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THE POLITICS OF SCHOOL REFORM IN CHICAGO: THE IMPACT OF MAYORAL CONTROL IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY

DISSertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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*****

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ABSTRACT

Because our nation's urban school systems are particularly marked by educational failures and serve high proportions of poor and minority children, urban educational policy decisions are intertwined with the pattern and persistence of racial and class inequality. To amend some current urban educational problems and design optimal school administrative structures, we must understand both the political system in which schools operate and the current state of public education.

The Chicago Public Schools illustrate two very different approaches toward urban school reform. The first reform occurred in 1988 and resulted largely from mobilization within the Black community for greater influence in educational decision making in its childrens' schools. This reform decentralized control of the school system from the school board's central office to parents and community groups. In 1995 the Illinois state legislature reversed its decision on the previous reform and recentralized educational policy-making by placing power in the hands of Mayor M. Richard Daley. Therefore, control of our nation's third largest school system was, for the first time, placed in the hands of the city's chief executive with virtually no checks and balances from other governmental entities or those served by the schools. Since 1995 many other large-city mayors have sought similar arrangements in their own school systems. The important
question is whether the sweeping change to mayoral control of school systems is superior to other more decentralized reform methods, or if another technique could more effectively aid the students in our urban public schools.

This study examines the history of school politics in Chicago and the impact that the two school reforms have had on those served by the school system: Chicago’s minority student body and the community at-large. The analysis demonstrates how responsive educational policy-makers are to community needs, to whom school policy-makers are accountable when making policy decisions, and how effective the two reforms have been at improving student performance. Empirical data and interviews with Chicago parents, community activists, teachers, and administrators provide the data in this study.

This study finds that parents and community members believe that the 1988 reform, in contrast to the 1995 reform, created a more responsive school administration where administrators felt accountable to those directly served by the schools. Although statistical measures of student performance do indicate some student improvement since 1995, respondents indicate they felt student performance was increasing under the 1988 school reform initiative.
Dedicated to my mother
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION
The Politics of School Reform in Chicago: The Impact of Mayoral Control in the Black Community

Education serves as one of the most important forces in the distribution and redistribution of economic opportunity in the United States. While all children have the right to a public education, the quality of that education varies widely. Because our nation's urban school systems are particularly marked by educational failures and because they serve high proportions of poor and minority children, educational policy decisions are intertwined with the pattern and persistence of racial and class inequality (Katznelson and Weir 1985). Case studies exposing the need to bridge the gross inequalities between our urban and suburban school systems have emphasized the need to lessen the disparities in educational opportunities (Kozol 1991).

The problems associated with urban education are many. A few policy makers, however, have pinned the blame for failing inner-city schools on school boards. Boards have been criticized as financially undisciplined, corrupt, unresponsive, and unaccountable to both the communities that they serve and to the government. Where educational reform efforts to improve administrative structures have been implemented, school boards
have frequently been the focus for improving urban schools in cities such as Chicago, Boston, Cleveland, Baltimore, and Detroit.

Low public confidence in school boards have led mayors, such as Richard Daley of Chicago in 1995, to execute large-scale takeovers of the school board in order to establish direct accountability to the city government. While some would applaud the efforts of big-city mayors to radically reform their school boards, others contend that these efforts are cosmetic and that the financial crises faced by cities are the overriding factor behind the failure of urban school systems. Altering the political control of schools, therefore, would not necessarily remedy the immediate crises that have a serious impact on our urban public school students. Educational policy experts are increasingly finding that that the poor and minority students, those disproportionately served by these urban schools, are consequently at the mercy of an undemocratic educational system (Chicago policy expert interview 6/18/96; Moore 1998). Because these groups have limited political influence, they have become outsiders in decision making despite their status as stakeholders in the education of their children. This trend in urban education clashes with an earlier, and more democratic movement resulting from minority parents' demand for greater community influence in school politics.

At the same time that political reform has been identified as a means of improving urban schools, minority groups have become increasingly influential in big city governments. Scholars have demonstrated that Black and Hispanic political mobilization during the late 1960s and 1970s led to greater minority office holding, and, ultimately,
governmental responsiveness to the minority community’s needs (Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1997; Button 1989; Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984; Karnig and Welch 1980). The fact that minority groups play a more critical role in the governing affairs of cities appears to have complicated school reform efforts. Wilbur Rich (1996) has demonstrated that Black activism in many rust-belt cities during the 1960s and ’70s resulted not only in more minority representation in municipal governments, but in administrative control of school boards and educational policy by the 1980s. However, this control of the school bureaucracy coincided with a declining economy, White flight to the suburbs, and a reduction in federal aid to cities. Because of the reciprocal relationship between economic crises, politics, and public education in post-industrial cities, performance improvements among students have not been evident.

While it is evident that minority incorporation in municipal and educational decisions has been established, the more important issue in urban education is whether minorities will benefit or lose power from the concentration of power into the hands of mayors. The movement favoring mayors in the reform of school boards is taking place as other school reforms such as voucher plans, the privatization of schools, and charter schools are being adopted.¹ While these new reforms have received great attention, an earlier trend in educational policy where educational decisions were transferred from the centralized school system to control by parents and community groups, has largely been forgotten. The rejection of the decentralized and community based reform model may be

¹See Marion Orr’s (1996) study of the Baltimore school system and the privatization of education.
related to Rich’s (1996) findings that community control coincided with a declining city tax base. Blaming the community based model for problems beyond the scope of their influence, a strategy used by opponents of decentralization and community inclusion, could have been premature. The improved fiscal management that many opponents of parental control argued was necessary may result in greater efficiency, but this does not necessarily translate into better school performance. Minorities may hold positions in school system’s bureaucratic organization; however, if decisions are made at the top of the hierarchy without the inclusion of the minority residents served by the system, their incorporation in the system is negligible. Furthermore, intuition tells us that a school system that is unresponsive to those being directly served faces a greater challenge for improvement.

The Chicago Public Schools illustrate two very different philosophical approaches toward urban school reform. The first reform occurred in 1988 and was largely the result of mobilization within the Black community for greater influence in educational decision making in their childrens’ schools. This reform decentralized control of the school system from the school board’s central office to parents and community groups. To the shock of many minority residents in Chicago, in 1995 the Illinois state legislature reversed their decision on the previous reform and recentralized educational policy making. While the 1988 reform had taken power from the school board and granted control to the community, the 1995 legislation centralized power not in the school board, but in the hands of Mayor Richard Daley. Therefore, control of our nation’s third largest school
system was, for the first time, placed in the hands of the city’s chief executive with virtually no checks and balances from other governmental entities, much less those served by the schools.

Since Mayor Daley assumed control of the school system in 1995 many other large-city mayors have sought similar arrangements in their own urban school systems. The important question is whether the very sweeping change to mayoral control of school boards is superior to other more democratic reform methods, or if another technique could more effectively aid the students in our urban public schools. While recommendations as to the best reform method are beyond the scope of this investigation, examining the influence exerted by minority groups under both the previous and current educational administrative structures is instructive and is therefore the primary focus of my research.

In order for steps to be taken to amend some current urban educational problems and design optimal administrative structures, we must understand both the political system in which schools operate and the current prospects for public education. This study examines the history of school politics in Chicago and the impact that two very different educational policy reforms have had on those served by the school system; Chicago’s minority student body and the community at-large. I examine the politics of school reform in Chicago to determine how effective reforms have been, to whom school policy makers are accountable, and how responsive they are to community needs.

My interests are rooted in the minority empowerment literature (Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984; Eisinger 1982); however, while that body of
work emphasizes mayors and city councils as the principal policy actors, I examine the school board as a third policy actor. Although my theoretical framework expands upon the current literature, I have been guided by many of the conclusions reached by these authors. Browning, Marshall, and Tabb (1984) assert that minority group mobilization at the local level can lead to minority incorporation in city governance, and ultimately result in governmental responsiveness to minority residents' concerns. If their findings are accurate, inclusion of Chicago's minority community in educational policy making would produce policies that reflect community concerns. Beyond the beneficial affect this could have on the education received by students, there could be a correlation between involvement in school politics and the interest in higher office seeking. If, in contrast, minorities are locked out of educational decision making, there could be a significant decline in feelings of political efficacy and political participation. Because Chicago's mayor centered administrative structure appears to have limited minority group influence, the impact of such conditions could affect the political system beyond the school house.

In addition to my use of the minority empowerment literature, I also draw upon the findings of educational policy scholars (Byrk et al 1998; Epps 1994; Hess 1995; Orfield 1979; Peterson 1976; Shipps 1995; Sizemore 1981) due to the extensive background information this literature chronicles. These policy experts have traced national and state trends in urban school reform to explain: how and why educational policy philosophies have changed over time; the enduring political issues of power, race, and class in public education; the variety of coalitional partners in educational policy and
their diverse interests; the relative success of different reforms; and the uncertainty about what “equality in education” means. This research is essential for understanding the general climate of school reform nationally and how Chicago has behaved in light of such trends. Combining the minority empowerment literature and the educational policy literature provides a bridge for those of us interested in the future of urban education and the prospects for democratic participation within urban school systems.

In researching the Chicago schools, I examine responsiveness, accountability, and effectiveness under two very different school administrative structures to determine how minority group involvement within the governance structure and among community groups affects urban school administration. Therefore, I study the politics of school reform in Chicago from 1965 to 1999, the period of time that minority political influence has expanded in urban government.

Analytic Approach

One of the central questions that urban politics scholars struggle with is the degree to which politics really matters in large cities (Judd and Swanstrom 1994; Fuchs 1992; Stone 1989; Swanstrom 1985; Peterson 1981). When examining our urban school systems, it is apparent that financial and demographic conditions have given rise to soaring deficits and extreme racial segregation. School boards have been faced with the nearly impossible task of improving student performance with little resources and no real authority to affect change. At the same time, mayors and activists have concentrated their energies on reforming school boards in order to improve performance. Chicago’s shift from a
decentralized school system characterized by community involvement after the 1988 reform act to a centralized system with mayoral control after the 1995 reform act necessitates examination. As our urban school systems suffer, we must evaluate our school reform efforts to assess whether our reforms are truly directed at the root of the problem, or are merely aimed at solving immediate symptoms of our educational crises.

I am interested in determining whether and how the political structure of the school system influences responsiveness to parental concerns, administrative accountability, and overall educational effectiveness. Therefore, my research examines the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts as they address these three issues. I believe that the structure of a school system can profoundly influence subsequent educational policy decisions. By political structure I am referring to the way school board members are selected and the level of parental involvement in educational policy decisions. Are school board members appointed by the mayor in conjunction with community influence and city council confirmation as was the case after the 1988 reform act? Or, does the mayor have complete autonomy in the process as occurred in the wake of the 1995 legislation? Furthermore, does the level of parental involvement in the school system really matter? The 1988 legislation created provisions whereby parents essentially manage each public school. The 1995 legislation, while it did not eliminate all parental involvement in decision making, greatly limited their autonomy and authority. The importance of this post-1995 recentralization of educational power must be examined if we want to understand the significance of parental involvement in their children's education.
The first of my dependent variables in this study is responsiveness and concerns how the needs of minority residents have been met under the 1988 and the 1995 school reform acts, as the Chicago Public Schools serve a majority of Black (54%) and Hispanic (34%) pupils (CPS Race Ethnic Survey 1998). For this variable I consider whether board members act as "delegates" for their constituents, or as "trustees," relying on their personal judgments to determine which policies are best for the school system. Social and political backgrounds of post-1988 appointees versus post-1995 appointees to the school board are also examined to draw conclusions about descriptive and substantive aspects of representation. This examination of responsiveness centers on whom community and minority groups look to for school change. Examining this issue in Chicago schools is interesting given that William E. Nelson's research on the Boston school district found that when school board appointments became the sole responsibility of the mayor in 1996, that members of the Black community saw a reduction in their presence on the board and to its responsiveness to their concerns (Nelson forthcoming).

In addition, responsiveness is considered as it relates to Local School Council (LSC) members elected under the 1988 and 1995 legislation. LSCs were established in the 1988 reform legislation and are elected parent/community based bodies operating in each public school. While the responsibilities of the LSC have been limited since the 1995 legislation was enacted, they perform duties related to the governance of the individual school. I examine voter turnout statistics for biannual LSC elections to determine whether and if participation has fluctuated since LSC responsibilities were limited by the 1995
legislation. Furthermore, I explore the extent to which parents have felt their LSC has been responsive to their concerns and whether sentiments have changed since 1995. I believe that examining LSC responsiveness to parental concerns is important because LSC elections provide the only chance for parents to become electorally involved with school policy in Chicago. Their political participation and perceptions of LSC responsiveness provides important data.

The second of my dependent variables in this study is accountability. In determining accountability under the two school reform initiatives I examine whether school board members are accountable to different interests when operating under different political structures. While the responsiveness element of this research centers on to whom community and minority groups look for school change, the accountability aspect of this study emphasizes whom board members tend to favor in school policy decisions. Whom do members represent in their voting and policy making patterns: the community, municipal politicians, interest groups, business organizations, etc? Interviews with past and present school board members provide valuable information regarding whom members say they are accountable when the school board is appointed solely by the mayor, and when the board appointments involve the community and the city council. Both Ester Fuchs’ (1992) and Martin Shefter’s (1985) research found that interest groups exerted more influence over policy in cities marked by weak and fragmented leadership, and the degree to which interest groups dominated city politics contributed to the city’s fiscal instability. Boards appointed under the 1988 nomination-confirmation system may
have cast votes that catered to, in fact, too many special interests, including teacher's unions, leading the district down the road to fiscal insolvency. The decentralization involved with the 1988 legislation may have involved too many access points for organized interests to exercise their power over school board appointments. Furthermore, the political clout of organized interests in cities may be greater than that of minority residents, making minority involvement less important than perhaps anticipated.

Devolving formal powers to the mayor, however, may also limit the school board's consideration of the city's minority community and limit citizens' access to the people who control city schools. Boards appointed with full mayoral autonomy may increase the business community's control over educational policy, as mayors, even minority mayors, have been shown to be overly responsive to the business community (Stone 1989). Mayors have been openly motivated by fiscal factors to assume control of their cities' school boards, and efficiency, in fact, is a chief aim and general preoccupation of the city's business elite (Peterson 1981). Shipps's (1995) specifically charted the strong influence exerted by Chicago business groups in school politics and has been useful in assessing which structural form of the school board allows business groups to penetrate school politics more profoundly.

Finally, overall effectiveness of the schools under the 1988 and 1995 reforms is evaluated specifically with regard to the quality of education received by students in the Chicago Public Schools. I assess effectiveness by examining various student performance measures to determine whether political structure is related to school performance. In
contrast to the position taken by some urban politics scholars, I believe that political structure plays an important role in the overall effectiveness of the management of urban school systems. While turning control of the school board solely to mayors is likely to improve the management of the district's finances, it is possible that nominated-confirmed boards may better address student performance issues because parental and community involvement is critical to urban educational improvement. If parents, those with firsthand knowledge of children's performance, are involved in the selection of school board nominees and exercise substantial decision making in local school policy, the quality of education may improve.

While gauging effectiveness includes an evaluation of student test performance over time, student attendance statistics, high school graduation rates, high school dropout rates, and composite ACT scores, interviews with parents and community members are also an important source of my effectiveness data. Interviews constitute the majority of this measurement because thorough studies, including recent student performance statistics, have yet to be conducted and because educational policy experts in Chicago have been reluctant to offer their assessment of student achievement under the newly appointed school board due to the scarcity of current data. Interviews were conducted with parents who have had children in the Chicago Public Schools between 1985 and 1999 to understand their feelings about their children's performance and their own involvement in their children's schools under both administrative structures.
School Reform and Its Impact on Minority Power

While my research is motivated by a concern over educational policy and, as Kozol (1991) has correctly labeled it, the "savagely unequal" educational opportunities provided for our urban youth, my findings speak to a number of important ongoing controversies in urban politics. First, I addresses the age old and very broad question of community power (Dahl 1961; Hunter 1953), while extending the issue to minority groups. Do the poor and minorities exert any influence over school policy in their cities? This is an important question in light of the school reform movement and the rapid pace that new policies have been adopted, including city-wide voucher plans or "choice" programs, and the new court-sanctioned retreat of urban districts from their decades-long goal of racial integration. Are minority interests represented in these reforms? Who now directs school policy? Does the re-concentration of power in the hands of the mayor over urban education expand or restrict the political influence of the poor and minorities?

Finally, my research enters the debate as to whether politics matters in urban governments. Does the political form of a school system affect its responsiveness and service? Do school boards perform better when directed by the mayor or when the community is more involved in educational policy making? Noted urban scholar Clarence Stone (1996) maintains the policy role of school boards is "inconsequential." However, if that was so, then why are mayors fighting to assume control of their cities' school boards? Certainly, we must consider the financial aspect of school districts. As scholars have demonstrated, school districts are essential to urban economies, providing large budgets,
many jobs and contracts, and may raise taxes and sell bonds (Rich 1996; Pinderhughes 1987; Peterson 1981; Herrick 1971). The Chicago Public Schools oversee a four billion dollar budget annually, provide an estimated 45,000 jobs, and continue to sell bonds, all of which have a potentially positive impact on the city's economic vitality. Proponents of reform who favor school boards appointed solely by mayors contend that they provide better fiscal management and are more efficient. Efficiency may not result in higher performing public schools, however. Those who believe that political control of school systems and city government make little difference in the distribution and redistribution of political goods, including education, may be correct in a broader sense.

In the end, however, whomever is held responsible for fixing the predicament that urban schools are in, the large disparities in urban and suburban educational systems are beyond the reach of school boards, local school councils, superintendents, and even mayors. School boards may be unfairly targeted for blame for the problems that require urban-suburban, state, and federal cooperation.

Summary of Chapters

This dissertation consists of seven chapters. Chapter two provides an overview of the history of school politics in Chicago. I examine the many stages of reform which have made Chicago a unique case and link them to the most recent reform centering on mayoral control of the school system. Additionally, I include in this chapter a discussion of the literature on which my theories are based, specifically the minority empowerment and
educational policy literatures. Finally, I present the methodological approach that I use in the study.

Chapter three addresses school board politics and educational reform in light of the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts. Here I present the two critical legislative initiatives, the Chicago School Reform Acts of 1988 and 1995. Not only do I address their provisions, I identify the actors and political coalitions involved in both reform efforts.

After discussing the history of school politics in Chicago and the details of the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts, I discuss the impact of these reforms. The next three chapters address the three dependent variables in this study, administrative responsiveness to the community, the accountability of school board members, and the effectiveness of the reform in improving the quality of public education.

