates to how decisions regarding school policies and procedures are made. In many schools, decisions are often made "from above" by either federal or state mandate or district central office administrators. Teachers are often not involved in the decisionmaking process, except perhaps for issues raised during collective bargaining, and school site administrators may only have control over a limited number of decisions. As a result, school staff often lack the flexibility to undertake many types of innovations. (For instance, state credentialing laws might prevent a science instructor from teaching calculus in the context of physics, or district regulations

might prevent a social studies instructor from using literature—rather than textbooks—to teach history.)

Generally, the restructuring of school governance systems involves the decentralization of decisionmaking. The literature on restructuring discusses two types of innovations in this regard: (1) shared decisionmaking, which relates to *how* decisions are made, and (2) school-based management, which relates to *the level* at which they are made.

- ***Shared decisionmaking.*** In shared decisionmaking, decisions are made with the formal input of teachers and, in some instances, parents and community members. Schools may make decisions by a vote of either the school's entire faculty or a representative "site council." At the district level, shared decisionmaking may also operate by involving teacher representatives in the decisionmaking process.
- ***School-based management.*** In school-based management, some decisions formerly made by the state or district are "moved down" to the school level. Although the exact scope of school-based management plans vary, in a comprehensive plan, schools (rather than districts) would be responsible for designing the curriculum, choosing textbooks, budgeting funds, and hiring staff.

Currently, schools in both Chicago and Los Angeles are conducting major efforts in both shared decisionmaking and school-based management.

State/District Roles. Ideally, restructuring requires collaboration not only among teachers but also between schools and higher-level administrators (at both the state and district levels). It is often maintained that the process of educational restructuring requires high-level administrators to act less as regulators of schools and more as "coaches" who assist school personnel--through providing information and advice--in solving problems related to school improvement. While in a restructured school system site personnel would have the *primary* role in generating ideas and solving problems, higher-level administrators would support them in these tasks.

Community Outreach. Just as restructured schools may develop the flexibility to establish new, collaborative roles within a school and with high-level administrators, they also can establish collaborative partnerships with groups and organizations in the community, such as universities, businesses, or health and social service agencies. For instance, a school might actively attempt to train parents on how they can best encourage learn-

ing, or might agree to serve as a "research lab" for professors and students from a local university. Schools could use partnerships with local businesses as a way of enriching an "active learning" curriculum through the development of job internships for students.

Finally, schools could form partnerships with health and social service agencies in order to coordinate the delivery of noneducational services through the schools, so that noneducational problems, such as substance abuse or mental illness, would be less likely to interfere with student learning.

Two national projects—the League of Schools Reaching Out and the Accelerated Schools Project—have combined the use of social and health services with other components of restructuring.

Forms of Accountability in School Restructuring

As noted previously, school accountability involves setting goals and establishing some mechanism to ensure that schools meet these goals. Various forms of accountability differ with respect to *who* is responsible for setting the goals and monitoring school performance. Goals, for instance, can be established and monitored either from "above" (by the state) or, alternatively, from "below" (by students and parents). Top-down accountability is not necessarily inconsistent with the spirit of restructuring, if schools are given considerable authority in implementing general goals. There are, however, different forms of restructuring, depending on the exact nature of the accountability system adopted.

Below we discuss four different forms of accountability that are frequently discussed in the literature on restructuring: (1) statewide testing, (2) school-community site councils, (3) school choice, and (4) teacher-related accountability. Figure 3 summarizes these various forms.

Statewide Testing. The use of formal statewide testing as a means of accountability assumes that some basic goals are set and measured by the state. State and local officials, as well as school personnel, may then evaluate the performance of individual schools or school districts based on the results of these tests. To the extent that school personnel feel that these test scores are important and reliable, they will pay attention to them and attempt to improve their performance where necessary.

