The Administrative Control of Principals in Effective School Districts: The Supervision and Evaluation Functions

Joseph Murphy, Kent D. Peterson, and Philip Hallinger

In this article we examine the nature of administrative control of school principals in 12 especially effective districts in California. We combined two lines of inquiry, knowledge regarding control in organizations and information from the teacher effects and school effectiveness research, to examine types and patterns of control mechanisms in these districts. Although the work reported herein is exploratory in nature, we see evidence that, contrary to the norm, supervision and evaluation of site level administrators were rational and meaningful processes in these effective districts. We report further that the supervision and evaluation functions appeared to form important linkage mechanisms between schools and districts. In addition, we note that supervision and evaluation provide a strong base for the development of other important linkage functions, especially goal setting. Finally, we report that the superintendents often appear to be the key figures in the supervision and evaluation functions in these effective school districts.

In this article we examine the administrative control of principals in effective school districts in California. The first purpose is to expand understanding of district office control mechanisms in general. The second goal is to examine the types of control in effective districts to see if there are similarities within these districts. A third objective is to compare patterns of control uncovered in these districts with patterns found in studies of other districts. Though there are numerous types of control, in this article we concentrate on two control functions, supervision and evaluation of principals.

In general there has been a lack of research on school districts (Bridges, 1982). Only a few studies look at either the administrative control of principals (Peterson, 1983; Crowson and Morris, 1984) or the role of districts in promoting effectiveness (Cuban, 1984). Although there have been calls for research that investigates the relationship between patterns of administrative control and school organizational outcomes (Peterson, 1984), we have been unable to find any studies in the literature that do so.

Joseph Murphy, College of Education, University of Illinois, Champaign, IL 61820. Kent D. Peterson, Vanderbilt University; Philip Hallinger, Westchester (N.Y.) Principals' Center.
TYPOLOGIES OF ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROL

Organizational control in districts can be viewed from several perspectives. Six of these are briefly noted below.

1. **Internal-External** (Owens, 1984). The source of the control mechanism is the primary characteristic in this perspective. Control is exercised both by people within the organization, e.g., the superintendent, and by actors external to it, e.g., textbook publishers and test developers. The internal-external view of control surfaced with the open systems movement in organizational theory. Expanding understanding of internal activity by examining environmental forces external to the organization has been a major contribution to organizational analysis.

2. **Hierarchical-Nonhierarchical** (Lortie, 1969; Peterson, 1983). Where the control mechanisms originate is the critical aspect of this view of control. As Peterson (1984, p. 7) has noted with reference to controls, "Hierarchical ones are controlled by or emanate from upper level administrators. They are bureaucratic in nature, providing specific constraints over subordinates. Nonhierarchical controls emanate from outside the superior."

3. **Formal-Informal** (Murphy, 1978). Formal and informal control mechanisms are closely related to the hierarchical and nonhierarchical dimension. In this view, however, the key element is whether the control mechanism is a product of the formal organizational system, either planned or as a by-product of systems operations, or part of structures that have evolved within the formal systems but are independent from them. In the former case they are formal controls and in the latter informal controls.

4. **Structural-Activity** (Meyer and Rowan, 1975; Lortie, 1969). In this perspective, the critical element is the type of organizational activity that is controlled. Studies of organizations (Meyer and Rowan, 1975; Lortie, 1969), of administrative control in schools and districts (Cohen and Miller, 1980; Peterson, 1983; Crowson and Morris, 1984), and of administrative work activities (Hannaway and Sproull, 1979; Peterson, 1978; Pitner, 1982; Sproull, 1981) have all noted that administrative control in most schools and districts focuses on activities, tasks, and processes peripheral to the technical core of the schools. That is, finance and pupil behavior are more tightly controlled than curriculum and instruction (see particularly, Hannaway and Sproull, 1979).

5. **Bureaucratic-Professional** (Lortie, 1969, 1975; Murphy, 1978). As with the internal-external typology, the essential element here is the source of the control mechanism. Bureaucratic controls have many of the same properties as hierarchical controls. In contrast, professional controls are those that emanate from education in training institutions and association groups. Principal behavior is controlled by professional norms directly through their own training and associations, e.g., the emerging norm of instructional leadership, and