Chapter four presents findings related to the responsiveness of school board members. I am especially interested in how the needs of minority residents are met under the 1988 and 1995 school administrative structures. My answer to this question will largely be based on the results of my elite and community member interviews.

The fifth chapter focuses on accountability; are school board members more or less accountable to the different interests involved in school politics when operating under the 1988 and 1995 school reform initiatives? I address this question through an analysis of school board member interviews and educational policy decisions.

The sixth chapter deals with the effectiveness of the two school reform acts. The overall quality of the schools under the 1988 and 1995 school administrative structures is
presented in light of my interview results and analysis of available performance data
including standardized tests scores, attendance statistics, high school graduation rates,
high school dropout rates, and composite ACT scores.

In the final chapter I summarize my findings and discuss their significance in light
of the overall trend favoring reforms granting the executive greater control of public
education.
CHAPTER 2
The Politics of School Reform

I. Introduction

As one of the nation’s largest school systems, Chicago has continuously been influenced by national trends in education. These trends have played a considerable role in determining how Chicago has operated its public schools. Chicago is also unique because while educational policy in Chicago has mirrored general trends in urban education, the city has frequently influenced educational decisions in other cities (Stodghill 1999). The Chicago Public Schools are attempting to reform their schools and manage the political, economic, and racial issues that converge in educational policy. As other cities model their own school systems after Chicago’s, I believe it is necessary for us to evaluate the educational reforms being instituted in Chicago to determine whether those being served by the schools are gaining or losing power in the system as education affects life opportunities.

While Chicago is a path breaker in school reform and shares the general characteristics of other urban school systems, there are unique aspects of the system. There is no mistaking that Chicago’s political machine legacy has influenced educational policy. Public education was used by the machine for political purposes, often resulting in
the manipulation of ethnic minorities, and later racial minorities, to depress political uprisings. While this strategy was successful during much of this century, mobilization within Chicago's Black community beginning in the 1960s was a viable challenge to the established political order. Although many of the distinguishing features of the political machine are absent from today's educational decision-making, similarities remain. This political heritage sets Chicago apart from some other urban areas. Nevertheless, the city has remained a national trend-setter in urban school politics despite its notable political history.

The most recent school reforms in Chicago, the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts, have generated great attention from scholars and policy makers alike. Establishing a parent/community controlled school system, the 1988 school reform act reflected a growing national trend for greater parent involvement in educational policy. Many cities incorporated parts of this act in modifying or reforming their own school systems. The 1995 reform act, which consolidated parental control in the hands of Chicago's mayor, is currently the new model for urban school reform. Elements of this reform have been adopted in several big-cities across the country and are underway in many others.

In this chapter I trace the history of the Chicago Public Schools to establish the foundations of the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts, the two legislative initiatives that are described in chapter three. This history will be framed in light of Chicago's notable political history, and in the national context of educational reform. The educational policy literature provides the framework for the various waves of reform and the position of
Chicago's minority population during times of changes. I also present evidence of the way administrative power in the Chicago schools has been used as a source of political control, specifically with regard to the school board and superintendent. Because my own theoretical framework is based upon the minority empowerment and educational policy literatures, I discuss the foundations of these bodies of work in light of Chicago's educational policy history.

II. Political History

Machine Heritage and Mayoral Leadership From 1930s through the 1970s

Chicago's reputation as an early machine city has become one of its most distinguishing political features. A political machine is a hierarchical, stable political organization that relies primarily on material incentives to build and maintain political support (Gosnell 1967). These incentives, such as patronage jobs, government contracts, and political favors, are offered in exchange for electoral support. From the 1930s onward there exists evidence that the centralized power exercised by the machine was an essential part of Chicago's ability to remain financially stable (Fuchs 1992). Chicago's Democratic political machine established at its inception a constituency of European immigrants. As residential patterns of the city changed during the middle of the century, machine bosses had to also appeal to the city's growing number of Black residents in order to maintain their political control (Grimshaw 1992). Machine support from Chicago's Black community remained strong from the mid-1950s through the 1960s (Pinderhughes 1987).
The machine exerted significant influence over the educational system and this launched a tradition of conflict and political struggle among interested parties in Chicago. School districts oversee an abundance of resources including large budgets, jobs and contracts, the ability to raise taxes and sell bonds (Rich 1996; Pinderhughes 1987; Peterson 1981; Herrick 1971). Examples of machine influence in education have been recorded by several scholars over the years (Grimshaw 1992; Pinderhughes 1987; Peterson 1976). Dianne Pinderhughes emphasized how the machine continuously focused energy on tangible benefits as opposed to substantive educational improvements (1987). Along these lines, she found that the machine provided more teaching positions to White ethnics until the 1950s when the need for Black electoral support made it essential for the machine to allocate jobs to some of the Black teachers. These patronage jobs, along with symbolic appointments of pro-machine Blacks on the school board, served the machine’s political purposes and provided the bare necessities to quiet discontent in the Black community.

Although Chicago’s political machine was established in the 1930s, stable machine leadership is associated with the tenure of Mayor Richard J. Daley (1955-1976). Prior to his mayoral tenure, Daley was chairman of Chicago’s Democratic party. The recognition he received as party chair provided an important asset in his subsequent mayoral victory. However, it was more than his standing in the party that secured his electoral victory. Originally the machine relied on the electoral support of poor White ethnics. However, by the 1950s the machine was forced to deal with several wings that had developed, primarily
the Protestant based “progressive wing,” and the Irish bloc’s “patronage and spoils faction,” (Grimshaw 1992: 19). As Richard J. Daley embarked upon his electoral campaign he encountered the post WWII exodus of White Protestants to the suburbs and a decline in support for the Republican party (Grimshaw 1992:19). To his political credit, he was able to align Blacks behind his campaign and solidify a new machine base. Mayor Daley created an electoral coalition of working class White ethnics and Blacks.

One of the realities Mayor Daley faced during the 1960s was the growing frustration within his Black electoral coalition regarding blatant racial discrimination in the city. The selective benefits Daley distributed in Black wards of the city enabled him to maintain political support and dodge issues of racial discrimination. However, this strategy provided only limited success, primarily because the civil rights movement began mobilizing Blacks during the 1960s. One of the substantive concerns in the Black community was the education of Black children. As residential trends in Chicago continued to segregate Blacks from Whites, the inadequacy of the city’s Black schools became more apparent. Civil rights groups in Chicago and at the national level, began documenting this inadequacy. With the goal of preventing further White flight to the suburbs and retaining his electoral coalition, Daley demonstrated his ability to provide just enough to the Black community without actually addressing the serious issues of discrimination and inequality in public education. However, because the selective benefits offered to Blacks never addressed the substantive concerns of the community, the machine faced many problems after Daley’s death in 1976. The machine politicians who hoped to
continue found themselves unable to quiet Black discontent after his death (Pinderhughes 1987).

**Machine Decline and Mayoral Leadership (1970s and '80s)**

Black voters in Chicago established their growing allegiance for Democratic mayors after the election of Daley in 1955 (Grimshaw 1992). However, the two mayors who followed Daley, Michael Bilandic (1976-1979) and Jane Byrne (1979-83), were unable to exercise the political power of their predecessor. Bilandic was not a capable machine boss and his inability to clear the streets after the blizzard of 1979 proved to be a tremendous political misstep. Bilandic’s neglect of mass transit for the Black community during that blizzard motivated Black opposition to him (Pinderhughes 1987). Mayor Byrne made electoral promises to Black Chicagans, but did not remain faithful once in office (Kleppner 1985).

In addition, Bilandic and Byrne shared their disregard for the Black community in educational policy, primarily in their decisions to appoint fewer Black school board members despite the fact that Blacks were the overwhelming majority of the student body. Overall, race relations, and the neglect of Black substantive concerns in Chicago, remained the same during the post-Daley era (Kleppner 1985). The frustration in the Black community over the clear disregard for the Black electorate would eventually result in the election of Chicago’s first Black mayor in 1983, Harold Washington.

The size of the Black community by the 1980s was 39.5% of Chicago’s population and Blacks represented 38.7% of the voting age population (see Table 2.1 below). The growing frustration with discrimination, segregation, political
unresponsiveness, and all the results of the established racial hierarchy continued during the 1980s. Although the political machine had weakened significantly after Mayor Daley’s death, conditions for Blacks in Chicago remained strikingly similar, especially with the continued neglect of substantive concerns. Black community organizers in Chicago were eventually successful in uniting the large number of Black voters in Chicago behind then Congressman Harold Washington. Due to this support, the election of Washington was made possible (Kleppner 1985). Pinderhughes notes:

Reaching the stage (cognitive liberation according to McAdam 1982) required the black population to focus on racial discrimination, which the city’s mayors had cooperated in facilitating. In a number of policy areas and in issue after issue Daley laid the groundwork, and then Bilandic and Byrne denied the black population increased descriptive representation and aggravated them through the poor foundation and implementation of substantive policy affecting blacks. The constant reassertion of racial hierarchy, of the legitimacy of blacks’ subordination under whites, provoked blacks of a variety of backgrounds and ideological positions to a very rare event in philosophical behavior patterns—almost universal agreement among all blacks on the necessity for black political leadership in the most important political office in the city, the mayor (245).

<table>
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<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
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<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
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<td>576</td>
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<td>63.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980</td>
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<td>758</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data from Kleppner 1985: 67.

Table 2.1 Racial Composition of Chicago’s Voting-Age Population, 1940-1980
Harold Washington’s political experience as a member of the Illinois legislature and the United States House of Representatives undoubtedly strengthened his leadership skills. In addition for his leadership abilities, Washington’s strong Black electoral coalition reflected Nelson and Meranto’s (1977) assertion that group cohesion and political consciousness are also essential for Black electoral success. The importance of his Black constituency for his electoral success was evident in his electoral rhetoric and reflected the strategy of many Black mayoral candidates of appealing to racial issues. The election was not, however, an easy victory. Although he had the solid support of the Black community and a high level of support in the Hispanic community, Washington faced significant challenges. This was especially true during the Democratic primary when he challenged Mayor Byrne and today’s mayor Richard M. Daley. Much to Washington’s advantage, the White vote was ultimately divided by his opponents and resulted in his candidacy in the general election.

The 1983 mayoral general election was more racially charged than the primary. The Republican candidate and former state legislator, Bernard Epton, appealed to White voter fears of a Black mayor by using negative campaign tactics (Kleppner 1985). In contrast to the “Vote Right, Vote White” sentiment among Epton supporters, Washington made appeals based on social issues that addressed the desires of the Black and Hispanic communities such as affirmative action, bilingual education, improving the Chicago schools and the housing authority. While the racially charged strategy embraced by Epton
was not ultimately successful, it appealed to enough White voters and kept the race close. Although results indicated that Mayor Washington captured nearly the entire Black vote, and twenty percent of the White vote, in the end he captured just 51.6% of the total vote (Pinderhughes 1987: 250). As Lublin and Tate have found, the large voter turnout among Blacks, the competitiveness of the race, and the small margin of victory has characterized the election of many city’s first Black mayors (1995). The apparent “social movement” behind Washington’s candidacy would later be instrumental in uniting the Black community around other issues like school reform. Washington’s 1983 victory and 1987 re-election were possible due to his ability to address the substantive issues of his Black and Hispanic supporters, and sympathetic Whites.

Once in office Washington realized that an electoral coalition differs from a governing coalition (Pinderhughes 1987; 1997). Because remnants of the Democratic machine remained in Chicago politics, Washington encountered numerous challenges. Most notably, Washington encountered great opposition from the Democratically-controlled city council during his first term and embarked on what has become known as the “council wars” (Kleppner 1985). Heavily White wards still harbored resentment about Washington’s Democratic primary victory and successfully blocked the mayor from numerous initiatives related to city finances, employment, and educational policy. Nevertheless, Washington’s election strengthened the political rights for many political and racial minorities, affected the number of Blacks holding countywide and statewide
positions, and created a sense of political efficacy among Blacks in Chicago (Pinderhughes 1997).

In relation to education, Washington spoke of becoming Chicago’s “education mayor” and solicited suggestions from the community regarding the shape of school reform. In addition, in 1986 Washington created an “Education Summit” composed of 50 business, community, and school leaders to advance reform proposals and build relationships between disparate interest groups (former activist interview 7/7/98). Washington’s educational vision made a lasting impact on school reform, and was largely responsible for the creation of the 1988 school reform act (see chapter three). After his unexpected death in office on November 25, 1987, his supporters united behind his educational policy vision despite indications that the electoral coalition Washington had created was fractured.

Following Mayor Washington’s death the city council selected alderman Eugene Sawyer to become acting mayor as the council was required to elect one of its 50 members under such circumstances. Sawyer was a seen as a good choice because he was the longest serving Black city council member, and was seen by White colleagues as a candidate who would cooperate with their interests (Grimshaw 1992). Although Sawyer would become acting mayor, Chicago’s Black community was outraged because Washington’s council floor leader and their preferred successor, Tim Evans, had not been selected due to White city council opposition and the support of some Black machine-minded aldermen (Hess 1995). Some members of the Black electorate were frustrated
with Sawyer’s machine compliance and thought a vote for Evans would protect Black substantive interests. The frustration among many in the Black community over the selection of “Uncle Tom Sawyer” to replace Harold Washington signified a return to a less unified Black electorate.

The 1989 mayoral special election reflected a growing electoral divide in the Black community. Richard M. Daley, son of the former mayor became the mayor, defeating Mayor Sawyer in the primary and Tim Evans in the general election. The racial divide that emerged in the 1983 mayoral primary, with two White candidates — Daley and Byrne — dividing White support then was reversed. Black candidates now tend to run against one another and divide the electorate. Mayor Daley has benefited from this trend and by appealing to Hispanic voters to join his White electoral base and secure his victory.

Mayor Daley was successfully re-elected in 1991, 1995, and in February of 1999. To date a successful Black candidate has not emerged to fill the shoes of Mayor Washington.¹


Whereas the political strength exerted by the machine during the elder Daley’s tenure has never been as strong, the current mayor seems to have united machine supporters. Although the death of his father in 1976 has been linked to the decline in the political machine, remnants of the organization have remained alive. The council wars that Harold Washington experienced were only one indication that machine supporters were a strong

¹ Congressman Bobby Rush, a Black Democratic member of Congress, unsuccessfully challenged Mayor Daley in the February 1999 mayoral election. He was unable to mobilize a Black constituency that compared to the 73% Black support received by Harold Washington (Kleppner 1985:218).
force on city council. While a comprehensive study of the new Daley administration has yet to be done, the mayor's goal of centralizing control of the school system is reminiscent of the machine's hierarchical structure.

The machine power wielded by the current mayor is certainly questionable since the political landscape has changed in the city, state, and nation since his father's administration. Demographics have changed in Chicago and created a constituency very different from the White ethnic electoral base during the machine's heyday. The large number of Black and Hispanic voting-age residents requires that candidates design campaigns that appeal to these voters' interests if they wish to create a successful electoral coalition. The concentration of minority residents in the city contrasts with the growing suburban and down-state residents who are electing a disproportionate share of Republicans to state office. Consequently, Republican governors and the growing Republican down-state majority have refused to provide favorable policies for Chicago. This signifies a vast change from the norm under previous Democratic majorities. Across the country big-city mayors have felt the pinch of declining tax bases and reductions in federal aid, causing a reliance on private economic elites for stability. This financial strain has heightened problems in urban education as the city's tax base primarily determines school funding. All big-city mayors, including minority mayors, face the same challenge of maintaining the economic base of their city during very challenging times. Not only are corporations enticed to leave cities in search of tax breaks offered in surrounding suburbs and overseas, but tax middle and upper class tax payers have continuously left the city in
favor of suburban life styles. Although declining tax bases and limits on federal aid to cities challenge all big city mayors, Mayor Daley has been forced to deal with problems in the school system without the political power associated with machine dominance.

On the other hand, Mayor Daley has been very successful in achieving his goals with regard to the school system, notably economic stability and increased academic achievement. In 1995 the Illinois State Legislature granted him control over the school system with very little oversight. Many assumed that this was a scheme developed by Illinois Republicans who had grown frustrated with bailing-out the Chicago schools and who also wanted the Democratic mayor to fail miserably. The typical patronage practices associated with education, always a tremendous resource for mayors due to the public school budget, have become even more important since 1995. Not only has the mayor provided important administration positions to his political supporters and business allies, but privatization of school services have added to Daley’s strength (see chapter three for additional details). Incorporating the business community is an important part of mayoral leadership due to the economic role corporate investment plays in municipal stability. Inclusion in educational policy making is likewise of interest to the business community as they desire an educated work force and general economic stability in the area they are located. The centralization of power we now see in Chicago is reminiscent of powerful machine domination exercised by Richard J. Daley. Across the country Mayor Richard M. Daley is receiving praise from President Clinton and big-city mayors for his educational innovations largely based on the economic stability of the system and the radical new
programs he has introduced (see chapter three for details on the economic stability of the school system).

III. Educational Reform History: The Chicago Case in Perspective

The Progressive Movement

The primary purpose of educational reform during the first part of the century was to purge the school system of patronage and corruption. These early reformers were Protestant and Jewish professionals who believed that fundamental principles of democracy were being violated by the machine and they wanted to remove politics from education (Peterson 1976). The movement these early reformers created came to be known as the progressive movement and advocated professionalism and a centralized bureaucratic educational structure without a connection to politics (Gittell 1998).

Although the place of city politics in education would be different, this concern with the centralization of school administrative structure would return as a theme among reformers in the 1990s.

The machine was concerned with retaining power in the educational sphere because it felt the school system was an essential symbol of "social fabric for economic prosperity," and steadfastly held on to the educational arena (Peterson 1976:18). While progressive reformers sought the support of the community, the machine used its patronage and reward system to keep business, labor, and White ethnics loyal. Consequently, the machine upheld its practice of utilizing the school system for political
purposes to placate those groups it relied on for support and offered opportunities to reformers through jobs, appointments, and contracts in order to quiet potential opposition.

**The Educational Equity Movement**

By 1954 a new wave of educational change was underway in the United States. After the Supreme Court overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson* and declared that intentionally segregated schools were inherently unequal in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), Chicago could not escape the growing attention to racial equality in education. Throughout Chicago's educational reform history the emphasis had been centered narrowly upon institutional issues rather than those of minorities or the modification of school practices (Peterson 1976). Concerns regarding racial equality quickly grew as hundreds of thousands of Blacks migrated from the South to northern cities. This resulted in school supply and teacher shortages and strengthened an already growing trend of racial inequality in urban education (Vander Weele 1994).