With some exceptions, most of the tests that states use are standardized multiple choice exams that measure discrete skills, such as the ability to add numbers. Because schools tend to gear

Figure 3

School Restructuring: Forms of Accountability

- ☑ Statewide Testing
  - Performance Testing
  - End-of-Course Exams
  - Rewards and Sanctions
- ☑ School-Community Site Councils
- ☑ School Choice
- ☑ Teacher-Related Accountability
  - Merit Pay
  - Evaluations of Teacher Teams

their curricula to what the state will assess, such narrow tests can lead to a narrow curriculum that focuses solely on a few basic skills at the expense of critical and creative thinking. Some testing agencies (most notably the California State Department of Education) have developed multiple choice tests that measure some thinking skills by including more difficult problems. However, the SDE generally acknowledges that such tests cannot measure the full range of thinking and related "higher-order" skills, such as creativity, writing, teamwork or oral communication.

For this reason, many have called for "restructured" assessment systems that contain an increased number of *performance tests*. In a performance test, a student must perform an activity, such as writing an essay or giving a speech. Performance tests are thus useful not only for measuring a range of educational skills that cannot be measured by traditional tests, but also for generating products that schools may show to policymakers and the general public.

Other types of assessment reforms that are often discussed in the context of restructuring include: (1) the use of state-developed and -mandated final exams and (2) the provision of rewards (such as teacher bonuses or merit grants to schools) and sanctions (such as negative school publicity) based on assessment results.

School-Community Site Councils. Some schools that restructure their governance system by establishing site councils for shared decisionmaking have also chosen a restructured form of accountability. This form of accountability provides that (1) a majority of the individuals on the site council are parents and community members and (2) the site council is authorized to hire and fire the school principal. The school principal (and staff) are then accountable to the members of the site council in addition to the district superintendent and school board; as such, the site council may terminate the school principal if it becomes unhappy with the school's performance.

School Choice. School choice is a model of accountability in which districts allow parents and students to choose which school the student shall attend. This type of accountability is based on the goals of individual students and parents and, if a school fails to meet these goals, the student is free to transfer elsewhere. Proponents assert that, under a choice model, schools that fail to meet the goals of a large number of their students would experience declines in enrollment and be forced to improve.

There are three basic types of choice plans:

- ***Intradistrict choice.*** This type of choice plan is confined to schools within one district. One of the best examples of this approach is the choice plan for middle grade students in New York School District No. 4 in East Harlem, where students can choose to attend any one of 24 specialized schools. Many of these schools were formed by small, autonomous groups of teachers over a 15-year period.
- ***Interdistrict choice.*** In this type of choice plan, students may attend public schools in other districts. The state of Minnesota is currently implementing such a plan.
- ***Public/private choice.*** In this system, students may attend both public and private schools. The City of Milwaukee, Wisconsin is attempting to implement a limited version of such a system.

Advocates of school choice disagree on the best type of plan. Some advocates endorse state-mandated *intra*district choice, but not the other forms of choice, on such grounds as (1) interdistrict choice could be too financially disruptive and could thus undermine district attempts to assist schools in restructuring and (2) public/private choice could possibly result in public support for schools that teach certain religious and political viewpoints. Others argue that only a system that allows students to attend

private schools would create a sufficiently strong incentive to induce the majority of public school districts to improve.

Teacher-Related Accountability. The fourth form of accountability that is often discussed is that directed at evaluating individual teachers or groups of teachers, rather than schools. When only schools are evaluated, an individual teacher can dismiss the cause of poor performance as the fault of administrators or other teachers, and may be reluctant to examine and improve his or her own skills and behaviors unless forced to do so by the school principal. Thus, while the other forms of accountability might result in *some* change among teachers, some argue that a teacher-related accountability system would result in much greater change.

Two major forms of teacher-related accountability that have been suggested are (1) merit pay systems based on teacher performance and (2) in cases where restructuring has led to "teacher teams," the evaluation of the entire team (as opposed to individual teachers).

THE STATUS OF SCHOOL RESTRUCTURING

In this section, we summarize the extent to which schools are engaging in restructuring, and what is known about the effectiveness of this approach.

To What Extent Is Restructuring Occurring?

