

Educational Governance in California

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Presentation Outline

- Study purpose and methods
- Framework for evaluating governance
- Study findings
- Conclusions

Study Purpose

To evaluate California's current educational governance system

- Reviewing links between educational governance and student outcomes
- Creating a framework to “unpack” governance
- Identifying indicators of effective educational governance systems
- Soliciting stakeholder perspectives on the effectiveness of California's system
- Comparing California's system to other states
- Recommending policy options for improvement

Study Methods

- Review of research on governance
- Review of prior CA reports
 - CCSGM (1985), LAO (1999), JCDMPE (2002), Timar (2002)
- Stakeholder interviews
 - 10 national experts + 30 state, county and district leaders
- Document analysis
 - CA Education Code, legislation, legislative committees, CDE, SBE, collective bargaining agreements

Prior Research

- Researchers believe governance matters
 - No agreement on one preferred set of institutional arrangements
 - Highly context-dependent; a necessary but not sufficient element
 - Design/intent versus implementation
- Some evidence that governance affects use of resources, community engagement, curriculum but:
 - Difficult to identify *specific components* that make a difference
 - Changes in performance not always related to governance changes

Framework

WHAT are the goals of the system are in terms of:

- Structure and organization
- Finance and Business Services
- Human Resources/Personnel
- Educational Programs

WHO is best situated to carry out the tasks necessary to meet those goals? Think about institutions and individuals at the various levels of the system (e.g. Governor, Legislature, SBE, SPI, CDE, District Superintendents, District Boards, County Offices of Education, Principals and Teachers)

HOW should these institutions or individuals best induce others to implement policy? What mix of the following is best suited to meet the goals:

- Mandates
- Inducements
- Capacity-Building
- System-Changing?

Evaluate. How does the system rate in terms of:

- Stability
- Accountability
- Innovation, flexibility, and responsiveness
- Transparency
- Simplicity and efficiency?

Findings – The “Who”

Reviewed role of key players at state, county, district, and local level including individuals, governmental institutions, interest groups, and service providers

- Since Prop 13 (1978), increased state role
- Interviewee views:
 - State ultimately sets education policy since it is in charge of the necessary funding mechanisms
 - Governance structure is fragmented
 - Roles of SPI and Secretary of Education are unclear
 - District superintendents noted that they have very little direct contact with personnel at the state level

Findings – The “What”

Examined distribution of power over four functions – structure and organization, finance and business services, personnel, educational programs:

- Distribution of authority by function varies
- Distribution of authority by level varies greatly
- Federal government has increasingly important role
- Schools have limited authority over each function
- Unions play a major role in several functions

Findings – The “How”

- Investigated use of different instruments by level and type (mandates, inducement, capacity-building, system-changing)
- Some regulation in the Education Code deemed superfluous or the result of narrow interests that accumulate
 - Districts operate under complex network of state rules, and in turn have their own set of policies and procedures which schools must follow
 - Mandates used more commonly than inducements across all levels
 - Some instances of system-changing (e.g., charter schools, mayoral/state takeovers)
 - Limited use of capacity-building tools

Effective Governance Indicators

- *Stability*: policy is made as far in advance as possible, enabling rational and planned decision-making; detected through examining revenue fluctuations, policy continuity and tenure of leaders
- *Accountability*: institutions and individuals are held responsible for their actions; clear lines of authority between parts of the system; limited duplication of functions
- *Innovation, Flexibility and Responsiveness*: system adaptable to changing needs; responds to new demands
- *Transparency*: clear to all stakeholders how decisions are made/who makes them; participation encouraged at every level
- *Simplicity and Efficiency*: decisions are coherent, coordinated across domains and levels, and made in a timely manner; duplication and waste are minimized

Stability

- Revenue fluctuations common
 - “[Local districts] do not know what form revenues will take.... It depends entirely on how ... the various political constellations are aligned in the education policy universe in Sacramento”
 - Increased use of categorical funding over the past two decades
- Frequent policy changes in student assessment and curriculum
 - “The current governance system allows for a lot of political influences to direct which direction we go, and allows us to continue to change programs right in the middle before we see the results of the program we just previously started”
- Increased volume and prescriptivism of legislation
- Increased turnover at all levels
 - 85% of SBE members now serve one term or less
 - 50%+ of local school board members serve less than 6 years

Accountability

- Lines of authority unclear
 - “California’s governance system is not only the worst that I’ve ever seen, it is absolutely the worst I can imagine. What you have is you have a series of entities which all have a piece of the governance pie, and you really have no one that has ultimate responsibility to be held accountable.”
- System fragmented
 - There are over a thousand districts, 58 county offices, and multiple state level bodies
- Lack of alignment between state and federal outcomes expectations
 - “It’s a remarkably crazy quilt of interacting authorities that are not aligned, for purpose of accountability or action”
- No consensus among interviewees on who ultimately should be responsible for education

Innovation, Flexibility, and Responsiveness

- Interviewees felt compliance stressed over creativity
 - *“The Education Code kind of restricts the ability to be creative unless you become a charter school, and you shouldn’t have to seek a waiver to be innovative.”*
- “One-size fits all” approach seen in the high number of categorical funding programs that the state uses, as well as in broader testing and curriculum policies

Transparency

- Interviews revealed one major area of concern: the role of “special interests”
 - According to a state administrator, *“I have consistently been concerned that we have union special interests.... The unionization of school districts is, I think, an unfortunate circumstance.”*
 - A county superintendent noted, *“The governance at the state level is largely a product of special interest groups.”*
- Perception that public lacks awareness of functions of each entity within the governance system

Simplicity and Efficiency

- Widespread perception that CA's system is overly complex and fragmented
 - “We have a Secretary of Education, a State Board of Education, a California Department of Education, we have county offices, we have districts and we have schools, and the question that I ask my class ... on school governance is, ‘Who’s in charge?’”
 - “What is screwing this whole puppy up is the legislators who are creating these incredible bills that continue to make the workings of this pretty effective ... structure almost impossible to work in.”
 - “It’s not that I want them to be soft on us, it’s just that this looking down the nose and coming through and using this white glove test to test for dust in all corners is not ... productive, it’s burdensome, and it doesn’t foster relationships, and it should be more focused on training, and less on ‘gotcha’.”

Conclusions for California

- Room for improvement!
- No proven “magic formula” that a state can adopt that will guarantee good governance
- In California’s case, outcomes-based accountability and input-based regulatory compliance gives schools (and to some extent districts) limited ability to manipulate resources to attain expected outcomes

Some Specific Policy Recommendations

- Implement statewide data system
- Clarify the roles of different state level actors
- Reduce the regulatory burden laid forth in the state Education Code, including reporting requirements and compliance checks
 - Push some of these functions to County Offices
- Grant districts and schools greater authority in return for accountability
 - Invest in building capacity at school level to handle autonomy including administrator training, school board training, budget tools, etc.
 - Reduce use of categoricals to increase flexibility at local level
 - Consider ways to increase staffing flexibility