At the same time that the Supreme Court issued its unanimous ruling in *Brown*, a new superintendent, Benjamin Willis (1954-1966), was appointed in Chicago. While the *Brown* decision had significant impact in the South, northern cities like Chicago largely avoided the issue as far as their own practices were concerned. Nevertheless, there was a growing focus on racial issues in Chicago, and Willis was opposed to any discussion of these issues as they related to education, which came as no surprise considering the institutional focus of Chicago school policies up until this period. In addition, the appointment of Willis occurred at a time when White ethnics constituted an important
electoral base for the machine. Because education was entangled with machine patronage and preferments, the concerns of these constituents received attention by the machine controlled school system. As an integral part of this process, concerns about the fate of Black students were ignored.

As residential trends continued to segregate Chicago and the Black population of the city continued to grow, racial controversies about segregation in the schools gained momentum. The residential segregation and decline in the city's White population was a trend observed in other northern cities and resulted in many predominately Black schools (Crain 1968). The inadequacy of these predominately Black schools, compared to those schools serving Whites, became a primary concern for civil rights groups in many cities. Chicago's civil rights groups were furious with Superintendent Willis for ignoring the issue of segregated and inherently unequal schooling for Chicago's urban students. Specifically, they complained that Black students were being taught in prefabricated buildings dubbed "Willis Wagons" to avoid placing them into classrooms in White communities. Among the many problems identified in Black schools, there was striking evidence of overcrowding compared to White schools which were underutilized (Pinderhughes 1987).

A new wave of school reform took hold in the United States after Brown (1954) and reached a critical mass by the 1960s. The equity movement centered around equal opportunities in education, and school decentralization, or moving administrative decision-making to the school level (Sizemore 1981). This populist philosophy focused on the
importance of a participatory system and equitable school aid formulas, reflecting the civil rights movement's emphasis on local level issues of racial equality and the need for community involvement at the local school level. Numerous civil rights groups began demanding attention be given to widespread de facto segregation in Chicago.² They believed that political decentralization would have widespread impact and shift the power from city-wide elites to Black and White community groups.

Between the mid-1950s through the 1970s the federal government provided a variety of initiatives to support groups concerned with inequities in educational opportunities. This period began with Brown (1954) and included several financial provisions intended to improve educational opportunities for disadvantaged urban youth. This support was also reflected in federal compensatory funding to equalize education and it matched the philosophy of Johnson's War on Poverty. In addition, the 1964 Civil Rights Act contained provisions that restricted federal aid to school districts found to embrace discriminatory practices (Orfield 1978). The creation of the largest federal education aid package, The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, required that school systems follow civil rights law as a condition for funding. When federal compensatory funding reached its peak in 1978, nine to ten percent of city school system budgets relied on federal funds (Gittell 1998: 155). Although the ultimate success of

²De facto segregation identifies racial segregation in public schools resulting from residential patterns and the placement of school district boundaries rather than segregation required by law (de jure) as was widespread in the South before Brown and appeared in some northern cities too.
federal intervention in reducing educational discrimination is debatable, especially in northern cities, it clearly gave Chicago’s civil rights groups a mechanism of support.

During the early 1960s a number of Black and liberal White community groups in Chicago had merged to form the Coordinating Council of Community Organizations. This new organization, along with the Urban League, contacted the United States Civil Rights Commission to report the continuing segregation within the Chicago school system. A 1963 law suit was settled out of court with the understanding that the school board was to appoint a group of experts to investigate the schools, especially Black schools, to identify race related problems (Peterson 1976). Despite the committee report which recommended immediate integration and decentralization, Willis continued to support the status quo practice of de facto segregation and used this rationale for discriminatory educational patterns. He adamantly denied that there was any segregation in the Chicago schools because children were going to schools in their own neighborhoods (Herrick 1971).

The centralized administrative school system under Superintendent Willis was resistant to making any changes beyond federally mandated investigations of the racial problems within the schools. In fact, as tensions increased due to overcrowded Black schools, Willis decided to use trailers as classroom units adjacent to some Black schools and to move some students to abandoned downtown buildings in order to increase the room available to Black students (Biles 1995). He hoped that these measures would ensure that integration would not occur and that the complaints about the overcrowded
Black schools would be quieted. Willis’s actions represent another example of Chicago’s tradition of avoiding substantive racial issues. Willis embraced the notion of “neighborhood schools” and defended his anti-integration actions based on his commitment to preserving this institution.

White parents who opposed integrating their neighborhood schools accepted Willis’ visions. Mayor Daley (1955-1976) attempted to avoid the integration issue, focusing primarily on the goal of preserving his electoral coalition. Daley’s continual support of Willis and the commitment he expressed to the “neighborhood school” sent the message that Daley was not interested in integration and was catering to Whites, an important part of his electoral coalition (Biles 1995).

Although some racial and ethnic diversity was present among school board members, and these members shared an interest in integrated schools, machine influence in Chicago complicated the process. Mayor Daley’s power and patronage practices with school board members caused even Black members to oppose desegregation due to their machine affiliation, and in some cases, their Black nationalist sentiments (Peterson 1976).

By the middle to late 1960s students in Black and racially mixed high schools demanded more Black administrators, Black studies, and greater community participation. These students staged walkouts, boycotts, sit-ins, and participated in acts of vandalism. Mayor Daley, realizing both that Blacks were an important part of his electoral coalition and that major protests were occurring within the Black community about segregated schools, decided to remove Superintendent Willis in 1965 (Grimshaw 1992). Ultimately, both the
mayor and school board members (both machine and integration supporters) were concerned with racial stability in the city at a time of great unrest in cities throughout the United States. It was evident that some changes needed to be made to end the civil disorder; however, it was feared that instituting an integration plan could contribute to more White flight and this was not an acceptable outcome for the mayor or his school board.

At the time that community protests were peaking in Chicago, increasing demands by the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) emerged due to the bargaining rights they acquired during the 1960s (Vander Weele 1994). Philip Meranto documented the strength exerted by teachers' unions in many metropolitan areas during the 1960s and how their demands for inclusion in educational policy making were inevitable due to the tremendous strength they came to wield (1970). In response to the growing demands placed on the machine-dominated school board and superintendent, some decentralization was finally seen as necessary.

In 1965 community groups went to Washington, DC in an attempt to get enforcement of the 1964 Civil Rights Act's fund withholding provision. The Office of Education subsequently withheld funds temporarily to the Chicago Public Schools until they complied with the stipulations of the act. Unfortunately, this attempt to amend some of Chicago's educational inequalities was largely symbolic due to President Johnson's order to release funds immediately after local Chicago politicians expressed their rage (Peterson 1976). The Daley machine was the largest Democratic organization in the
country and tampering with this powerful group was obviously a political concern for the
president's administration.

Although Mayor Daley had replaced Superintendent Willis in 1966 with James
Redmond, a superintendent who expressed an interest in changing Chicago's segregated
school system, problems for the Chicago Public School administration mounted and
reached a peak between 1967 and 1969. Superintendent Redmond initially recommended
massive changes in the system such as mandatory two-way busing, magnet schools,
educational parks, and financial incentives for teachers working in predominately Black
schools. As mentioned previously, the school board was unwilling to approve such
changes in light of White opposition and the machine's unwillingness to endorse such
drastic measures. At the same time, Black activism continued to mount, especially during
the 1967-68 school year, due to the stagnant nature of educational equality in Chicago
schools. Students organized and staged walkouts, sit-ins, boycotted classes, and
participated in acts of vandalism and arson (Peterson 1976). Despite these clear signs of
discontent among Black students, Mayor Daley's position on school desegregation was
unaffected as Black elected officials also continued to support the mayor.

As concern about segregated schools spiraled unabated, Mayor Daley did feel
compelled to order a plan which consisted of several steps to increase community
decision-making power within the schools, and to increase minority representation in
Chicago's school administration. In response to the rising minority discontent and
growing anti-machine sentiment among progressively minded residents, the mayor
implemented a plan to meet some of their demands. While the 1968 plan included provisions like a community role in the selection of principals and the elimination of the city’s candidacy exams for principals, these changes were primarily symbolic considering that the community role remained limited under the mayor’s plan and the administrative staff was slow in its implementation of the plan’s objectives. Consequently, this plan did not integrate the schools (Peterson 1976).

The symbolic nature of the 1968 changes merits a moment of discussion. Strong support had been expressed for neighborhood schools by individuals like Superintendent Willis and Mayor Daley. Their position on this issue was a strategy primarily intended to prevent the integration of White schools. In contrast, civil rights activists and integrationists had proposed numerous plans intended to end segregation and equalize the educational field for Blacks. These plans included a host of ideas such as two-way busing plans, city-suburban consolidation, and educational parks (Meranto 1970). However, as the civil rights movement was winding down at the national level and resistance to integration grew among powerful Chicago interests like the mayor, the school board, business groups, and the White component of Daley’s Democratic machine, integrationists altered their goal. The new focus became community control of neighborhood schools or

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3 Two way busing was the idea of both moving Black students to predominately White schools and White students to predominately Black schools. City-suburban consolidation was considered as a way to work with the large suburban White school population and to deal with the declining tax base that was harming the city due to White flight. Educational parks were the campus like settings intended to replace the neighborhood schools and to offer all students equal educational opportunities regardless of race or socioeconomic background.
decentralization of decision-making in these majority Black schools. This was seen as the only realistic alternative left for reformers; however, it is interesting that the focus on neighborhood school control became a primary concern for reformers given that this was a position taken earlier by those who fought integration.

The 1968 decentralization initiative offered a decision-making shift only at the lowest level of educational decision-making for community groups. However, decentralization demands were not only addressed by the mayor at the community level in the 1960s. Mayor Daley was also forced to create a new way of dealing with the CTU due to its strength and demands for more decision-making power. As labor strikes were under way the mayor began intervening and negotiated settlements in the union’s favor by using financial gimmicks. In order to fund the settlements the mayor was forced to borrow from future years’ tax receipts. Mayor Daley “managed to keep the schools open throughout the 1970s by settling teachers’ strikes with promises of money the system did not have, convincing legislators to make minor changes in state aid, and asking bankers to ignore the unusual accounting and financial procedures used to keep the district’s bond ratings high,” (Shipps 1997:88). Because the mayor had power in the Democratically-controlled state legislature, he was able to ensure that they allocated acceptable amounts of money to the school system or ignored any financial blundering that occurred (Shipps 1997). This type of financial blundering resulted in Chicago’s 1979 financial collapse when it was realized by bondholders that their money was being used to re-pay previous loans and that routine educational operations were funded by accounts earmarked for
long-term loans (Vander Weele 1994). This financial blundering would haunt the school
system for years to come and ultimately contributed to an ongoing budget deficit that
Mayor Daley Jr. would inherit in 1995.

The Decline of the Equity Movement

By the late 1970s the emphasis among school reformers was no longer on integration and
racial equality. The Chicago school authorities had agreed that progress toward
desegregation had been sufficient to justify suspending the state regulations which
required involuntary reassignment of students if voluntary efforts failed (Orfield 1979). In
addition, the federal government was relaxing its position on segregation in schools. Due
to the Supreme Court’s failure to establish criteria for desegregation in both Brown and
the subsequent Brown II (1955) decisions, several momentous court decisions followed
and essentially reinforced the separate but equal aspects of Plessy v. Ferguson (Orfield
and Eaton 1996). In the 1971 Supreme Court case Swann v. Charolette-Mecklenburg
Board of Education the court decided that desegregation did require actual transportation
of children, Black and White, to new schools in order to desegregate schools. While this
decision did push some federal judges in the North to order busing programs in urban
areas, the trend toward facilitating integration was short lived as the Supreme Court issued
a series of rulings which opposed busing and integration initiatives.

The most influential of these early reversals of Brown was Milliken v. Bradley
(1974) in which the court blocked interdistrict and city-suburban desegregation plans to
integrate racially isolated city schools (Orfield and Eaton 1996: xxii). The justification for
this case was that unless segregated residential patterns resulted directly from state or suburban actions, mandatory metropolitan integration initiatives were not necessary. This decision severely limited integration attempts in northern cities like Chicago. In addition, funding for the Emergency School Aid Act of 1972, the only federal program designed to fund integration efforts, was eliminated in 1981 under President Reagan's administration.

As the issue of equity in schooling lost momentum at both the national level and in Chicago, the idea of school-based management took hold in the 1980s. Numerous scholars have provided evidence that as the focus on integrating urban schools declined, an emphasis on local control of neighborhood schools emerged among urban schools (Meranto 1970; Orfield and Eaton 1996; Peterson 1976; Sizemore 1981). The purpose of this change in objectives was to ensure that poor and minority urban students would have access to similar educational opportunities as those of White students in wealthy suburbs. Orfield and Eaton (1996) argue that this shift in focus mirrors the separate but equal aspect of *Plessy v. Ferguson*.

Underlying this new wave of reform in Chicago during the late 1970s, the school system's financial crisis in 1979 generated strong concerns about the economic stability of Chicago Public Schools. The 1979 fiscal crisis peaked as the district declared bankruptcy, the CTU went on strike, and Mayor Jane Byrne (1979-82) was unable to negotiate union settlements using traditional machine strategies like Mayor Richard J. Daley had. The

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3School or site-based management can be characterized as "a program or philosophy adopted by schools or school districts to improve education by increasing the autonomy of the school staff to make school site decisions," (White: 304 in Caldwell).
Board of Education, the mayor, the governor, legislative leaders, and bankers developed a bail-out scheme to keep the schools open (Kleppner 1985). One aspect of this plan was the creation of the School Finance Authority (SPA) which was responsible for the oversight and approval of the budget and was to remain intact until there were six consecutive balanced budgets (Wong and Sunderman 1994). In addition, this five person oversight committee was comprised of businessmen and attorneys appointed for fixed terms by the mayor and the governor (Shipps 1997). The plan also provided some additional funds, required budget cuts, and allowed the mayor to replace any or all of the Board of Education members (Kleppner 1985). While the financial crisis was temporarily settled, it would reemerge again in 1993. In the interim, reforms during the 1980s, which emphasized decentralization and school site management, were getting underway in Chicago.

**The Educational Excellence Movement**

In 1983 the National Commission on Education released its report, “A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform.” This report cited alarmingly low levels of student achievement and failing schools across the country. In response, a national shift in reform objectives emerged, centering on excellence and achievement by emphasizing things like: graduation requirements, teacher testing, merit pay, increasing standardized testing, and tightened state curricula standards (Gittell 1998).
The excellence movement coincided with the growing support for a decentralized school administration. Equality and school integration had lost so much support that minority activists in Chicago were forced to abandon their original goals and focus on improving conditions for their own children's neighborhood school. School decentralization and community control were established in the city through the 1988 school reform act (see chapter three). One of the reasons for the reversal of the community control model resulted from critics' accusations that this method of decentralized community control was not producing enough student test score achievement to justify continuation. This criticism was one cause for the reversal of the 1988 school reform legislation and replacement with the 1995 centralized mayoral model. This happened despite extensive evidence that the results of reform often need more time to appear and that test scores are not the most reliable measure of student achievement. The emphasis on excellence in education and reliance on test scores to monitor student achievement continues to this day and will be discussed in detail in later chapters.

IV. School Board Politics

The Chicago Public Schools system, like many other urban school systems, is monitored by a number of political regulations and mandates. Federal and state laws, court decisions, consent decrees, and administrative codes all place restrictions on the way in which the school system operates (Wong and Sunderman 1994). These regulations tie the educational system to governmental bodies and create a situation of political oversight.
The fact that public schools rely heavily on state aid for educational funding increases the emphasis placed on school system compliance with governmental requirements.

In the area of educational reform, parents, tax payers, teachers, community organizations, business associations, racial/ethnic groups, unions, and students are just some of the actors who can be observed as competitors in this political process. In Chicago, many of these groups have long histories of vying for educational resources.

While some contend that school boards "have relatively minor policy roles everywhere," this assertion is not accurate in the Chicago case (Danielson and Hochschild 1998; see also Stone 1998; 1996). Stakeholders in Chicago have either fought for control of the school board or attempted to gain substantive or descriptive representation on the board, demonstrating that the board does have some value. This intense interest in school board control stems from the board’s influence over school district budgetary decisions, employment guidelines, curricula decisions, and policies that directly affect the lives of students. Although the minority empowerment literature emphasizes mayors and city councils as principal policy actors, I examine the school board as a third policy actor. I believe that the position of the school board has continuously been a major source of political power in Chicago. In fact, Chicago has a history of attempts to remedy educational problems through altering administrative structures by changing board sizes or terms of appointment, adjusting the racial balance among board members, and firing superintendents (Vander Weele 1994). These tactics have been used to increase representation of certain groups and temporarily quiet their demands. Furthermore, the
focus on the school board in the most recent pieces of school reform legislation substantiates my assertion that school boards do matter in educational policy.

The Mayor, the Black Community, and the School Board

Two general patterns are evident in Chicago's school board politics: the strong relationship between the mayor and the school board and the frustration expressed within the Black community over educational policy decisions that result in its exclusion or neglect. The Mayor of Chicago has always had control over nominations for school board members. One of the reasons for the appointment of the board rather than election is because elections were thought to limit membership on the board to those individuals able to run a successful electoral campaign (Chicago policy expert interview 6/18/98). Placing board appointment responsibility in the mayor's office, because he is the only elected official accountable to the entire city, has always been seen as the preferable alternative. Until the 1995 reform act all school board nominees required city council confirmation to ensure that corruption and patronage could be negated in board selection. Given the political heritage in Chicago, the idea of city council confirmation was largely irrelevant for most of the century due to machine dominance on the council. The other theoretical safeguard against corruption was the requirement of a nominating commission for board appointments. This advisory body was, except for the brief period from 1988 to 1995, selected by the mayor (Herrick 1971). For this reason, the nominating commission has not been an anti-corruption mechanism for the vast majority of time.
Black membership on the school board, as in other municipal institutions, was limited for most of the century. Michael Homel's work indicates that between 1910 and 1940 Blacks sought to increasing their numbers on the board (1984). In 1939 the first Black board member, Midian O. Bousfield, was appointed. However, any substantive improvements for Black students were blocked by the White and machine-controlled board majority. Pinderhughes pointed out that the appointment of the first Pole in 1894 and the first Italian in 1927 provides evidence of the racial hierarchy in school politics (1987). Beginning in 1944, Blacks held at least one position on the school board, a level of representation that in no way reflected the growing proportion of Black students (Herrick 1971).