Based on our review of the literature on restructuring, it appears that some forms of restructuring are fairly widespread. The literature that we reviewed cited over 60 major restructuring projects across the nation that have been implemented by (1) schools in collaboration with state governments, universities, and associations, or (2) large urban school districts, including those in Los Angeles, San Diego, Richmond (California), Chicago, and Rochester. In addition, the SDE has made a concerted attempt over the last several years to restructure curriculum and instructional methods by upgrading its model curriculum frameworks. Moreover, many middle grade schools in California have adopted faculty teams following publication of SDE's report in 1987, *Caught in the Middle.*

Many of these efforts, however, appear focused on only one or two components of restructuring, such as school organization, school-based management, or choice. With a couple of exceptions (such as the efforts in Harlem), we found few, well documented cases of more comprehensive restructuring efforts. While there are several efforts that are designed to produce extensive change in the curriculum, organization, and governance mechanisms of

specific schools, these efforts do not attempt to develop and test broad-based systems of accountability that extend beyond an individual school, such as restructured statewide testing or school choice.

Is Restructuring an Effective Strategy?

Although there is little experience with large-scale, comprehensive restructuring efforts, there is research on the effectiveness of the individual components of restructuring. Figure 4 summarizes the major findings of this research, while Figure 5 lists some of the potential pitfalls.

We draw several conclusions from this information.

First, although there is sufficient preliminary evidence to suggest that certain aspects of restructuring are promising strategies that the state should explore further, *additional research is needed on most of the components of school restructuring in order to conclusively judge the effectiveness of this approach.*

Second, the research indicates a number of things that can potentially go wrong when restructuring approaches are implemented, as detailed in Figure 5. In general, *restructuring does place added demands on teachers, and they must be provided with sufficient release time and training in order to meet these demands.*

Third, there is fairly conclusive evidence that some active learning approaches in the area of curriculum and instruction—such as peer tutoring or the use of group projects—can make a difference in levels of student achievement, if implemented properly. There is also some evidence that the delivery of a challenging curriculum that requires pupils to engage in creative thinking and problem-solving also results in significantly higher levels of student achievement (although researchers disagree as to the exact extent). This finding suggests, although it does not prove, that for the other components of restructuring to have much effect on levels of student achievement, *schools must link them to the effective delivery of a challenging curriculum that is centered on active learning.* For this reason, some researchers have faulted a number of previous attempts to implement school-based management and shared decisionmaking plans because participants in these reforms failed to address issues of curriculum and instruction. Rather, participants more frequently addressed issues such as changing discipline policies or developing parent newsletters. Thus, failure to address curriculum issues may constitute another major pitfall of restructuring.

Figure 4

Summary of Research on School Restructuring: Findings

Components Related to Decentralization and Collaboration

Curriculum and Instruction

Large body of research documents:

- Active learning improves attention, memory, and understanding.
- Group projects can result in improved academic achievement.
- Enrollment in "harder" classes that require more thinking results in higher achievement, even when student ability is held constant.

Organizational Changes

No comprehensive studies. Evidence from 20 German schools using teacher teams found:

- 1% dropped out (compared to 14% nationally).
- 60% qualified for college (compared to 27% nationally).

Governance Changes

Research findings are mixed:

- Several major studies show that high levels of achievement are associated with high levels of (1) school autonomy, (2) staff involvement, (3) a clear focus and sense of mission, and (4) strong principal leadership.
- Other studies show that school-based management councils often shy away from curriculum and budget issues.

Restructured State and District Roles

No formal research exists:

- Several efforts are in progress. The most prominent are occurring in San Diego (district level coaching) and Kentucky, Virginia, and New Mexico (state level coaching).

Figure 4—CONTD

Community Outreach

Evidence very preliminary:

- Test scores in one school in the League of Schools Reaching Out project increased from 3 percent to 10 percent annually for four years. No data are available on other participating schools.

Components Related to Accountability

Performance Testing

Evidence very limited:

- Use of writing assignments across all curriculum areas increased following implementation of California Assessment Program writing assessment.
- Few systematic studies of performance assessment in other areas.

