
Preface to the Symposium: “The Management of Schools as Public Organizations”

Symposium Editor

Alexander W. Wiseman, Ph.D.
School of Education
The University of Tulsa

The public nature of schooling and its effect on the management of schools is often overlooked in discussions of public administration and management. This special symposium issue of *Public Administration and Management: An Interactive Journal* focuses on the management of schools as public organizations. As such, the articles in this symposium issue address school management and the nature or influence of the public context on management activities in schools.

Principals', teachers', and other administrators' management activities in schools are unique compared to those of managers in other organizations because of the uniquely public character of schools. As one of the few public organizations with compulsory participation all people over a significant portion of their lives, schools are also public service and publicly-funded organizations. High degrees of organization autonomy and external penetration are both expected and required of schools. The articles in this issue bring together several unique but cohesive perspectives on public administration and policy in schooling.

Lance Fusarelli and Bonnie Johnson's article, "Educational Governance and the New Public Management," looks at how neo-corporatist ideology is blending private sector administrative techniques with public sector organizations like schools. The coupling of process and product is a focus of this investigation. Ultimately, the public accountability policies for schools, such as the educational legislation known as 'No Child Left Behind,' are decoupled from the actual administration and implementation of schooling because the nature of schooling as a largely localized public service prevents strict accountability from occurring.

David Brown's article, "Managing from the Inside-Out: Debating Site-Based Management in Public Schools," steps inside schools to look at a recent trend in the administration of schools as public organizations: site-based management. Building upon the idea of private versus public spheres explained in Fusarelli and Johnson's article, Brown looks at the differences in administrative perspective that two important school managers (administrators and teachers) hold. The internal managerial conflict that can and does arise from the discrepancy in opinion between these two players in the site-based management of schools is an important consideration when discussing the public nature of school administration and management.

M. Fernanda Astiz's article, "Decentralization and Educational Reform: What Accounts for a Decoupling Between Policy Purpose and Practice? Evidence from Buenos Aires, Argentina," explores the implementation outcomes of decentralization and education reform policies in Argentina during the 1990s. In particular, Astiz asserts that policy directives, implementation, and outcomes are decoupled due to the politicization of public schooling policy and organizational adaptation. There is also a mismatch between national-level official mandates and local-level public policy implementation in schools. In particular, Astiz points out that policies of decentralization meant to promote local-level action in public organizations such as schools often do not achieve this goal. Instead, the public context of schooling frequently leads to the fragmentation of public school administration policy and activity.

Finally, Alexander W. Wiseman's article, "Management of Semi-public Organizations in Complex Environments," ties the previous three articles together by discussing the nature or influence of public schools' organizational environments on management activities in the schools. As semi-public organizations, schools are unique (1) because high degrees of organizational autonomy and external penetration are both expected and required and (2) because of their institutionalization across organizational environments (including transnational organizational environments). In particular, the idea of coupling between schooling processes and school managers' activities, which are directed toward the management of technical outcomes versus legitimacy outcomes, is discussed. This means that school management activity may be directed more towards external legitimacy than internal management depending on the penetration of regional or national level governance into local schooling and schools. As a result, schools with fewer institutional requirements and penetration can be more overtly accommodating to local community and cultural influences.

Not only do school managers have to be available to the public, but they are also expected to listen, to try to implement the suggestions (or demands) of these constituents, and to provide some evidence back to the public that their wishes have been fulfilled. These articles suggest that public policy and administration discussions should remember that the school systems in most nations, and especially in the United States, are democratic systems where there are often publicly-elected officials who have significant input into the administration of schools. School systems are also increasingly locally controlled meaning that the voice of even the least of the taxpayers is a booming voice that must be answered if not obeyed.

Schools are sometimes compared to hospitals for their degree of public penetration, but in reality these comparisons are woefully off course. While there is quite a large degree of public penetration into health care indeed, by comparison to schools the public's ability to directly influence hospital decision-making is weak. Public schools are organizations whose "clients" are generally the entire population of a nation or community. Schools are compulsory mass public institutions meaning that not only does every person have the opportunity (or right) to take advantage of this organization's services, but also everyone is also required to do so. Schooling is compulsory in most of the world's educational systems. This is dramatically different from health care or hospitals where there is no daily requirement to get a check up or complete a series of health checks. Schools are

the only organizations in the world in which high degrees of organizational autonomy and high levels of external penetration are both expected and required.

This public access and performance accountability make the public school administrator's job one of public service, but also one of complex contexts. This is quite the organizational double punch, and means that school administrators are double punched as well. In the final analysis, the management of schools and public organizations is not an option, but a long-standing requirement. The articles in this symposium emphasize the conflicts and contradictions in public expectations of schools in relation to the reality and feasibility of popular attempts to treat schools as if they were not public organizations at all. And, as each of these articles points out, this is a mistake that can have disastrous consequences.

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