During the administration of Richard J. Daley (1955-1976), school board members were selected largely due to their machine allegiance. In fact, board members were threatened with removal if they operated against his wishes (Vander Weele 1994). Daley's tenure coincided with a number of very important changes. The first was the growth is White flight to surrounding suburbs. This caused concern for the mayor, especially with regard to his electoral coalition and the city's tax base. Not only did changes in demographics become evident, but the civil rights movement and the equity movement in education reform also came to fruition. Although Daley did appoint Black board members, they were machine supporters and shared a common concern for preventing the flight of Whites from the city. This was in direct opposition to the
desegregation initiatives that Black community members were fighting for during the 1960s (Kleppner 1985).

Although the position of superintendent was eliminated under the 1995 school reform legislation, this position was historically important in Chicago for several reasons. First, superintendents were selected by the school board which made them accountable to the board of education and indicated a shared educational philosophy. The superintendent's system-wide oversight duties and policy initiatives were not only consistent with school board interests, but the individual in this powerful position was able to shape the goals of the school system. The second reason for the importance of this position was because selection for this high-profile position became increasingly political as educational inequalities eventually reached a peak. A trend eventually emerged in Chicago whereby the racial background of the superintendent would become important and serve as a method of providing a selective benefit to the Black community. The decision to appoint Black superintendents became a strategically important political decision which was balanced with finding a Black candidate willing to reflect the philosophical background of the school board. From the middle 1950s through the early 1990s, Chicago's superintendents would reflect the political struggle over the school system and the quest for minority incorporation in the policy process.

Superintendent Willis (1954-1966) was appointed by the school board just before Mayor Daley took office. Willis' resistance to desegregation and emphasis on the neighborhood school as ways to maintain the support of the White population were
embraced by Daley. Although Willis was forced to resign in 1966, it was always clear that Daley backed Willis until the superintendent's discriminatory policies mobilized the Black community. After Willis, a trend in school board politics would emerge. This trend was that the superintendent, a leader selected by the board itself, would change repeatedly. Each successive appointment would go against the choice of the Black community and reflect their collective growing dissatisfaction with educational policy.

Superintendent Redmond (1966-1975) took a very different approach concerning the discontent in the Black community over educational policy. Redmond's term coincided with federal intervention due to segregation in the school system and protest in the Black community. Although he introduced a compulsory desegregation plan in 1968 with the initial support of the board, public outcry and machine opposition eventually forced board members to vote down the plan. Redmond eventually resigned in 1975 due to his inability to fight the board's racial stabilization objective (Vander Weele 1994; Kleppner 1985). Redmond's term signified the first shift toward equalization of educational opportunities due to mobilization in the Black community and increasing federal mandates regarding educational inequalities. The decision to appoint Redmond, an individual who advocated desegregation, indicated that the school board's desire for a more egalitarian superintendent and someone who would be seen as an advocate in the Black community. Despite his attempts to alleviate the disparities in education based on race, Redmond was unable to defeat the politically powerful regime which favored maintaining the status quo in education.
Redmond’s successor, Superintendent Hannon (1975-1979), attempted to initiate some “antiseptic integration” plans after the state board of education threatened to pull state and federal funding if the school system remained segregated (Kleppner 1985). The plan under this superintendent and his board outraged Black community members when they learned that the plan only went as far as providing closed-circuit television interaction between students of different races and meetings with these students in non-school facilities to work on projects. Hannon’s selection indicated the school board’s desire to return to a less progressive superintendent. While Willis had been too obvious in his desire to maintain a segregated school system, Redmond was too radical in his desire to redesign the school system. For these reasons, Hannon apparently struck a temporary balance for the board. Mayor Jane Byrne supported Hannon’s plan as it protected the neighborhood and clearly maintained segregated schools. Hannon eventually resigned as the 1979 school financial crisis came to a head.

Hannon’s successor was a White woman, Angeline Caruso (1979-1981), who many Black activists believed was the wrong choice as there were plenty of qualified Black candidates (Vander Weele 1994). The discontent in the Black community over the selection of superintendents who did not initiate policies that improved conditions for their children became a strong force and school boards became increasingly aware of the need to alter their selection process to reduce racial hostilities. Superintendent Caruso was the interim appointee until 1981 when the board selected their first Black Superintendent, Ruth Love (1981-1985) who had experience in the Oakland, California school system.
This appointment was a symbolic choice for the board for several reasons. First, it was evident that the board needed to choose a Black superintendent due to the frustration expressed by Blacks over Caruso’s appointment. Rather than selecting the choice of the Black community, Manfred Byrd, who was a deputy superintendent with relevant experience, the board selected Love, an outsider to the Black community. Love broke with all five Black board members over a 1982 mandatory busing plan that they favored. What ensued were attempts in the Black community to force the resignation of Love after Blacks had mobilized and elected Harold Washington in 1983 (Pinderhughes 1987). Love did eventually resign, stating that Mayor Washington forced her out because she did not endorse him in the 1983 election (Vander Weele 1994).

Just as the Black community made the election of Mayor Washington possible, so too did their support for Manfred Byrd push his selection by the board. Substantive concerns among Black parents were addressed by Byrd and he was endorsed throughout the community. While Ruth Love was the first Black superintendent, Byrd was the first superintendent to meet the descriptive and substantive needs of the Black community. Given Chicago’s history of suppressing the desires of the Black community in educational policy, Byrd’s selection reflected the growing political mobilization and subsequent incorporation of the Black community. However, the significance of Byrd’s Superintendency was not long lived. A machine strategy emerged where only outside Blacks who were unknown and unaccountable to the Black community were given the important role of superintendent.
When the 1988 school reform legislation took effect in 1989, Mayor Richard M. Daley (1989-present) was given the responsibility of appointing a seven member interim board of education to replace the previous eleven member board. While the Washington administration reflected a commitment to minority incorporation in policy making to improve the level of responsiveness to minority concerns, the Daley administration reverted to the usual commitment to symbolic gestures to quiet the Black community. The interim board did not require city council confirmation or community endorsement; making members completely accountable to the mayor. Although the Black community fought to prevent Byrd’s departure, the new board brought in an outsider, Ted Kimbrough, as the new Superintendent. Kimbrough (1989-93), was a Black administrator from the Compton, California unified school system. Community members argued that his credentials were not adequate (his resume was found to be fraudulent), and that the failing Compton school system had only 5% of Chicago’s enrollment, making his experience inadequate (Vander Weele 1994). In addition, Kimbrough was not supportive of the decentralized school reform initiative that Blacks had fought so hard to achieve.

Under pressure from the community, the school board, and the media’s coverage of Kimbrough’s excessive spending habits, he resigned in 1993. Superintendent Kimbrough, similar to Love, descriptively represented the Black community; however, these individuals’ policy positions reflected the mayoral administration with which they coexisted. The school board in 1993 was reflective of the community due to the 1988 legislation which included a mechanism for community nomination of board members.
(through the School Board Nominating Commission which will be discussed in chapter three), and required city council confirmation of the mayor's selections. When Mayor Daley's interim board was replaced in 1990, the board increasingly reflected the Black community in terms of numbers and their substantive educational policy concerns. The search for Kimbrough's successor resulted in the selection of Argie Johnson, the choice of the community and not the mayor. Johnson remained superintendent until the most recent reform in 1995 when the position of superintendent was eliminated and replaced with a CEO. The changes brought about by the 1995 legislation and the affects of these changes will be discussed in chapter three.

The superintendents discussed in this section reflected shifts in the balance of power between administrations concerned with maintaining unequal educational policies, and community groups determined to equalize educational opportunities. The apparent school board compromise to select Black superintendents who would not respond to the needs of the Black community was unsatisfactory to community groups who fought for substantive policy results. In contrast, Superintendents Byrd and Johnson were strongly endorsed by the Black community, and represented a true shift toward minority substantive representation. Although tenure for both individuals ended due to the alterations in school board structure, they were notable due to their commitment to endorsing policies that directly responded to concerns in the minority community. This was especially true in Johnson's case as she was the superintendent selected under the
stipulations of the 1988 school reform legislation which increased community input in
school administration.

Several conclusions can be drawn from Chicago’s school board politics. One of
the most apparent features is the control the city’s mayor has almost consistently had over
educational policy. Machine politicians took full advantage of their control over
education. However, after the death of Daley in 1976, the reality of racial discrimination
and budgetary constraints would fracture the balance that had previously been established.
Mobilization in the Black community over issues related to inequality and segregated
education increased Blacks’ descriptive, and at times, substantive representation on the
board. In addition, Black bureaucrats in the school system multiplied during the 1960s
and 1970s. However, this did not result in the equal educational opportunities or the
desegregation that community groups advocated fiercely during the 1960s and 1970s. It
was not until 1985 that machine influence on Black board members truly declined or that a
Black superintendent substantively worked to improve opportunities for Black students.
This was, as Rich explained, happening at a time when financial conditions provided a real
challenge for Black administrators due to the declining tax base in the urban areas where
Blacks were gaining political control. Additionally, as the excellence movement emerged
in the 1980s, school systems under Black administrative structures did not measure-up
well.
V. Minority Empowerment and Educational Policy

While the minority empowerment literature constitutes the theoretical frame of my study, the educational policy literature has helped me document the impact of minority incorporation on Chicago's educational policy during different waves of educational reform. The minority empowerment literature followed the growing Black and Hispanic political mobilization during the 1960s and 70s and how this resulted in greater minority office holding and responsiveness to substantive concerns (Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1996; Button 1989; Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984; Karnig and Welch 1980). Because my research is centered around Chicago's Black community involvement in educational policy decisions, this literature provides the background for understanding mobilization and incorporation of minorities in Chicago. Browning, Marshall, and Tabb's 1984 research on minority political involvement, Rich's (1996) findings on Black incorporation in educational policy, and Fuchs' (1992) assertion that internal politics and economics drive policy decisions have all shaped my work.

Although many authors concerned with minority empowerment have rejected pluralism (Hero 1992; Reed 1988; Parenti 1970), Browning, Marshall, and Tabb (1984) adopted elements of pluralism in their 1984 research. Pluralism, most commonly associated with Dahl's 1961 research on New Haven, is characterized by an open system where influence is varied and there are multiple points of access into the political system. Individuals have the opportunity to participate regardless of their personal, economic, or political situation. Although resources may vary according to things like financial situation, organizational
strength, a cohesive voting block, the system does not discriminate based on such criterion. There are also multiple group identities under pluralism, indicating that individuals may move from one group to another while retaining a connection to the former group. The bottom line with pluralism is that each and every interest is capable of organizing and defending itself and that no one group dominates specific outcomes.

Browning, Marshall, and Tabb (1984) worked within the pluralist parameters to identify ways minorities can become a significant political force. By examining the struggles of minority groups in ten California cities for political access and responsive policies, they found that mobilization (protest, electoral participation, or combination), can lead to minority political incorporation and ultimately policies which are responsive to minority concerns. They argue that pluralism is relevant because the political system is opened; when minority groups align themselves with liberal Whites they are able to have influence over the political process. In addition, they explain that resources such as organizational strength are introduced by these groups. Finally, they believe that the alliances minority groups (particularly Blacks) make with liberal Whites demonstrate that race is just another of the identities that can be transcended.

The 1988 school reform initiative in Chicago reflected the minority empowerment model because the mobilization surrounding the election of Harold Washington led to greater community incorporation in city governance and responsive policy, especially in terms of school reform. Washington not only responded to the concerns of his Black electorate in general, but he specifically focused on greater minority involvement in educational policy through increasing racial diversity on the school board and mobilizing Black parents around the
education of their children. My own methodological framework, as discussed in the following section, reflects the aforementioned Browning, Marshall, and Tabb (1984) empowerment progression in light of educational policy responsiveness in Chicago. In addition, just as Mayor Washington was able to bring some Whites into his electoral coalition, the 1988 reform law required that Blacks unite with White liberals over educational policy reform. This fits Browning, Marshall, and Tabb's (1984) coalitional characterization. However, the break-up of this coalition by the time of the 1995 school reform reflects the theories of anti-pluralists who assert that these coalitions are usually short-lived and ultimately result in the disempowerment of the minority coalitional partner (Hero 1992; Reed 1988; Parenti 1970).^5

Rich's research has found that as Blacks were incorporated in municipal governments during the 1960 and 1970s, they increasingly became the dominant force in educational policy as school board members and superintendents. Again, this coincided with declining economic tax bases in urban areas across the country. While control of a school district is an important political resource due to a large budget, employment opportunities, and ability to raise money, Blacks were incorporated at a financially inopportune time. Black administrators have been forced to contend with declining federal funding for education, White flight to the suburbs which reduces the city's tax base, Black teachers being lured to the suburbs, and a large impoverished student body.

The challenge for minority groups making educational policy decisions has been complicated due to the social, political, and economic issues that manifested themselves as

^5See also Keiser 1997; Pinderhughes 1997; Sonenshein 1997 for more details on failed racial coalitions.
Blacks assumed control of school systems. Reversing the downward educational achievement trends in large urban school systems has frequently not been accomplished. When the excellence movement emerged during the 1980s, large urban school systems were not evaluated favorably because they were incapable of adequately addressing problems, much less ensuring student achievement.

Although the Chicago school system was not evaluated by Rich, it matches his findings in several important ways. First, Blacks were increasingly represented on school boards and in the school administration during the 1960s and 1970s. The 1988 school reform act occurred only after the Black electoral coalition responsible for Harold Washington's election united after his death to push through a community centered school reform. As chapter three will detail, the financial strain faced by the city and the school system, would critically challenge the newly empowered minority community. Correspondingly, achievement in light of operating cost obstacles would present problems.

My research has also relied upon the finding by Ester Fuchs (1992) that politics and economics matter in policy decisions. Earlier research by Peterson (1981) indicated that the economy of the city is of primary importance and guides local political decisions. In contrast, Fuchs believes that political structures develop over time and constrain policy choices. Fuchs disagrees with Peterson's assertion that economic conditions drive all local political decisions. Essentially, she thinks that fiscal conditions and political outcomes are interconnected and inseparable. She compared the political and economic histories of Chicago and New York to demonstrate that political decisions are multifaceted and that
these cities have addressed social, economic, and political conditions differently. These approaches have produced very different results between the cities. Mainly, political decisions in New York led the city to near default in 1975, and decisions in Chicago maintained stability during the same era. This comparison is useful in light of my research in Chicago and because it demonstrates that political outcomes are measured by more complex indicators than mere economics.

Fuchs makes several comparisons among the cities based on: past budget decisions, the local party organization (and history of machine), interest group or pluralist demands, relations with other branches of government, the formal structure of the local government and the relative strength of the mayor. She attributes Chicago's relative stability to decisions made as early as the 1930s, frequently revolving around the city's ability to balance the demands of interest groups. After the Depression the political machine quickly centralized political control of the city. The party machine organized wards and distributed patronage and preferments to quiet demands of constituents. The machine's ability to deflect or suppress interest group demands greatly contributed to the city's economic stability in the years to come; including stakeholders outside the purely economic realm.

Another related component in Chicago was the strength of the mayor. Because the mayor was the machine boss and the city council was also machine based, the agenda was tightly controlled. This was especially true during Mayor Daley's tenure (1950's - 1976). The city/machine also had strong links to the state government and the national
Democratic party. Financial arrangements from the state allowed Chicago to receive services from special districts, tax at a different rate than the state of Illinois, impose a residency requirement on city employees to maintain a residential tax base, and get the state to cover welfare benefits for city dwellers. The federal government provided funds to the city (especially during Johnson's Great Society programs) that could be used by the machine for its purposes. Presidents Kennedy and Johnson were very much aware that the voting block in these large northern industrial cities were essential for their own political aspirations. Therefore, they were pleased to unite with the machine.

Although there was some political confusion after Daley's death (the mayor's office changed hands regularly, bond ratings dropped temporarily), the city has remained capable of limiting interest group demands. These demands have been suppressed by the machine, or through the ability of an individual like Harold Washington to address the needs and interests of underrepresented groups. Grimshaw (1992) examined the relationship between the Black community in Chicago and the political machine. Mayor Daley was successful in courting Black electoral support into the early 1960s. Even as Black support declined and his electoral coalition shifted to a White ethnic, working and middle class base, he maintained support in a few Black "plantation wards," (120). However, by the 1983 mayoral election the Black community had united behind Harold Washington. This unity, in addition to placing the first Black mayor in Chicago, condensed the political demands placed on the city.

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6Plantation wards were Black wards controlled by White ward bosses (Grimshaw 1992).
What is striking about the Chicago case is that even though machine strength has waxed and waned, mayoral control remains relatively strong (especially in control over budget). Even today we can see the mayoral power exercised by Mayor Daley Jr. in his complete control of the budget, continued deflection of costs (transportation-hospital), and control over the appointment of the school board. More impressive is the fact that the current mayor has successfully balanced the Chicago Public School’s budget, an accomplishment others were unable to achieve since the 1979 financial crisis hit the school system and left them bankrupt. Browning, Marshall, and Tabb’s (1984) neo-pluralist analysis suggests that if minorities mobilize for greater political incorporation, that responsive policies may emerge. However, the sustainability of responsive policy making is uncertain. Given Chicago’s political history, minority incorporation after the election of Mayor Washington did result in responsive policies, especially in educational policy. The insustainability of favorable educational policy for minority residents became a reality with the 1995 school reform initiative. Along the lines of Rich’s (1996) research, the reversal in policies favorable to minorities should come as no surprise given the economic strains that accompanied the increase in minority control of large urban school systems. These economic strains, combined with other extraneous political factors, created a tremendous barrier to the continuation of educational policies that responded to the desires of Chicago’s minority community.
VI. Methodology

Because the political and educational systems have historically blocked minority groups from full participation, the road to incorporation has been challenging. In our democratic system, participation and representation are assumed rights. However, while our urban education systems serve large numbers of minority students, history demonstrates that minority incorporation in educational policy has been limited. Looking at the vastly different educational reform initiatives in Chicago, I examine the impact of the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts as they pertain to minority incorporation in educational policy making. This is important because there has yet to be study that determines whether minorities gain or lose power under the centralized mayoral school administration established in 1995. As other urban school systems follow Chicago’s lead, they must understand the ramifications of their decisions for the minority population.

I evaluate the 1988 decentralized and community based reform initiative in comparison to the 1995 centralized mayoral system in the three areas of responsiveness to parental concerns, administrative accountability, and overall educational effectiveness. Accordingly, the independent variables in this project are the 1988 and the 1995 school reform acts. Both pieces of legislation applied vastly different philosophies to urban school reform. The 1988 legislation implemented a system designed to involve parents and community members in educational policy making while limiting the role of the school board’s central office. In contrast, the 1995 legislation created a more cohesive school
decision-making apparatus by centralizing administrative authority in the hands of the mayor and emphasizing fiscal responsibility.