School-Community Site Councils

Research findings discouraging:

- Some studies show that councils often shy away from curriculum and budget issues.

Choice

A moderate body of research exists:

- There are some documented successes. For instance, from 1974 to 1988, district reading scores in Harlem (District No. 4) increased from last place in New York City to about average.
- One major pilot project, conducted in Alum Rock, California, in the mid-1970s, did not result in significantly improved student achievement.

Teacher-Related Accountability

Research very limited:

- No studies available that evaluate relationship to student achievement. One study found that merit pay/career ladders in Texas resulted in decreased cooperation between teachers who were competing for promotions.

Figure 5

Summary of Research on School Restructuring: Potential Pitfalls

Components Related to Decentralization and Collaboration

Curriculum and Instruction

- Teachers may fail to pinpoint what students should learn.
- Teachers may fail to use activities that engage students and keep them busy.
- Teachers may fail to monitor and manage multiple groups of students working on different projects.
- Teachers may fail to develop group facilitation skills among students.
- Teachers may be unwilling to learn--through both training and trial and error--how best to implement instructional innovations (such as peer tutoring).

Organizational Changes

- Schools may fail to combine block schedules with an engaging curriculum or with useful instructional methods.
- Innovations may not last if there is a lack of support for block schedules or career ladders from unions or teachers given new responsibilities.

Governance Changes

- Resources may be diverted from instructional issues to administrative matters (especially if teachers spend large amounts of time out of the classroom or if site councils fail to examine the curriculum).
- Teachers may lack time for meetings.
- Meetings may be conducted ineffectually.
- Site councils may fail to solve school problems due to insufficient authority, resources, ideas, or management expertise.

Restructured State and District Roles

- Administrators may lack expertise in solving particular problems, or be unable to draw individuals with various types of expertise together for this purpose.
- Providing assistance can sometimes be time-consuming and make administrators spread resources "too thin."

Figure 5—CONTD

Community Outreach

- Direct parent involvement can, in some instances, result in placing unreasonable demands and burdens on schools.
- Referring individuals to social service agencies may be time-consuming.

Components Related to Accountability

Performance Testing

- Costs may be high if many students are tested.
- Tests may be unreliable if not properly developed.
- Insufficient incentives may exist for schools to place importance on test results.

Site Councils

- Parents and community members may lack sufficient knowledge of educational procedures and programs to participate meaningfully.
- Parents and community members may, in some instances, place unreasonable demands on schools.

Choice

- Unless students and parents are provided with sufficient information on available options and adequate transportation, some students may not be able to exercise meaningful "choice."
- Students in some instances select a particular school for "noneducational" reasons.
- The supply of "quality" schools may not expand (either because of a lack of excess capacity in existing schools or because there is no mechanism to allow for the formation of new schools). In this situation, enrollment levels in poor-quality schools would probably not decline.
- Low-quality schools that begin losing significant numbers of students as a result of "choice" may not be able to improve unless districts provide the necessary conditions for restructuring (such as school autonomy or adequate teacher training).

Teacher-Related Accountability

- Merit pay may reduce collegiality among teachers.
- Teacher evaluations (for merit pay) may be perceived as unreliable.

Finally, the evidence suggests (but again does not prove) that *schools which base restructuring on "strategic planning" may have more success than those which base it on piecemeal reform.* In strategic planning, the staff members in a school form a vision of what they wish to achieve—including the knowledge and skills that graduating pupils should possess—and then design strategies to achieve these goals. Many of these strategies could involve other aspects of restructuring, and so will tend to be more comprehensive than simply implementing a single innovation such as shared decisionmaking. Research on both effective school restructuring and restructuring efforts in industry suggest that, for strategic planning to be effective, organizations must support change efforts with strong leadership, a consensus among staff on the need for change, and the ability of staff to solve problems and implement innovations in a collaborative fashion.

The Legislature Has Provided for Additional Research

Because most of the research on restructuring is not conclusive, the Legislature initiated the school restructuring demonstration projects pursuant to SB 1274. These projects, which will be operated in individual schools, might include such things as team teaching, extensive use of peer tutoring, or the formation of community-school partnerships. According to the legislation, the purpose of these demonstration projects is to determine whether restructuring is a cost-effective strategy and, if so, under what circumstances. By contrast, the purpose of these programs is *not* necessarily to find one specific model of restructuring to mandate in all districts in the state. This is because an innovation that may work well in one school may not work in another. This argument is consistent with the view that, rather than mandating specific statewide practices, states should encourage schools to choose which innovations to adopt and how to tailor them to their needs. Establishing demonstration projects can further this goal by identifying and showcasing a variety of *general approaches* that schools might find useful.

OTHER POTENTIAL ROLES FOR THE STATE

While the demonstration programs established by SB 1274 will generate important information, some significant questions regarding restructuring are likely to remain partially unanswered. In particular, the demonstration programs—which, again, are focused on individual schools—may not tell the Legislature how restructuring would be implemented on a very large scale—for example, throughout large school districts or on a multi-district basis. In addition, there are other roles the state could play in restructuring, generally by providing increased

flexibility to schools in a variety of areas. Figure 6 summarizes these potential state roles, which fall into the general categories of experimentation, research, and policy changes.

Additional Areas for Experimentation

The Legislature could experiment with a number of alternative mechanisms relating to restructuring on a larger scale, including (1) new forms of school accountability, (2) restructuring of teacher preparation programs, and (3) performance-based waivers.

Pilot-Test New Forms of School Accountability. Prior to the current fiscal year, the state evaluated the performance of individual schools through the California Assessment Program (CAP), and made these scores available to the local media in every

Figure 6

Potential State Roles in Restructuring

Experimentation

- ☑ Pilot-Test New Forms of School Accountability
- ☑ Restructure Teacher Preparation Programs
- ☑ Experiment With Performance-Based Waivers

Research

- ☑ Review Legal Requirements Imposed on Schools
- ☑ Research Procedures for Using Alternative Facilities
- ☑ Evaluate Technical Services Provided by County Offices of Education

Policy Changes

- ☑ Require Fewer Programs and Mandates
- ☑ Coordinate Policy Objectives With the State's Model Curriculum Frameworks

community. Almost all 1990-91 funding for CAP, however, was vetoed and so, at the time this analysis was prepared, California lacked any major statewide system of accountability. The Governor' Budget proposes to implement a "revised" statewide testing system, and the Legislature will need to consider to what extent the proposed system should include student performance assessments.

In addition, the Legislature may wish to establish pilot projects in school choice and teacher-related accountability. It is unclear how many of the demonstration projects that the state will fund under SB 1274 will address these alternatives— especially that of school choice—since the measure provides funding to restructure individual *schools*, rather than restructuring on a districtwide or multi-district basis.

Restructure Teacher Preparation Programs. If teachers are to work in a restructured educational environment, they must have training in such areas as (1) utilization of active learning techniques and (2) how to collaborate with other teachers. Colleges of education, however, appear to vary greatly in how well they teach these and other types of related skills. For this reason, a number of reports have called for a "restructuring" of teacher preparation programs, by providing colleges of education with greater autonomy in setting course work requirements. (Currently, the state indirectly sets such requirements to a large extent through credentialing and accreditation laws). Some have proposed that accountability systems should also be strengthened, for instance by publishing "outcome measures" on individual teacher preparation programs, in order to encourage some programs to improve.

Upgrading teacher preparation programs could help promote the restructuring of K-12 schools by producing teachers with the necessary aptitudes for working in such schools. For this reason, the Legislature could implement some additional pilot programs in improving teacher education.

Experiment With Performance-Based Waivers. Currently, the State Board of Education (SBE) grants some school districts waivers from selected provisions of state law, but these waivers are not generally "performance-based." Performance-based waivers exempt schools from certain statutory requirements if the school can obtain a specified level of academic performance within a fixed period of time, for both its general population of students and, if appropriate, among special groups. As an example, the state might grant a waiver to a science teacher on an interdisciplinary faculty team who might wish to teach calcu-

lus, on the condition that the team's students maintain a certain level of performance on tests of mathematical ability.