I base my analysis of these two legislative initiatives on documentary findings, interview data, and participant observation. Documentary evidence from the school board archives and research foundations have provided extensive information related to the performance of the school system over time. In addition, newspaper and other print media reports on school reform in Chicago have also been used to analyze the two school reform acts.

In addition to reviewing secondary sources, I have conducted 46 interviews with the principal actors in Chicago’s urban school politics between June 1998 and March 1999. These actors include current and former school board members, past and present local school council members, teachers, parents, community/ minority group activists, central office administrators, and policy analysts. Taken together, these interviews provide substantial information for my three dependent variables (responsiveness, accountability, and effectiveness).

My sample of respondents resulted from contacts I made with several individuals who reside in Chicago, are politically active, and are also knowledgeable about school reform in the city. I described my research concerns to these people and inquired whether they could refer me to others who could represent the groups I intended to include in my study. This technique was very useful in obtaining community and parent

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7Dr. William E. Nelson, Jr. assisted tremendously in my search for politically active Chicago residents.
interviews. My interviews with administrators and other elite respondents were largely the result of regular visits to the central office and letters requesting interviews with such actors. Although my sample size is limited and a selection bias issue is introduced based on my method of locating respondents, I believe my research provides very valuable information. While I do not contend that my interviews reflect the views of the entire community, they do reflect instructive perspectives on school reform in Chicago from a group of very knowledgeable and active individuals. I have omitted or changed the names of all respondents with the exception of elected officials or school board members. However, when these elite respondents requested their comments remain “off the record,” I omitted their names from their statements. This was done to ensure that respondents would feel comfortable expressing their views during their interviews.

Participant observation has provided an additional component in my research. During 1998 I attended a mathematics workshop at Foster Elementary School for parents and educators, participated in an eight hour local school council training workshop, spent a half a day at both King High School and Price Elementary Schools, and attended a meeting held by Parents United for a Responsible Education (PURE) and the Center for Law and Education entitled “What Makes a Good High School.” Taking part in these events allowed me to meet and interact with individuals working on behalf of Chicago Public School students. Not only did I find people willing to be interviewed, but I gained a better sense of what these people are striving for.
I base this study around the fact that school politics is deeply connected with educational and occupational opportunities provided to public school students. Because our urban school serve a disproportionate number of minority and poor students, educational policy is truly intertwined with the larger societal aspects of racial and class inequality. Because public education is so important, I examine the impact of different forms of educational governance in Chicago to determine the affect of different models of administrative control on the minority community. My independent variables, the 1988 and the 1995 school reform acts, provide divergent models of school governance and administrative control of the school system. One of my primary hypotheses is that the community involvement and decentralized control provided in the 1988 school reform act was beneficial to the minority community and brought them closer to the pluralist ideal of empowerment, inclusion in policy creation, and the implementation of responsive policies. Furthermore, I believe that an environment which is conducive to parent and community involvement will not only result in responsive policy-making, and school board members who are accountable to the community, but improved student performance.

In contrast, the centralized administrative structure associated with the 1995 reform, while it may increase financial and overall municipal efficiency, has probably disempowered the minority community by limiting their involvement with the education of their children. Therefore, I believe that policy-making that responds to the needs and interests of the minority community is less likely to occur under this model. In addition, it is unlikely that school board members will be accountable to the community if there is no
direct link between the board and the community. Under the current reform initiative
Mayor Daley alone has control over the board. And finally, it is my belief that student
performance is unlikely to demonstrate long-term improvement with the exclusion of the
minority community in the governance process. Evaluating these hypotheses is essential
because Chicago’s 1995 reform is being emulated in urban areas across the country
including, Detroit, Boston, Cleveland, and Baltimore. If my hypotheses are correct,
mayoral control may provide some serious set-backs for minority empowerment in
American cities.
CHAPTER 3
Stakeholders in the Political Process, Community Influence, and Educational Reform

I. Introduction

Clarence Stone believes that placing blame on school systems for failing students does not get to the heart of problems in urban education. His theory of civic capacity posits that when diverse groups in society are united behind community problem solving, positive changes can occur. Stone recognizes that students enter the classroom after having experiences in numerous social institutions (family, media, peer groups). These encounters, combined with in-school experiences contribute to human capital formation. Stone asserts that if educational stakeholders come together to improve urban education, they can compensate for deficiencies in human capital formation among students. Although the various interests among the stakeholders may present challenges, they should nevertheless be able to overcome these differences (Stone 1998).

There are several useful aspects of Stone’s theory. First, his identification of human capital development recognizes that schools are not the only socializing agents children encounter. In addition, the idea of diverse educational stakeholders including: parents, teachers, school administrators, union leaders, business people, and politicians, is
logical. However, in contrast to Stone’s theory, reality tells us that it is difficult to unite people behind the same goals, even with a goal as practical as providing a high quality education to all children. Furthermore, his eleven city civic capacity project demonstrated that while his theory is appealing, there is not a high degree of civic capacity in urban education.¹

In this chapter I examine Chicago’s educational stakeholders and their primary interests in education. I look at parents and community members, teachers and principals, unions, business groups, mayors, and state legislators. These stakeholders’ positions in the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts reflect their interests, which are not the same. However, coalitions do form despite divergent objectives among groups. I therefore discuss the coalitions behind the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts.

While school board members and superintendents are part of the puzzle, their appointments more often represent the prize for stakeholders in 1988 and 1995. In later chapters I will argue that the method of school board member selection is related to the interest that educational stakeholders have in educational policy. For example, if board members are nominated with community support and then appointed by the mayor, they may feel that they must be loyal to the communities they represent. Thus, community groups would have an interest in this method of board selection. On the other hand, if board members are selected solely by the mayor they may have a strong inclination to

¹Chicago was not included in the civic capacity project.
enact policies that the mayor favors. This would clearly be the selection method favored by a chief executive.

In addition to discussing the groups involved in school reform in this chapter, the two school reform acts are detailed with regard to their components and results. Because these two reforms serve as the independent variables in my study, they are an essential building block for the chapters that follow.

II. Stakeholders in Education

Without a doubt, students are the primary stakeholders in educational policy. Because schools are an important socializing agent and provide many of the foundations for future education and job opportunities, students have the most at stake in this policy arena. However, conceptualizing the importance of a quality education is not often a priority for children. A notable exception would be the activism of Chicago's Black high school students during the 1960s. Even today, when students from Chicago's inner-city high schools travel to North Side schools or suburban schools, they are often hit hard by the reality that their educational opportunities do not reflect what they see in more economically privileged areas. One 1998 high school graduate reported:

I knew that I wasn't getting the same education as kids on the North Side or Whitney Young. There was nothing I could do but work hard to get into college. When I started college I had to take the remedial math classes and I didn't feel ready for some of the other classes either. That's ok because now I'm catching-up. The problem is that a lot of other kids don't go to college or get information about how to get in....They don't catch-up (CPS graduate interview 1/30/99).
Despite the interest students may have in accessing a quality education, they are not included as negotiators in the educational policy process. Unfortunately, their interests do not always seem to be the driving force among all decision makers either.

In this section I examine the stakeholders in educational policy-making, stressing the different agendas embraced by each group. I would like to note that broad generalizations about individual groups are problematic. For this reason, as I describe each group I will attempt to demonstrate some of the more important differences among members.

Parents and Community Groups

Moving from the students who are directly affected by educational policy, we can examine parents and community groups as stakeholders. As tax payers, these individuals clearly have a stake in education as they are largely responsible for financing public education in the city. Their loss of faith in public education could seriously impede the financial stability of the school system. I combine parents and members of the community because beyond paying taxes, it is the geographic neighborhood that is often directly impacted by public schools. If children are unable to get jobs after graduating from high school, it is the community that feels the strain. Furthermore, problems associated with truancy are likely to be noticed in the school neighborhood. The racial segregation in Chicago also has the tendency to bring people together when they see the young people from their racial or ethnic group receiving inadequate education. These feelings of hopelessness due to failing urban schools are frequently experienced by parents and community members alike.
The legacy of grassroots activism in Chicago, perhaps still influenced by the Alinsky legacy (1969), has waxed and waned among parents and community groups. As stakeholders, parents want their children to receive a quality education. The problem among parents is often that they do not unite around the principle that all children can and should have the opportunity to learn; rather, they emphasize the situation of their own child. Overcoming the emphasis on the individual child does happen, but it is more common for parents to focus on their child’s situation. Parents, especially low income and minority parents, often feel that they are not respected and relegated to an inconsequential position in their childrens’ schools. These feelings, although they too may be overcome through unity, are quite common. Socioeconomic differences among parents can also cause a strain. Parents in low income neighborhoods may be concerned about providing merely adequate education for their children, while parents in middle class areas may be concerned about providing gifted and talented programs for their children. Therefore, it is not necessarily the shared philosophy regarding educational objectives that unites parents and community members, but the problems in their own schools.

**Professional Educators: Teachers and Principals**

Teachers and principals share the constant concern about high academic standards for children. However, teachers and principals also must consider their job security and career advancement. Essentially, while many educators do view student performance accomplishments as their primary concern, other professional goals clearly enter the picture. Efforts to reform education in Chicago have often neglected the perspectives of
professional educators (teacher interviews 7/14/98). While this seems ironic given that teachers and principals would be instituting reforms, Chicago's school reforms have frequently been centered around system-wide administrative reform rather than educational innovations. For this reason professional educators have long expressed discontent over their limited role in educational policy even though they are major stakeholders. One scholar noted, "The emphasis of school reform for the past nine years has largely been on governance and accountability standards. While these are important, teaching and learning need to be the focus," (Baron 1998).

Unions

The goal of organized labor groups is to promote policies that benefit workers in general and union members in particular. Because education is tied to jobs, contracts, and career opportunities, teachers' and principals' unions are important players in educational policy as their members compose the schoolhouse work force. Teachers and principals in Chicago have successfully worked through their unions to receive higher salaries, improve their work environments, and negotiate favorable contracts. However, while decisions made by the union generally reflect positions of individual union members, there are times when union settlements in Chicago have not satisfied individual members. Despite variation in satisfaction, it is essential that unions are included in educational policy because dissatisfied workers will not contribute to educational improvement and strikes can cripple the entire school system. Furthermore, financing union settlements directly impacts union members and the financial situation of the entire school system.
Business Interests

Businesses are concerned with profits and efficient operations. Business types also apply this philosophical perspective to public education (Darling 1998; Shipps 1997). Cities have historically been important centers of economic activity, and entrepreneurs based in Chicago have always been concerned with the community’s social well-being, economic health, and education provided to their future work force. While their primary motive may be lower taxes, business groups are nevertheless stakeholders in education. For one thing, if a city wants to maintain their middle income residents, they must make sure that the educational system is adequate. If this does not happen, the municipal tax base decline could result in higher taxes for the private sector. More importantly, corporations must consider their future work force and whether they will be prepared for employment through their education. Although they are usually not concerned with creating new pedagogical tools for the classroom, business groups do have a stake in an adequately trained potential work force. It is more important today that new workers have basic educational skills because as the international economy and the labor market has changed there has been a reduction in low skilled jobs.

Privatization and outsourcing of school functions are other areas where businesses may be seen as stakeholders. If big-city school systems become reliant on private firms to provide services in the cafeteria or as janitorial staff, the potential profits for the private sector are considerable. Therefore, it would be an asset for business to increase privatization in school systems.
As with other stakeholders, business interests are not idiosyncratic. Some groups may be more civic minded than others. However, there is no mistaking the fact that the economic vitality of the city is a concern to area businesses. Gittell (1998) found that one unique aspect of business groups in Chicago is that they see themselves as citizens of the city, as opposed to nationally or internationally minded business groups in a place like New York. As the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts will demonstrate, Chicago’s business community has continuously played an important role in educational policy.

**Mayors**

Big-city mayors are important stakeholders in education. One of the most apparent reasons that mayors are stakeholders has to do with economic stability. As middle class residents flee the city for better schools in the suburbs, the tax base of the city declines. Beyond the impact this has on education, it also challenges the financial stability of the entire municipal system. Corporate investment is certainly another economic consideration. If businesses decide to leave cities for more attractive tax incentives, economic repercussions result. The growth of the city is therefore a major preoccupation for big-city mayors.

To insinuate that all big-city mayors place economic growth as their number one concern would be inaccurate. Cleveland’s former mayor, Dennis Kucinich, refused to give in to growth strategies that catered to the business community at the expense of city residents (Swanstrom 1985). Fuchs (1992) found that in addition to economic factors related to governance, mayors must also consider a host of political factors when making
decisions. These political and economic factors are intertwined with educational policy. Because mayors are concerned with re-election and because education is an important issue to many urban constituents, attention must be directed toward this issue.

Mayors must also make sure that their school system meets federal standards, state standards, consent decrees and any other mandated requirements. Jeopardizing federal or state funding for education could have economic and political repercussions for a mayor. On the positive side, if a mayor is able to gain control of the school system budget, a tremendous political resource could be won as school budgets represent one of the largest pieces of a city’s budget, an asset Mayor Daley currently enjoys. Mayor Daley and his Board of Trustees have made great financial strides since assuming control of the school system, primarily due to their ability to balance the school budget. This financial asset extends beyond the educational sphere because if city tax payers are confident that their hard-earned money is going toward a financially sound school system they will be more inclined to support public education and provide electoral support for the mayor who facilitated this accomplishment.

State Legislature

State responsibilities for urban education are quite expansive. It is up to state legislatures to decide how state funding should be distributed throughout the state and the types of mandates placed on different school districts. Due to changes in legislative district lines resulting from population shifts, many cities have witnessed a decline in their number of state representatives. The result has been a decline in legislation favoring cities. Often
viewing school districts as wasteful and financially inefficient, states like Illinois have been making educational policy decisions that negatively impact Chicago. Legislators, also stakeholders in education, must consider how their policy decisions will resonate with their constituents. They must also consider their ability to actually assist failing urban schools. The Chicago Public Schools have a long history filled with financial crises where the state has had to intervene. Therefore, while all Illinois legislators ought to be concerned about failing urban school systems for ethical and financial reasons, the individual stakeholders often create policy that benefits their district at the expense of Chicago.

III. The 1988 Reform Act

While all of the aforementioned stakeholders in education had vested interests in the key components of the 1988 school reform act, their interests were not equally represented in the actual legislation. It would clearly be impossible to create a school reform package that met the needs of these many competing interests. Therefore, as this section illustrates, certain groups were pivotal in creating this legislation and were subsequently satisfied with the major components of the legislation; other groups lost out.

Legislative Provisions

The national shift in urban educational reform from equity issues to the new emphasis on educational excellence via quality and achievement was largely the result of the National Commission on Education's 1983 report, "Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform." This report cited significant declines in student achievement, alarming rates of
illiteracy, and exposed numerous other problems contributing to our failing public schools (Vander Weele 1994). The report essentially began the first wave of reform which Wong and Sunderman characterized as state led (1994).

Following "A Nation at Risk," the Carnegie Task Force and the National Governors Association issued reports in 1986 emphasizing the need for restructuring public schools and for altering the role of teachers in administration. This constant attention to failing urban schools hit Chicago hard in 1987 when the Secretary of Education, William Bennett labeled the Chicago Public School system, "the worst in the nation" (Vander Weele 1994). The national trend emphasizing site-based management and rapid decentralization took hold quickly in Chicago due to the severity of its low student performance within city schools and pressing fiscal concerns. Despite modest trends in decentralization which emerged in Chicago after 1968 (see chapter two), these alterations clearly did not improve student performance or fiscal stability. With the highest four year dropout rate and the lowest level of achievement among the largest school systems, it was evident that changes were necessary in Chicago (Vander Weele 1994).

The response to the national trends in school reform and the poor student performance in Chicago was the Chicago School Reform Act of 1988 (P.A. 85-1418). The national attention this law received was considerable due to its reputation as a democratic exercise in community participation, parental involvement, and site-based management. The legislation drastically altered the structure of the Chicago Public
Schools by decentralizing the entire system and requiring a shift to parent majority school-based management so that administrative powers would shift from the central office to the local school communities. This reform was somewhat inspired by a 1969 community centered school reform in New York City where parents and community members successfully lobbied for the creation of 33 elected subdistrict school boards. Commenting on the differences between New York’s 1969 reform and Chicago’s 1988 reform, Byrk et al note:

Chicago pushed much further toward a democratic localism than was the case in New York City. The New York subdistrict boards are as large as many mid-sized urban districts. In contrast, the fundamental governance unit in Chicago is the individual school. Thus, in Chicago, the distance between the site of political activity and its consequences is radically reduced. Political accountability was intended to be much more personal, immediate, and sharply drawn (1998: 21).

In fact, Chicago’s model of decentralized school reform was intended to deflect some of the divisiveness which emerged following New York’s 1969 reform and resulted in an unsuccessful attempt to develop and sustain coalitional school governance (Gittell 1998:155). One of the most important steps taken to create a democratic school system was the establishment of 541 local school councils (LSCs).

Intended to allow the school to manage its own resources and solve problems independently, among the main components of Chicago’s 1988 school reform act were creating LSCs, changing the role of the principal, establishing the Professional Personnel Advisory Committee (PPAC), creating district councils and a School Board Nominating
Commission (SBNC), and limiting the school board’s authority (Shipps, Kahne, and Smylie 1998).

Each of the 541 Chicago schools was to have its own LSC composed of eleven individuals: six parents, two community representatives, two teachers and the school principal. Parent and community representatives were to be elected by voting age neighborhood residents and live within the school's neighborhood. Teachers were to be elected by their colleagues. The specific responsibilities of the LSCs were the evaluation of the principal to decide if he/she ought to be retained, the selection of new principals, the approval of the School Improvement Plan (SIP), the approval of an annual expenditure plan, oversight related to the allocation of staff, the recommendation of texts, the development of suggestions on attendance and discipline, and ensuring that state and district objectives were met (Byrk and Sebring 1991). They were also granted great fiscal flexibility because all Chapter One moneys were allocated directly to schools, bypassing the school board (Shipps, Kahne, and Smylie 1998).

Under the 1988 law each principal was to be signed to a four year contract which eliminated tenure for the position. In addition, principal selection was done by the LSC, removing the school board’s central office from hiring decisions. Devolving principal selection decisions from the board to the LSC represented a major shift in power. During their four year appointment the principal was responsible for hiring and firing academic staff. This role of selecting and releasing teachers did not conflict with union requirements because only non-unionized teachers could be removed, and such instances they could
apply for positions in different schools. In addition, because teachers were represented on the LSC, there was a balance between principals’ power and teachers’ interests. In addition, the principals’ post required the monitoring of custodians and lunchroom managers and the development of a budget for the SIP (Fitch 1990).

The School Finance Authority (SFA), which was temporarily established after the 1979 financial crisis, was granted additional powers under the 1988 law. As mentioned previously, this organization was created in 1979 due to the severe financial problems in the school system emanating from financial blundering during the elder Daley’s administration, and the national recession. The SFA was responsible for the oversight and approval of the budget and was to remain intact until there were six consecutive balanced budgets (Wong and Sunderman 1994). This five person oversight committee was comprised of businessmen and attorneys appointed for fixed terms by the mayor and the governor (Shipps 1997). Initially the SFA’s only responsibility was to oversee and approve the budget. However, in 1988 the SFA was given broad control over the implementation of the school reforms in addition to their broad financial management of the system. This control was later extended to virtual financial oversight of the Board of Education. This oversight was resented by the board and caused many problems between the two organizations during the following years (Wong and Sunderman 1994). One important priority for the SFA after 1988 was the downsizing of the central office staff and the devolution of Chapter One funds to the individual schools based on their low income enrollment (Shipps, Kahne, and Smylie 1998).
In addition to the role of the LSCs and the principal, the law mandated the creation of a Professional Personnel Advisory Committee (PPAC) at each school. Selected annually and composed of teachers and the principal, the responsibility of the committee was to identify and evaluate tasks to meet the school agenda, advise the principal and the LSC, and to evaluate student graduation and attendance rates in order to develop long term goals (Fitch 1990).

Another provision contained in the 1988 legislation was the creation of a subdistrict governance structure that divided the Chicago school system into eleven districts (Shipps, Kahne, and Smylie 1998). Each district had its own subdistrict council composed of one parent or community LSC representative from each school in the district. This body functioned as an advisory board for LSCs and also selected subdistrict superintendents. However, a more important aspect of the district council was that each of the eleven district councils elected a representative to the School Board Nominating Commission (SBNC) (Hess 1995).

The SBNC recommended three nominations to the mayor for each of the fifteen school board positions. From the fifteen nominees the mayor selected, city council ratification was required. Although mayors in Chicago have historically appointed school board members, relying on nominations from a nominating commission and requiring city council confirmation of nominees, the SBNC provided a very new approach to this process. In the past, the nominating commission was selected by the mayor, and therefore was not accountable to the electorate. Furthermore, previous commission members
represented prestigious community organizations and did not reflect the community at large (Peterson 1976; Herrick 1976). Consistent with the intention of the 1988 legislation, the SBNC was designed to increase community influence in educational policy making and to expand representativeness of school board members. Because SBNC members were also elected LSC members, and city council members are elected representatives, mechanisms for school board approval by the electorate were incorporated more than ever before.

One important fact must be noted. The 1988 reform act created a one year seven member interim school board so that the transition to the SBNC nomination process would happen smoothly. This interim board was to be appointed solely by Mayor Daley without any oversight or confirmation requirements. This board was responsible for appointing the new superintendent of the Chicago Public Schools (Shipps, Kahne, and Smylie 1998).

In addition to these various administrative bodies and organizations, the financial resources of the schools were altered by the act. Each year individual schools were to receive a lump sum determined by enrollment and the needs of the student body. Much of this money was from state Chapter One funds which assist in the educational financing of low income students. The final aspect of the legislation established state levels for attendance, graduation and test scores (Wong and Sunderman 1994).
Creation of the 1988 School Reform Act

A key component to the 1988 legislation was the role of the minority community. The concern within the Black community regarding political issues like the education of their children contributed to the organizational resources the group brought to the development of the School Reform Act of 1988. Although it is far more common for parents to focus attention on their individual child as opposed to the entire community of children, the parental mobilization that surrounded the 1988 legislation was incredible. One significant influence during the 1980s in Chicago was the role the Black community played in electing Chicago's first Black mayor, Harold Washington (1983-1987).

Under Washington's leadership, progress was made toward opportunity expansion through human investment policies for lower class citizens (Stone 1993). In fact, Washington was very responsive to requests by the Black and business communities for improvement within Chicago's public schools (Shipps 1997). Prior to becoming Chicago's mayor, Washington had served as a member of Congress. During his congressional tenure, Washington was quick to identify the continual patterns of segregation within the Chicago schools, despite the Reagan administration's praise of the system for its outstanding example of desegregation (Kleppner 1991). It appears that within the Black community confidence in the ability to change the system was high due to the election of Washington, something that could not have happened without its political mobilization. This confidence and organizational ability provided the community based resource that was important in the educational reform efforts of the 1980s.
Washington considered education one of his top priorities. In October 1986 Washington convened his first education summit centered around the high levels of minority unemployment and high dropout rates among students (Hess 1995). This summit brought together 40 representatives from the business community, teachers and school administrators, and community groups to discuss the path toward school reform. One instrumental business coalition involved in the summit was the business coalition Chicago United. Since 1981 Chicago United had advocated a decentralized school system where local schools made decisions. Its image reflected the corporate model of moving decision-making down to plant managers from corporate executives (Moore 1998). Because parents, particularly minority parents, had always been locked out of educational policy, they embraced the idea of local decision-making which included their perspectives. As one former community activist and now board employee noted:

Harold brought us all together. We shared a vision of a better school system. Even though these business types didn’t have kids in our schools they were interested because the school system was collapsing. We all started talking about how to make things better. When Harold said we could make this a world class school system it gave us a burning desire to make it work (former activist interview 7/7/98).

Mayor Washington was able to unite his Black constituency with the business community. Like previous mayors, Washington shared a concern for business interests in Chicago. However, his commitment to the Black community was unique and fostered the educational coalition that ensued (Shipps 1997).

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2Mayor Daley has hired several of the key Black community activists from the 1988 reform to work in board’s office of community relations.
Despite the dialogue that the mayor’s education summit created, it did not prevent the 1987 teacher strike over the issue of compensation. This was the ninth strike in 18 years, and it was the event that finally caused groups to initiate an educational reform package. Washington called a second summit in 1987, just one month before his death. This summit resulted in a coalition between parents, community advocacy groups, and the business community which would come to be known as the Alliance for Better Chicago Schools or the ABCs (Moore 1998). This group successfully lobbied the state legislature for the 1988 school reform act.

There were many reasons that the 1988 reform was implemented. First, parents and community organizations united for overall improvement in their schools and for local control of the school system. The civil rights movement’s emphasis on local control, combined with the motivation within the Black community after the successful election of the first Black mayor, provided an ideal atmosphere for political mobilization and feelings of political efficacy. Mayor Washington’s attention to education provided the added motivation to reform the school system.

The coalition between parents / community groups and business organizations was an essential part of the 1988 law. Business influence and experience in lobbying at the state level was invaluable. The business community had been actively involved in educational policy since the 1800s (Herrick 1971). Most recently, the 1979 financial crisis brought business groups in as policy makers as they played a key role in the state bail-out plan. Their credibility in Springfield was also influenced by the economic contributions
businesses provide to the entire state. In addition to their influence in the legislature, their interest in the school system stemmed from their position as stakeholders in municipal financial stability and access to an educated work force. As Shipps (1997) explained:

Corporate business associations have been key actors in Chicago education politics for much of the past century, and continue to be a potent force in the recent reforms. The latest reform laws can be traced to a resurgence of corporate activism that began shortly after the death of Mayor Richard J. Daley, when local bankers and other corporate business association leaders sought to restructure financial control of the system. This led them to an intensive, unilateral effort to rationalize and decentralize central office operations between 1980 and 1984. Discomforted by central office resistance to their advice and support, in 1987 they invited other civic and community groups to form a cross-sector coalition to restructure the school governance structure (74).

This unlikely coalition was largely facilitated by the attention Mayor Washington had paid to both his Black constituency and Chicago’s business community. While the two groups united behind the 1988 school reform act, their goals differed. Whereas the business community sought to end bureaucratic inefficiency through decentralization, parents wanted power over individual schools and the school board appointment process. These differing goals are evident in the legislative provisions of the 1988 reform act. Specifically, parents were granted additional power over the school system. At the same time, the SFA’s broad financial oversight of the school system provided business interests a significant amount of power. The power that the business community wielded ultimately assisted in their influence on the 1995 school reform act (Shipps 1997).

The state legislature was eager to reform the Chicago school system as the district was attracting more and more national attention for its failures. Both the state House and
Senate were Democratically controlled in 1988, and there was broad support for this legislation among majority party members. Although the Republican governor and his fellow legislators opposed this legislation, it was eventually signed into law. As stakeholders, these state decision makers needed to consider their own tax paying constituents and the economic strain of the Chicago Public School's on the state. State Senator Emil Jones (1972-present), and the Democratic majority leader in 1988 noted:

I was involved with the whole piece of legislation in 1988. The portion that relates to poverty funds (Chapter One funds) is really significant. These dollars were directed to the schools. What I did with this legislation was that I gave those Chicago community groups that were lobbying down in Springfield, I gave them the power to approve the expenditure of these dollars. The district I represent was impacted by this. I thought this legislation was darn good because the schools were the focal point. The only aspect of this that was a failure was that added resources weren’t there (Jones interview 8/25/98).

With regard to the interests of legislators, former state senator Richard Guidace explained:

Many state legislators first look at what Chicago’s getting when they are dealing with state funding. If they don’t represent Chicago, giving a little more to Chicago is not in their interest. You first always want to make sure that your own district gets as much as you can get it (7/13/98).

Therefore, while the legislation created an administratively decentralized school system, there was no additional funding for the implementation of the legislation.

Teachers and principals are also stakeholders in educational policy. In the case of the 1988 reform, neither of their occupational unions was very influential largely because the schools themselves were seen as failing and the teachers had recently gone on strike (Moore 1998). As a result, neither of these groups were supportive of the legislation.
Teachers were upset because although they would participate on LSCs, they were not consulted when it came to student achievement (teacher interviews 7/14/98). In addition, the legislation did not offer them any additional financial security, something that created problems for the school system in the aftermath of the 1988 legislation as teachers continually went on strike. Principals were also dissatisfied with the outcome of the 1988 legislation. Not only would they now be appointed by their LSC, but the elimination of their tenure was a major blow to their authority. Clearly, neither of these groups were enthusiastic as the 1988 school reform was implemented.

The mayor, yet another stakeholder, was interim Mayor Sawyer who had replaced the late Mayor Washington. Sawyer was a weak leader who did not exercise power or have broad support in the Black community. Again, the 1988 school reform was facilitated by a Black and business community based coalition. Sawyer’s interim position as mayor possibly reduced the power he exercised in the creation of the legislation, as neither the Black community, nor business interests viewed him as a long-term force to reckon with. For these reasons, Sawyer was not influential in the passage of the 1988 reform act. In contrast, the election of Mayor Richard M. Daley, Jr. in 1989 meant that he would play a role in implementing the reform as the mayor was responsible for appointing the interim Board of Education.

Results of the 1988 School Reform Act

The School Reform Act of 1988 received mixed evaluations. While there were reports of reduced violence and productive aspects of direct community involvement in schools,
rumors of financial mismanagement and a lack of improvement in test scores also emerged. Clarence Fitch (1990) explained that the three school bodies (LSCs, PPAC, and the principal) regularly experienced confusion over who was in charge of the various school procedures and policies. The implication was that the overlapping of responsibilities did not create a more efficient system.

There was also frustration among those parents and community groups who created this legislation when Mayor Daley’s interim board remained in place for 17 months rather than the one year that the legislation authorized (Hess 1995). This board also hired Superintendent Kimbrough against community support for the retention of then Superintendent Manfred Byrd. In addition, the interim board authorized generous pay increases to employee groups which would later complicate the financial troubles the system would face after the new school board was in place (Hess 1995).

Despite the problems associated with the interim board, there were some very notable changes that occurred once the fifteen member board was in place. For one thing, there was a level of racial and class diversity among board members that had never existed on the board previously. Although some criticized the new board for being too responsive to the community and micromanaging, there was considerable evidence that board members felt they represented the community. The former chair of the SBNC reported:
What was unique about the SBNC was that anyone who wanted to serve on the Board of Ed. had to come through us and through our community based process...Our process was a very open process. By law there were advertisements in the newspaper and there were thousands of community brochures asking anyone who was interested to come forward and offer themselves as potential school board members. Because of the size of the board we could make sure that there was diversity on the board according to race, economics, location in the city, whether they were representing parents or business, or whether they had concerns that reflected a broad based interest (former activist interview 10/24/98a).

Aside from the diversity on the school board due to this legislation, reports of conflicts on the other governance body, the LSC, emerged. Although Chicago's 1988 reform differed from New York City's 1969 school reform because school governance in Chicago was devolved to individual schools, factional bickering similar to that which emerged in New York also emerged in Chicago. Anthony Byrk and Sharon Rollow (1992) explained that the LSCs were comprised of factions which divided over such issues as whether tutoring positions should be filled by low income community residents or if new teachers should be recruited. Toni Griego-Jones (1990) conducted a six month case study of a Chicago high school and found that school personnel had not been actively involved in the initiation of the reform they were expected to implement. In addition, Kenneth Wong and Gail Sunderman (1994) noted that decentralization contributed to a form of school governance that was both highly fragmented and consisted of multiple centers of power within and outside the public school system. In addition, because
individual LSCs are independent of one another they essentially compete for scarce resources such as highly qualified teachers and principals.

Don Moore, the director of one community group active in the reform legislation, asserts that LSC governance has always varied between schools with some activist LSCs and other more marginal bodies depending on the climate of the school (Moore 1988). In a survey conducted by the Consortium on Chicago School Research, it was found that a majority of principals were pleased with the 1988 reform legislation and felt their schools were improving due to the reform (Bennett et al 1992). A survey of teachers found that they too were supportive. Although teachers were initially hostile toward the reform, they eventually found satisfaction in the 29% salary increase they received and their increased role in school decision-making through the LSC (Easton et al 1992). However, although it is not documented, it is conceivable that the increased involvement of parents could be viewed as a mixed blessing due to the fact that parents often focus attention on their individual student, as opposed to the entire student body. This could cause additional stress on teachers and school administrators if individual parents placed too many additional demands on the school staff.

My interviews with parents and community activists involved in the 1988 reform also indicate a high degree of satisfaction among parents with the 1988 reform (see chapter four). One former community activist noted:
One of the best aspects of the 1988 legislation was that parents were included. We are the stockholders. We are the ones who send our kids and our tax dollars to the schools. To some it was unheard of to have us parents making decisions about how funds would be used and how programs would be constructed. Many of us were thought of as ignorant and uneducated. Although many of us were not educators, we were educated and capable of making important decisions for our kids education (former activist interview 7/7/98).

Only five years after the legislation had been implemented, reports detailing the failures of the 1988 legislation were numerous and over shadowed the favorable results that were also reported. Despite research indicating that the results of urban school reform initiatives often take five or more years to develop and that test scores usually do not show signs of improvement for several years (Comer 1980), many criticized the 1988 reform for not producing clear test score increases. Others argued that the reforms of 1988 would take more time and that the indicators of reform success were not objective.

As I mentioned previously, the SBNC increased racial diversity on the school board. Another striking result of the 1988 law were the 1,800 Blacks and 700 Latinos elected in the 1994 LSC elections. These representatives provided the majority of minority elected officials in the state (Shipps, Kahne, and Smylie 1998). In addition, voter turn out during the first LSC election was close to 30% of eligible voters. This percentage, while it may appear low, exceeds the average 10% turnout in cities with school board elections (Gittell 1998). Many of the reform advocates believed that the voice given to community groups and parents was a necessary and positive step for the Chicago Public Schools. Regardless of the position taken by individuals or groups as to the results of the 1988 reform legislation, one significant problem with the legislation was
that the state legislature was not willing to provide additional funding to assist in reform
initiatives and this made successful implementation extremely difficult to accomplish (Epps
1994). While many schools serving disadvantaged students were provided greater
flexibility with state compensatory funds, there was no provision for additional funding to
assist with implementation of reform efforts.

The funding of the Chicago Public Schools has led to considerable debate and
controversy. Frequently cited for its low level of state funding, Illinois ranks forty-fifth in
the nation for per capita education spending (Vander Weele 1994). This trend in low
levels of state funding, usually hovering around the fortieth percentile, has been an
ongoing trend in Illinois throughout the century (Herrick 1971:216). The numerous
federal/state mandates, judicial regulations, and administrative restrictions combined with
low levels of state aid, a low tax base, and a new administrative reform underway
presented challenges to the school system. By 1993 the Chicago Public Schools were
operating under a severe budget deficit. In order to solve the problem the state legislature
issued a bond to cover the operating expenses of the schools.

The financial problems that hit the Chicago Public Schools resulted from many
unfortunate circumstances including the fact that the reform was not granted additional
funding by the state, that the interim Board of Education had made a number of
irresponsible financial concessions to interest groups, and that the school system had been
experiencing ongoing budget deficits before the reform was even discussed. Furthermore, because one of the goals of the legislation was to reduce the central office bureaucracy and make it more efficient, jobs were cut without much planning or forethought. Many of the jobs that were lost were held by Blacks who had become members of the administration during the 1960s and 1970s (Shipps, Kahne, and Smylie 1998). These jobs appeared to be eliminated haphazardly and left an inept central office (Byrk et al 1998).

The decision to bail out the school system, along with the mixed reports regarding the 1988 school reform legislation, ushered in new concerns that educational reform was once again necessary. One current CPS administrator and former state lobbyist for the Chicago Public Schools said:

One of the huge problems with the 1988 law was that it didn’t do anything to address the finances of the school system. Every year, starting in the early 1990s, there was this routine in Chicago. The board would announce that how bad the budget situation was, believing that if there was just enough of a shortfall that Springfield would see that they needed more money and provide it. Instead, Springfield would say ‘these guys are totally incompetent,’ and refuse to allocate another dime. Then the board would try to negotiate with unions and they’d say ‘up yours.’ They’d stare at one another for a while, and then the teachers would strike and parents would be outraged. The lack of funding for the 1988 legislation made success realistically impossible (administrator interview 7/13/98a).

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3 Some of the concessions made by the board included generous union contracts made by the interim board, and the board’s general willingness to fund numerous educational and infrastructural programs in individual schools.
The state bail out clearly concerned state tax payers, but also municipal residents who had grown tired of pouring their money into a school system that was continuously characterized as financially unstable.