Although currently school districts can request the SBE to waive the requirements of most sections of the Education Code, there is no guarantee that the board will grant a waiver, especially in areas that may be viewed as controversial or unorthodox. As a result, many school districts are reluctant to seek such waivers. In order to experiment with performance-based waivers, the Legislature could direct the SDE, as staff to the board, to experiment with performance-based waivers and to evaluate the results.

Additional Areas for Research

We have also identified a number of areas where the state may wish to conduct additional research in order to design specific options for providing school districts with greater flexibility and technical assistance.

Review Legal Requirements Imposed on Schools. In order to provide schools with greater local discretion, the Legislature could direct the SDE to convene a task force to review the various legal requirements that the state has imposed on schools. Those requirements that appear to no longer serve any useful purpose could be eliminated.

Another purpose of such a task force could be to identify and clarify common areas of confusion regarding where schools and school districts *currently have flexibility*. Often, school districts have areas of flexibility of which they are not aware. Staff at the SDE report, for instance, that requirements which some districts thought were mandated by the state were actually local rules that evolved through collective bargaining.

Research Procedures for Using Alternative Facilities. Many restructured schools that use block schedules need physical space that can accommodate both large lectures (to 60 or more students) and small group discussions. Most schools are designed, however, simply to accommodate class groupings of 30 students each. Some restructuring experts have proposed that the state enact legislation to make it easier for schools to rent or lease public and private buildings, so that schools can have access to more flexibly designed space. To ensure that these buildings are earthquake-safe, the state currently requires schools to comply with extensive facility utilization requirements. The Legislature could direct the appropriate state agencies to review these requirements to determine if they can be streamlined,

while at the same time maintaining adequate protection for the state's children.

Evaluate Technical Services Provided by County Offices of Education. One restructuring-related role that the state already performs is to provide school staff with technical assistance to better enable them to solve local problems in a collaborative fashion. Such technical assistance often takes the form of help with strategic planning, where schools seek to identify local needs, set goals, and develop strategies for achieving these goals.

Because of the large number of schools in California, it is not feasible for the SDE to provide technical assistance directly to most schools or school districts; rather, the state relies on county offices of education to provide the majority of this technical assistance. The capacity of county offices to serve this function, however, varies widely. Some county offices are adept at providing help with strategic planning, while others are not. Although the county offices have developed a common "menu of services" in an attempt to achieve a degree of standardization, it is unclear to what degree these services are consistently and adequately delivered.

For this reason, the Legislature could direct the SDE to evaluate the capacity of county offices to provide schools assistance with strategic planning and other services supportive of restructuring.

Potential Policy Changes

If the Legislature wishes to promote educational restructuring, it could consider policy changes to increase schools' flexibility by (1) requiring fewer programs and mandates and (2) seeking to further state policy objectives instead through the state's model curriculum frameworks.

Require Fewer Programs and Mandates. Every year, the Legislature enacts a number of additional programs and mandates that further certain policy goals. For instance, there are programs designed to increase students' awareness of environmental issues, to decrease drug use, and to promote civic responsibility. Most such programs contain rules and regulations on how program funds may be spent, and thus reflect a "rules-based approach" to public policy.

One problem with such an approach is that school teachers and administrators become inundated with limited-purpose programs and initiatives. As a result, teachers often attempt to cover a large number of subjects in a short period of time,

resulting in superficial treatment of the material. Some studies, in fact, indicate that curricula in most schools in the United States lack "depth" when compared to the curricula taught in most other industrialized countries.

For this reason, some have argued that the Legislature should refrain from adding programs and initiatives to an already overcrowded school agenda. On the other hand, it can be argued that it is the Legislature's responsibility to set and further societal goals, and that it would be an abdication of legislative responsibility not to require schools to address current issues.