Overall, it can be said that Blacks had their policy concerns met under the 1988 school reform act. This was possible due to their successful mobilization in the wake of Mayor Washington's unexpected death. The coalition they formed with the business community was also essential, but so too was the absence of other principal actors in educational policy, namely unions and the White community. However, the climate would soon change as Blacks began to focus their energy on their newly created LSCs, with the election of Mayor Richard M. Daley in 1989, and the Republican take-over of the state legislature. These events all contributed to the emergence of a new school reform coalition supportive of an administratively centralized school system. This coalition was unlike the Black / business community coalition that advocated the 1998 legislation. The resonating theme among those dissatisfied with the school system was that no one was directly accountable under the 1988 legislation due to the decentralized community control structure.

IV. The 1995 School Reform Act

Legislative Provisions

The School Reform Act of 1995 (P.A. 89-15) significantly altered many of the stipulations contained in the 1988 reform legislation and included several provisions intended to overhaul the Chicago Public Schools. These provisions are to remain effective throughout
a four year trial period. Of the 1995 reform provisions, one of the most sweeping aspects of the legislation is the control placed in the hands of Mayor Richard M. Daley. While Chicago's mayors have historically exercised influence in educational policy, this new legislation went beyond previous provisions. Although Chicago's mayors have historically had the power to appoint school board members, the 1995 legislation eliminated the School Board Nominating Commission and the need for city council ratification of school board appointments. While the SBNC was a 1988 legislative creation, city council approval of school board nominees was a norm spanning a century (Peterson 1976; Herrick 1971). Additionally, the size of the school board was reduced from fifteen to five.

In conjunction with the new role of the mayor in education and the changes made to school board selection and structure, the strengthening, weakening, and elimination of several other key positions was included in this legislation. Replacing the superintendent is a five person management team appointed by the mayor including a Chief Executive Officer (CEO), a Chief Operations Operator (COO), a Chief Financial Officer (CFO), a Chief Purchasing Officer (CPO) and a Chief Education Officer (CEDO)\(^2\). The individuals in these positions have business backgrounds or were high ranking city officials, usually from the mayor's staff. In addition to the elimination of the superintendent under this new system, the School Finance Authority and the eleven subdistrict governance structure were also eliminated. The new management team works with the Chicago School Reform

\(^2\)This is the only position which was intended for an individual with background and experience in education.
Board of Trustees which was created in 1995 and appointed by the mayor. This new business oriented management structure was established to eliminate the $150 million budget deficit and reduce waste within the system (Shipps 1997). The terms of office for the Board of Trustees and the management team were recently extended, and the board size will increase from five to seven members during the 1999-2000 school year. The rationale behind increasing the board size is that with a five person board two members cannot even talk informally because they have a quorum according to board rules.

At the school level, principals were granted additional power over unionized school staff including setting schedules and hiring/firing all staff members, including those with tenure. The provisions of the 1995 legislation also placed restrictions on strikes by teachers and other unionized groups for 18 months, and limited the types of negotiations which could occur. In addition, employees can be eliminated within 14 days if privatization makes their positions redundant, and previous contract stipulations like class size and teacher assignment were removed from school codes (Shipps, Kahne, and Smylie 1998).

Finally, the LSCs were not eliminated by the 1995 reform. For this reason it is easy to assume that one of the key components of the 1988 reform was retained. However, a closer look indicates that LSCs power has changed considerably and limited parent and community influence in school governance. LSCs are now evaluated by the new management team and eliminated if found to be inefficient. This power exercised by the board clashes with the fact that these members are democratically elected. The LSCs
also lost power over budgetary issues, were deprived of much of their control over the
principal, and were required to have an additional and unfunded three day training for their
positions. Probably because the elimination of LSCs altogether would have mobilized
large-scale opposition among community groups, this was not one of the legislative
provisions. Therefore, the legislation places stringent restrictions on the educational
power community groups had achieved in 1988.

Another innovation of the 1995 law was the Accountability Council. This council
is responsible for reviewing school performance and identifying failing schools. When
such a school is identified, the council either nominates the school for remediation,
probation, or reconstitution. These three terms reflect three stages of intervention in low
test scoring schools. The last of the three stages, reconstitution, allows the Board of
Trustees to eliminate the entire school’s staff, principal, and LSC and select replacements.

Regarding the financial provisions of the legislation, seven of the districts’ tax
levies have been combined into one fund to facilitate greater budgetary flexibility. Two
block grants, one with specific state mandates, have also been provided to the school
system. Chapter One funds continue to go to the LSCs for dispersion among the city’s
schools. However, any Chapter One funding increases from the state now go directly to
the district, freezing LSC budgets at 1994 levels (Shipps, Kahne, and Smylie 1998). The
Board of Trustees has essentially gained unprecedented financial flexibility. Also, the state
legislature again neglected to provide any additional funding for the implementation of
new reform legislation.
Creation of the 1995 School Reform Act

The 1994 Republican victory in the Illinois House appears to have generated interest in altering the way in which the state addresses educational issues in Chicago. The Chicago Teachers Union and the Black Caucus lost much of the influence they exercised when the Democrats controlled educational affairs, even though the 1988 reform was not initially to the satisfaction of the teachers' union. In place of these organizations, a coalition of business interests long active in Chicago's educational politics formed a statewide business alliance centering on educational reform and a centralized school administration (Shipps 1997). Despite the fact that the educational problems of urban Chicago are different from those of smaller and more rural areas of Illinois, it seems that the predominant desire among statewide business leaders for financial efficiency has allowed this statewide business alliance behind school reform to occur.

One of the most interesting results of the 1988 reforms was that the attention of community groups became totally focused upon the situation of their individual local school. This occurred because site-based management created a system where competition among the various schools for resources caused activists to lose sight of the greater problems within the Chicago Public Schools. As a result, when business interests, the Republican legislature, and the governor were busy drafting new reform legislation, the community groups were focused upon retaining local control of schools rather than on the overall future of the Chicago Public Schools (Chicago policy expert interview 6/26/96). In contrast to the open meetings during the 1988 reform legislation drafting
process, the 1995 law was formulated quickly and behind closed doors. Community groups were not invited to participate and, surprisingly, Mayor Daley was also not associated with the process.

At first glance it may appear that Mayor Daley attained his desired control of the Chicago Public Schools possibly in an attempt to return to a centralized system similar to that which his father controlled. The fact that the mayor had expressed interest in privatizing education (Daley 1994), in gaining direct power over the appointment of a five member board, and had made pledges during the 1994 reelection campaign favoring school reform, all seemed to indicate that the 1995 legislation was to his liking (Strahler 1995).

However, the fact that the Republican-led legislature did not request Daley's input before enacting the legislation and that they provided no additional funding for the 1995 mandates presents a more complex scenario. It is possible that the Republican state legislature, more concerned with issues pertaining to Illinois' more influential constituents, decided that it was advantageous to leave the financially troubled Chicago Public Schools to fend for themselves. Under these circumstances more time could be spent on other statewide issues. Another possible reason is that by placing the responsibility on the Democratic mayor, he alone would be held accountable for the failures he would most likely encounter under the new plan. One former CPS lobbyist and current CPS administrator explained:
The mayor had an idea about schools, like he wanted to have a diploma mean a student accomplished something when they graduated. During the Spring of 1995, and prior, the mayor had been complaining about the school board. So, the Republicans in Springfield took him up on his ideas. That was the same Spring that the airport battle was going on and the Republicans really hated him. Whether or not they were intentionally trying to stick it to the mayor, we'll never know. I think a lot of the Republican legislators thought Daley would fall on his face (administrator interview 7/13/98a).

State Representative Lou Jones, a Democratic representative from Chicago’s South Side, explained that during the twelve years she has been a member of the Illinois General Assembly she has witnessed a steady decline in the legislature’s interest in Chicago’s educational problems. She explained:

The 1995 reform was totally political. Republicans were finally in control and flexing their muscles to undue all the wrongs of the Democrats. Remember, this was the time of the *Contract with America*, and the Illinois Republicans were trying to do the same sort of thing. The thing that was really bad, and it has been this way for a while, is that all education law is really anti-Chicago or district 299. When the Republicans wrote the law they didn’t include any of the state senators or representatives from Chicago. We were part of the earlier law (Jones interview 8/3/98).

This observation further illustrates the drastic difference between the 1988 and 1995 school reform legislation in how it was drafted. Whereas the 1988 legislation was drafted by a Democratically controlled state legislature and also reflected community interests, the 1995 Republican-guided school reform package excluded Democrats, community members, and the mayor. The only consistent force in both the 1988 and 1995 school reform act was the business community. However, whereas Chicago’s business community had previously supported decentralization and community control of the
schools, the 1995 state-wide business coalition emphasized the need to make the Chicago Public Schools financially efficient and received the support of the major business organizations in the city such as Chicago United.

Results of the 1995 School Reform Act

A number of groundbreaking initiatives have been undertaken by the mayor's centralized school administration. In response to reports about mandatory promotion of low performing students, the board and the mayor established a system known as reconstitution. First initiated in San Francisco, this program identifies schools where overall student test performance has declined over time and places the schools on probation (Duffrin 1998a). Without school-wide student test improvement the school will be recreated and all school employees will be required to reapply for their jobs. The power that the state had granted the mayor and the school board in 1995 allowed them to place 109 of the 557 Chicago Public Schools on probation during the 1995-1996 school year (National Public Radio 7/12/97). This reconstitution initiative was unique in that Chicago is the first large city to undertake reconstitution of seven schools (of the 109 probationary schools) at one time.

Unfavorable reports about reconstitution have surfaced, especially among teachers and community groups. For example, of the 109 schools placed on probation, the Chicago Sun Times relayed the less publicized fact that 56 elementary schools with high test scores were awarded $5000 each. The significance of this action becomes evident when looking at the 71 elementary schools on probation where 94% of the students are at
the poverty level. In contrast, the schools rewarded financially have an average of 35% of students living in poverty (Woestenhoff 1996). Ultimately, reconstitution took place in seven Chicago schools and resulted in the removal of 118 teachers from these schools (Rossi 1997a). One community LSC member from the reconstituted King High School said:

> I was really hurt when King was reconstituted. I saw how demoralized these children were. We knew our reading and math scores were low, but it didn’t seem fair to label us the way they did and take away the LSCs’ power (community member interview 10/30/98).

The Chicago Teachers’ Union (CTU) was slow in complaining about reconstitution. One of the reasons the union was quiet had to do with the four year pay increase that was negotiated between the Board of Trustees and the union. Along the same lines, principals were given a raise. One former CPS lobbyist and current CPS administrator explained:

> In December 1995 all the principals were meeting and Paul Vallas (the CEO) got in front of them and told them they were all getting raises. The teachers had gotten some raises, but principals hadn’t in something like five years. So, they needed this and it probably kept them from complaining about any new changes (administrator interview 7/13/98a).

Nevertheless, complaints surfaced among school employees. Teachers expressed resentment about reconstitution because of the ten month limit on their time in the reserve pool after removal from their school. The reserve pool offers teachers the opportunity to

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5LSCs from reconstituted schools are allowed to meet; however, they have no authority over the budget, school curriculum, or principal selection.
be hired at other schools and remain on the payroll for ten months after their dismissal. This represented the first problem the school board encountered with the teacher’s union since the 1995 legislation was enacted. The 1998 CTU election centered largely around reconstitution (Keefe 1998). After the re-election of CTU president Tom Reese, CEO Paul Vallas agreed not to reconstitute any new schools for at least a year. This has again prevented union uprisings.

Although the decision not to reconstitute appears to stem from a union compromise, the fact remains that reconstituted schools have demonstrated little improvement. The Manager of Reconstitution for the Office of Accountability in the CPS board office, explained that four of the reconstituted schools showed some improvement, one remained virtually the same, and one did worse after one year of reconstitution (administrator interview 6/25/98). This administrator also commented that because he has a staff of one, it would make further efforts of reconstitution impossible. Fred Hess, a researcher from Northwestern University is currently conducting a three-year study on the seven reconstitutes schools (Lewis 1998). Until this study is complete, CEO Vallas has said that the management team does not intend to reconstitute any additional schools.

Along with reconstitution, the school board ended the practice of routine student promotion in the third, sixth, and eighth grades. Therefore, if a student does not meet the board’s established standardized test score in math or reading, they are not allowed to progress to the next grade regardless of their marks in school (Federal News Service 6/5/97). This new accountability mechanism was first initiated in the spring of 1996 when
eighth graders learned that if they did not meet national standards on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) that they would be sent to mandatory summer school (Shipps, Kahne, and Smylie 1998). If they failed to meet the standards after summer school, they would be sent to transition centers for low achievers as opposed to the ninth grade. The following Spring these high stakes tests were applied to students in other grades. This method of high stakes testing is receiving praise from political leaders across the country. In President Clinton’s 1997 State of the Union Address he mentioned Chicago’s admirable efforts to end social promotion through their new achievement measures. Again, in 1998, the President mentioned ending social promotion and attached the suggestion that school systems that do this should receive federal financial rewards.

Chicago’s mandatory summer school program has received mixed reports. Severe discipline problems were reported among the 42,000 students required to attend summer school in 1997 and 1,500 eighth graders were detained at transitional centers until they passed the achievement test (Rossi 1997b). After learning that only 6,698 of 11,458 ninth graders required to attend summer school actually attended and took the exit exam, the Board of Trustees decided to eliminate summer school for ninth graders and will save an estimated $9.3 million dollars. Incidentally, only half of those who took the test passed (Duffrin 1998b).

High stakes testing is seen by many educational policy experts as a problem despite the fact that cities like Chicago, Philadelphia, Los Angeles are adopting these policies
One co-author of the National Academy of Sciences report on testing and promotion reported that:

Our report finds that all the available evidence shows that retention leads to lower academic achievement and increases the likelihood of school dropout (Lewin 1999).

These findings raise concerns about Chicago’s policy of relying solely on standardized tests to determine student grade promotion. Essentially, while the Chicago schools receive much public praise for creating accountability among students, there exist mixed opinions on the results. One central office administrator who wished to remain anonymous, mentioned that any test score increases identified by the Board of Trustees may be due to student retention and their subsequent re-testing after a year of remedial work (administrator interview 7/15/98). This sentiment regarding test score increases has also been expressed by the editor of the publication Catalyst: Voices of Chicago School Reform (Lenz 1998).

Another innovative program implemented by the mayor’s board is the new slew of charter schools. The state legislature approved the creation of six charter schools in Chicago for the 1997-1998 school year. This number has now increased to ten. Although these schools have not performed well academically based on the ITBS test, they will remain in place as they cannot be placed on probation (administrator interview 7/2/98). Charter schools are one of the popular innovations for mayors interested in retaining a middle class city population (Shipps, Kahne, and Smylie 1998). One community activist noted:
Between the charter schools and the transition schools (schools for low achievers), we have what is known as creaming. You take the top and concentrate them in the top schools, and the others you send off to the transition schools. In Chicago we have always had a two-tiered system. It used to be based on race, one Black and one White. Now that most of the kids are Black and Hispanic, its become a class based system. The state legislators accept this. It has become expected that one group will give you nothing and another will perform (community member interview 7/14/98).

Others have argued that it is unjust to use tax dollars to support these elite charter schools that require students apply and be accepted because it provides an exit option for wealthier families with connections (parent interview 8/7/98). Because these schools employ non-unionized teachers, are largely free of city and state regulations, and yet receive tax-payer funds, it is conceivable that union opposition to charter schools could arise in the future.

Privatization and outsourcing were both authorized under the 1995 legislation. As a result, an estimated 1,700 non-professional staff positions like janitors, maintenance employees, and playground aids have been eliminated (Shipps, Kahne, and Smylie 1998). Some parents have voiced their concern as these positions often went to parents of students in the school (parent interviews 10/29/98). This finding seems to indicate that the community has been negatively impacted by under the new legislation.

Another innovation related to students which the mayor and school board are taking credit for is the pledge they received from parents last year to spend time each night with their children on school work (Federal News Service 6/5/97). Whether this pledge
has been honored, or will improve parental involvement in the schools, remains to be seen as the board has not released information on this initiative.

One LSC is fighting a court battle with the school board over the board’s placement of an interim principal for the school despite the LSCs 6-3 vote on two occasions in favor of a different principal. LSC members have expressed outrage because they are not being appeased, because the CEO of the board did not follow the 1995 law and select one of the LSC’s three top choices, and because one LSC member was allegedly threatened with the release of his prison record if he refused to go along with the board’s decision (White 1998). Accusing the LSC of financial mismanagement of poverty moneies for Puerto Rican pride activities, the board removed the LSC’s power (Mendieta 1998). This battle has sent a message that LSCs are under the oversight of the board and do not operate independently. Other LSCs understand that they must comply with the board or have their powers suspended. Essentially, it is not only the reconstituted schools’ LSCs that must face the reality that the board can severely limit the powers they were granted after their election to office.6

In addition to the new programs established in the Chicago schools since the reform board of trustees was appointed in 1995, the mayor has praised his appointees for eliminating much of the financial waste long ignored by those previous educational policy decision makers. Not only did the appointed board reduce the district’s operating costs,
but it began a five-year capital improvement plan designed primarily to build new schools and improve existing schools. This $1.4 billion capital improvement plan coincided with Chicago’s bond rating increase from an A- to an A in 1995, an increase not seen in any other American city during this decade (Federal News Service 6/5/97). Since 1995 the district has issued $2 billion of general obligation bonds for the plan, therefore exceeding their initial estimates (Finkel 1998). As a result, the city received approval from the city council and the state legislature for an additional $850 million bond which would be repaid with a special citywide property tax. This special city tax also replaces the expiring state levy that currently pays for bonds issued by the Chicago School Finance Authority which was established during the 1979 financial crisis (Ward 1997). Voters have not had the opportunity to vote on school financing changes because the reform board had kept property tax increases below the amount that would require a referendum (Finkel 1998). This reflects the great financial flexibility the new board has been granted.

The mayor’s office routinely receives media coverage for the balanced school budget, the student accountability measures they have instituted, and the overall business efficiency that has resulted since the 1995 legislation was enacted. As a sign that Mayor Daley is pleased to have the school system consolidated with his city administration, he even moved the board office from its dilapidated Pershing Road location to a downtown high-rise. More important than financial efficiency and political rhetoric is the role of the community in this new reform and the extent of minority incorporation in educational policy under this new reform initiative. It is evident that the new educational
administration has been able to solve some of the severe budgetary problems in Chicago. These new financial assets have led to various improvements such as more schools, summer school programs, and a slew of charter schools, for all of which the mayor can claim credit. Considering that corporate and financial issues, rather than improved community participation or higher academic achievement held priority in the 1995 legislation, it appears that objectives are being met. Although Mayor Daley and his five member school board have boasted of improved student performance, educational policy experts are reluctant to comment this early about results. Additionally, some community activists have cited the delayed effects of the 1988 legislation as responsible for any test score improvements (Stanfield 1997). Others insist that test score improvement is due to teachers training students for tests or the result of retained students taking the same test after repeating a year of school (journalist interview 8/3/98).