Coordinate Policy Objectives With the State's Model Curriculum Frameworks. There is, however, a middle ground. Specifically, the Legislature could seek to identify and further certain high-priority goals through the state's system of model curriculum frameworks.

These frameworks, which were developed by the SDE, consist of somewhat detailed *goals* regarding the knowledge and skills that students should learn. The frameworks do not, however, precisely specify how schools should organize and present the curriculum. Nor are schools required to use the frameworks, although the state's testing system is aligned with the frameworks at the secondary level. Figure 7 presents a few examples of the goals that are reflected in the frameworks, using the framework for middle grade science for purposes of illustration.

The Legislature could proceed to integrate legislative goals with the model frameworks in the following manner:

- ***First,*** the Legislature could adopt a general policy not to require additional activities in areas which are already addressed by the frameworks (recognizing in advance that some exceptions may be warranted).
- ***Second,*** the Legislature could direct the SDE to strengthen the frameworks where it finds them to be inadequate.
- ***Third,*** the Legislature could direct the SDE to develop an interdisciplinary resource document that would assist schools in addressing legislative goals and other various curricular goals simultaneously. This document would contain examples of promising interdisciplinary learning activities, such as how instruction on topics such as AIDS could be combined with instruction on mathematical probabilities or civics.
- ***Finally,*** in selected cases where schools still appear to be failing to achieve framework goals of particular importance to the Legislature, it could direct the SDE to modify

Figure 7

Examples of Goals From State Curriculum Framework: Middle Grade Science

Category	Examples
Examples of Major Curriculum Goals	• Students should understand the nature of science. • Students should understand the principles underlying energy.
Examples of Specific Content Goals	• Students should understand the principles underlying such phenomena as boiling water or insulation. • Students should understand that farmers have increased agricultural productivity through the selective breeding of animals and plants.
Examples of Behavioral Goals	• Students should be able to observe, compare, categorize, and make inferences.
Examples of Suggestions to Teachers	• Teachers should center instruction around themes, such as energy, evolution, change, and stability. • Teachers should use active learning.

existing statewide exams so as to (1) signal to schools that those goals are important and (2) monitor school performance accordingly.

Advantages of this Coordination Approach. Pursuing statewide legislative goals through the model curriculum frameworks would reflect the spirit of school restructuring because, rather than prescribing a specific manner for achieving a goal, the state would allow teachers the freedom to create a variety of solutions for achieving the goal. This approach potentially has two major advantages:

- ***Local creativity enhances effectiveness.*** By furthering local creativity, schools would be likely to discover a number of effective solutions, all tailored to the school's individual needs. For instance, some schools might wish to promote civic responsibility by requiring students to engage in community service, while others might find interviews with community leaders on specified social problems to be more effective.
- ***Coordination decreases educational fragmentation.*** To the extent that schools could pursue broad goals through the regular academic instruction offered in core subjects such as history or science, additional specialized programs would be unnecessary. Varied program requirements and funding sources often discourage schools from using interdisciplinary projects to address multiple goals simultaneously.

SUMMARY

The term "restructuring" is an umbrella concept, encompassing a wide array of proposed changes in the educational process. As such, it means many different things to different people. There are, however, three broad themes that tend to run throughout restructuring reforms: decentralization, collaboration, and accountability.

To date, there is very little evidence that documents the benefits of restructuring proposals. The research information that is available suggests, however, that reforms have the potential to improve educational performance, especially when they are: (1) accompanied by strategic planning by the schools and (2) focused on the delivery of a quality curriculum. Restructuring proposals, however, are also subject to numerous pitfalls, such as teachers not being given adequate release time or training.

While the state is already encouraging schools to experiment with restructuring, there are other roles the state could play as well. For example, the state could: (1) experiment on a broader-based scale (for example, on a multi-district basis), (2) research various state actions that would increase local flexibility (such as in the areas of legal requirements and facilities regulations), and (3) coordinate better the state's educational policy objectives with the model curriculum frameworks currently provided to schools.

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