Despite some controversial indicators of student improvement, the four consecutive balanced budgets facilitated by the mayor and Board of Trustees are an indisputable improvement. Not only does this instill confidence among tax payers that the Chicago schools are indeed a good investment, but this opens the door for a progression from a fiscal emphasis among educational policy makers to a greater concentration on educational improvements in the future.

V. Conclusion

My research centers around the 1988 and the 1995 school reform acts due to the mixed reports regarding both pieces of legislation and my interest in examining the changes in
minority involvement under the new system of administrative control. Discussing the stakeholders in educational policy and the roles they played in drafting the two laws offers insight into which groups benefited under these two very different school reforms. It is evident that community and parent groups were excluded from participating in the 1995 legislation. This exclusion marked a shift from the 1988 legislation where the community was a leading coalitional partner in the drafting and implementation process. The results of community inclusion versus exclusion provides a compelling reason for further investigation of minority involvement with urban school reform. The configuration of coalitions formed among stakeholders greatly impacts who benefits and loses power in the school system. This study is the first attempt to systematically evaluate how these two important reform acts have affected the stakeholders in education, but particularly the minority community as it is directly served by the school system.

The chapters that follow address the dependent variables in my study, responsiveness to parental concerns, administrative accountability, and the overall educational effectiveness of both school reform acts. This chapter has laid the foundation for a closer evaluation of these legislative initiatives and how they have affected Chicago’s minority community.
CHAPTER 4
Responsiveness and Political Action

I. Introduction

In a perfect world all stakeholders in educational policy could reach a consensus on educational issues based on their shared concern about educational opportunities for school-age children. However, any observer of this policy arena quickly realizes that the numerous interests and resources affiliated with educational policy create an atmosphere that thrives on competition due to the financial resources of urban school districts. School policy making in Chicago has been an important part of municipal politics and has undoubtedly been tied to the city's often tumultuous political history. Chapter three illustrated Chicago style school politics in light of the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts and presented the stakeholders in education. In this chapter I begin to build upon this foundation and assess the balance of power in school policy making and whether these policies are truly democratic. The three dependent variables in this study (responsiveness, accountability, and effectiveness) provide the lens for a democratic evaluation of the Chicago Public Schools under the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts.
This chapter focuses on the first of my three dependent variables: responsiveness. This variable addresses how the needs of minority residents have been met under the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts. Interview data are the primary source for my research and I focused my questionnaire for parents and community activists around whom they have sought for assistance with their educational concerns and whom has responded. This is important because while an open system may foster participation by diverse groups, a system that closes the door to participation by those served by the schools themselves does not encourage participation from diverse groups. Many studies, including my own research findings through interview data, emphasize the need for parental involvement in schools as a necessary component for student achievement (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler 1997). If a school system is designed to meet the needs of students, it can hardly do so if students' parents are excluded from decision-making. This possibility of exclusion in educational policy contrasts with the pluralist notion of an open system where all stakeholders have the opportunity to exert influence.

My approach to the issue of responsiveness to minority interests stems from Browning, Marshall, and Tabb's (1984) notion that minority group mobilization at the local level can lead to incorporation in city governance and ultimately result in governmental responsiveness to minority residents' concerns. I have applied this idea of responsiveness to educational policy because responsiveness requires a degree of incorporation of minority interests. Without consideration of these peoples' views, it is unlikely that educational policy decisions will be satisfactory to minority groups. I
emphasize the minority community because the Chicago Public Schools educate a 54% Black and 34% Hispanic student body (CPS Race Ethnic Survey). Most assessments of school reform, especially since excellence in education is most often measured through indicators like test performance, ignore the analysis of those personally served by the school system. Similarly, with the exception of the dramatic shift to a community-based school reform in 1988, school policy in Chicago has historically blocked Black and Hispanic parents from exercising influence. As a result of their exclusion, many researchers have downplayed or overlooked the significance of parental assessment of school reform. The driving force behind my research has been the impact on the minority community from school reform initiatives. I have accordingly relied on individual assessments of the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts by parents and minority community activists. Despite the limited size of my parent and community member sample, I believe that the sentiments expressed by these respondents offer important firsthand information on the impact of school reform efforts in Chicago.

In addition to consulting parent and community members for their assessment on the responsiveness of the school system under both laws, I have also conducted elite interviews to identify possible differences in perceptions. Elites include top level and middle level school administrators, teachers and principals, state legislators, and

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1 My 46 interviews were conducted with the following groups: eleven parents, six community activists, four former community activists, one journalist, two state legislators, six past and present school board members, six teachers, two principals, seven administrators, and one recent CPS graduate. Ten of these individuals are past or present local school council members.
academicians. Although there were a few instances when there was an overlap between elite and non-elite labels (e.g., a former school board member who is also a community activist), the lines between elite and non-elite were usually clear. While it is commonplace for elites to be consulted regarding their views on policy reforms due to their involvement in these decisions, community and parent groups are often neglected. For this reason, and in the tradition of Michael Parenti, I examine educational policy from the "bottom up" by focusing on those non-elites who have a tremendous stake in the policy process despite their lack of influence (1970).

Having referred to the research of both Browning, Marshall, and Tabb (1984) and Parenti, there is an important theoretical issue that must be addressed pertaining to pluralism. Browning, Marshall, and Tabb work within the pluralist framework to convey their belief that minority groups can become part of the political system if they unite with liberal Whites and combine resources. Stated simply, mobilization within the minority community can lead to political incorporation and ultimately, policy responsiveness. My adoption of policy responsiveness is derived from this framework. However, I do not entirely accept the pluralist conception of an open system where influence and benefits are available to all groups in the system because interracial coalitions can be short lived and not necessarily result in long-term responsive policy (Keiser 1997; Sonenshein 1997; Pinderhughes 1997). The history of Chicago politics, and school policy in general, demonstrates that minority groups have historically been excluded from decision-making despite their clear stake in the education of their children. Using Michael Parenti's anti-
pluralist, bottom up analysis allows us to evaluate historically quiescent participants and their assessment of the policy process. Although non-elites may not always be excluded, as Chicago’s 1988 school reform act demonstrated, understanding their positions can help in determining the consistent and occasional participants in the policy process. Bachrach and Baratz suggest that understanding whether there is a dominant group placing issues on the agenda or limiting decision-making power of lower status groups so that their concerns become non-issues, directly contradicts pluralistic ideals of inclusion (1980). Determining who is included in policy making, and whether policy decisions address the concerns of non-elites being served by the school system, speaks directly to arguments of anti-pluralists who contend that pluralism is not present if opportunities and resources are not distributed equitably.

There is one additional point regarding policy responsiveness and pluralism that requires attention. If numerous groups are suddenly working together within a single policy sphere there is an increased risk of bickering which may result in inefficiency or stalled policy making. In the case of Chicago’s 1988 school reform act it is possible that the rapid influx of parents and community members in local schools placed added stress on teachers and school administrators because parents are usually more concerned with the fate of their individual child over the entire student body. Democratic inclusion may provide opportunities for non-elites to participate, but it may also complicate the ability for the school system to address the needs of the entire student body if individual demands
on the system become the overriding focus. Essentially, responsiveness is democratic only if the general needs of groups as a whole are addressed by the system.

Methodology

Having established the significance of responsiveness as an indicator of democratic inclusion in the policy process, I used several indicators to evaluate administrative responsiveness to the concerns of minority residents. Non-elite and elite interview data, participant observation, the racial and occupational background of administrative bodies, and voter turnout statistics for local school council elections have been examined as they relate to the responsiveness of the school administrative structures.

To what degree under the 1988 reform law's decentralized structure do board members act as "delegates" for their constituents, or as "trustees," relying on personal judgments, in designing educational policy? This is an important question because the decisions made by board members ultimately affect the students in the public schools. On the one hand, if parents feel that appointed board members do not consider their positions when creating the policies for students and act as delegates, the democratic ideal of access to education is shattered. On the other hand, if parents believe that board members do consider their concerns when creating policy, they are more likely to feel like constituents and important stakeholders in education. My interviews with parents and community representatives have sought to determine whom they seek for assistance in educational policy and whether they believe their concerns are reflected in subsequent policy decisions.
The 1988 legislation, in decentralizing decision-making power, created the short-lived School Board Nominating Commission (SBNC). This commission was composed of local school council (LSC) members who had been elected to their sub-district council and were then elected by colleagues to sit on the SBNC. This committee was responsible for creating slates of potential school board appointees for the mayor. Although the 1995 legislation eliminated the SBNC and the necessity of city council approval of school board appointments, I have used parent and community assessments of the SBNC process as an indicator of responsiveness under the 1988 legislation. Because SBNC members were also elected LSC members, there was a direct link between the community at large and the selection of board members. This organization was groundbreaking because never before were school board members selected with community input.

Among the most important components of the 1988 school reform law was the creation of the local school councils (LSCs). These parent and community majority, democratically elected, councils operate in each school and perform duties related to the governance of the school. Although the extent of their power was altered in the 1995 legislation, they are the only popularly elected educational governing body that parents may seek for assistance. For this reason, my interviews have also focused on whether parents believe their LSC has been responsive to their concerns under the 1988 and 1995 reform laws. Because LSCs were seen as essential democratic vehicles when the 1988 reform was being drafted, it is important to know whether these councils successfully carried out their responsibilities or if the 1995 legislation altered their level of
responsiveness to the communities they were designed to help. For this reason, parent and community interviews are an important component of this study.

As an additional indicator of responsiveness pertaining to LSCs, I have examined voter turnout statistics as a measure of responsiveness. Beyond the ideal of civic responsibility as a reason for voting, people are more inclined to participate in politics if they believe that their vote will make a difference. If people find that their vote really does not matter because elected officials do not make decisions that reflect their concerns, political efficacy and voter turnout will decline. I have therefore looked at voter turnout and the number of candidates in elections as a supplementary measure of responsiveness.

In addition to examining the level of policy responsiveness to minority concerns through LSCs, the SBNC, and school board members under the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts, I have also examined the racial and occupational composition of the school board under both school administrative structures. This is important as the presence of minority board members may be linked to policy decisions that are more responsive to the community served by the school system. William E. Nelson discovered a correlation between mayoral appointment of school board members in Boston and a reduction in the number of Black school board appointees (Nelson forthcoming). Consequently, community members witnessed a decline in educational policy that addressed their concerns. If this decline in responsiveness depresses efficacy and participation within the minority community, urban education can hardly be considered democratic. For this
reason, I have tracked the racial and occupational make-up of the school board and sought community input as to their belief in the importance of descriptive representation.

After evaluating responsiveness data collected under the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts, I conclude with a comparison of administrative responsiveness under these two administrative initiatives.

II. Administrative Responsiveness in the Post-1988 Period

The School Board Nominating Commission and Board of Education

Chicago’s 1988 school reform legislation decentralized the administrative structure of the school system by placing an unprecedented amount of power in the hands of parent and community members. As detailed in chapter three, one important component of the 1988 law was the creation of the School Board Nominating Commission. Composed of 28 people, 23 of whom were elected LSC members and had been selected by their colleagues to participate on the SBNC. Although there were informal school board nomination procedures in the past, the individuals whom mayors invited to participate were usually business elites. In addition, because there were no formal stipulations mandating that the mayor select those nominated by his commission, previous commissions were actually inconsequential. Creating the SBNC signified the first time that community members were included in school board member selection. Because LSC members were democratically elected after the 1988 legislation was implemented, voters actually had an indirect influence over school board selection because they could hold the SBNC accountable for

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2 The other five SBNC members were appointed by the mayor.
their decisions. In addition, because city council ratification of the mayor's board selections was required, there was yet another link between democratically elected city officials and the school board selection process.

In addition to being representatives for the community, SBNC members were committed to increasing racial, ethnic, regional, and occupational diversity on the board of education (former activist interview 7/7/98). Although past school boards did have some racial and ethnic diversity, the policy of recruiting a diverse group of members was a radical departure from previous searches. The SBNC advertised in newspapers and distributed flyers throughout the community urging interested individuals to come forward for consideration. The chairman of the SBNC during its existence explained:

The SBNC was unique and important for a number of reasons. First, the mayor could not get around this democratic selection process, he was required to choose one of the three people we sent for each of the fifteen board positions. Many of us were grassroots activists who had played a role in the 1988 legislation and were willing to give a great deal of our time to finding the right people for the school board. Our selection processes was very open and because we had fifteen slots to fill, we could be sure that there was diversity on the board according to race, economics, location in the city, the type of school they were representing, whether they were representing parents or business, and whether they had concerns that reflected a broad interest. You must also understand the commitment that we all had. We were not paid as LSC members, as sub-district council members or SBNC members. We had to nominate 45 people for the mayor and we usually had over 300 applications and did approximately 230 interviews. This took a lot of time and it was a challenge to get 28 strangers together to make some really tough choices (former activist interview 10/24/98a).

Due to the efforts of the SBNC, a school board eventually emerged from the SBNC that was more diverse and democratic according to many activists in the minority community.
Table 4.1 illustrates the changes in the racial composition of the school board between 1986 and the present time. The 1990 school board was the first board to significantly address the goal of diversity on the school board. Not only was there an increase in minority representation and a corresponding decrease in the number of White members, but there was an increase in economic and occupational diversity on the board. No longer were board members important business or municipal actors, but they were middle class parents, ministers, community activists, homemakers, and professors.
1980 and 1986 School Boards: 11 Members

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1989 Interim School Board: 6 Members

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1990 School Board: 15 Members

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1995 Board of Trustees & Management Team: 10 Members (5 board & 5 management)

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<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

a. All school board racial background provided by the Office of Communications for the Chicago Public Schools.

b. Boards were selected to highlight the changes in racial representation after the 1988 and 1995 legislation took effect.

Table 4.1 Racial Representation on the School Board
Interviews with parents and community members revealed a relatively high level of satisfaction with school board selection under the SBNC process. Although the actual name of the commission was usually unknown to those who were not active in the 1988 legislation, they were aware that there was community input in the board selection process for the first time. The racial, ethnic, economic, and occupational diversity which was reflected on the school board appeared to provide people with a sense of direct representation. One SBNC member explained:

The nominating commission gave the community the chance, for the first time, to have some input into how the board was selected, and consequently how the budget was run. This gave us the system-wide input that the LSCs provided at the school individual level (former activist interview 10/24/98b).

When asked whether they could remember any school board members selected during the time of the SBNC, many interviewees were readily able to do so. One well known academician and community activist insisted:

Today people don’t know the names of any members on the Board of Trustees. If you asked parents for the names of school board members after the 1988 legislation was implemented they could usually name at least two (community member interview 7/14/98).

In a few interviews, respondents recalled having personal ties to board members after the 1988 law was passed. Some respondents indicated that board members had been neighbors or had children in school with their child or children. The fact that respondents reflected positively on the school board selection process after the SBNC was established is critical. There was a clear feeling among these respondents that there was finally a
mechanism intended to include the desires of the minority community. This was important to all parent and community respondents.

While there was a high degree of satisfaction with the SBNC, and a clear consensus that it connected the community to the educational policy process, criticisms also emerged. One of the main problems identified by SBNC members was that they were not given the resources, office space, or any legislative guidelines under which to operate. Essentially, the Illinois Legislature had created an organization without any formal structure except for the number of members and a time line in which to have nominations submitted to the mayor. As an illustration of the organizational problems suffered by the SBNC in the first years, the commission was not provided with any money in which to operate or a place to meet. The former chairman noted that those people interested in entering the SBNC’s screening process did not even know where to send their applications (former activist interview 10/24/98a).

Although the problems identified by SBNC members derived from ambiguity or insufficient provisions for the SBNC under the 1988 legislation, the problems identified among parents and community activists is best reflected in the words of the former Chicago Public Schools Director of Mathematics:

I really liked the SBNC process because it really got down to the community level to select board members. But the problem with this process was that it tended to get political (community member interview 7/21/98).

The reason this process was considered “political” stems directly from its strengths pertaining to diversity on the school board. In their attempts to increase representation on
the school board, a number of interested groups began fighting for spaces on the board.

The SBNC chairman claimed that the dissatisfaction expressed among many groups was an indication of the democratic nature of the SBNC selection process:

The first couple of years everybody was complaining because they saw people from all over appointed to the board. For example, the reform groups were upset because there weren’t enough reform people on the board. We also received complaints from the mayor, from the unions. Because we got complaints from everyone, but also knew that many of these same people appreciated many of our choices, we felt the process was very democratic (former activist interview 10/24/98a).

However, observers also noted that they believed that the SBNC was submitting slates of names that Mayor Daley was unable to choose from and that he could reject the entire slate if a decision could not be made. Some current school administrators asserted that this was strategically done to frustrate the mayor and make him look weak. One example that was provided was as follows:

The SBNC could submit a slate of names for a position that was intended for a Black board member. So, they would give him (the mayor) a list of three very active and influential Black candidates which would infuriate him because he couldn’t take one over the other. It would be like giving him a list with Bobby Rush and Jesse Jackson and telling him to choose one (administrator interview 7/15/98).

A former alderman and current Black community activist and radio talk show host complained about the SBNC process for different political reasons:

The SBNC would have been a very good thing if the mayor would have actually had to select one of the three names sent to him. If he would have been mandated to select one of the three it would have been fine, but he could reject all three and this undermined the process (community member interview 10/31/98).
Despite these political problems, the high degree of satisfaction with the school boards that were chosen through the SBNC process indicates that the political nature of the SBNC was relatively inconsequential to parents and community members. The fact that greater racial, ethnic, and economic diversity on the school board resulted from the SBNC process, and that subsequent actions were connected to the community through elected officials, seemed to outweigh the complaints of the politicization of the selection process. This is especially clear in looking at the selection process under previous nominating commissions which were entirely elite centered and selected by the mayor. These previous commissions made their recommendations which could be rejected by the mayor. Resulting from that process was a steady stream of board members with a political machine allegiance. Needless to say, these individuals did not reflect the community served by the school system.

One important difference I discovered between my interviews with present day school administrators and my sample of parent/community respondents was that the administrators claimed the SBNC process was far too cumbersome, time consuming, slow, and not conducive to an efficiently run government structure. This finding seems related to notion that the selection process was too political. Considering that the SBNC selection process primarily included community groups who were traditionally excluded from meaningful participation in Chicago's political machine, it is not surprising that their desire to create a truly democratic school board selection process was slow and cumbersome. In comparison to the selection process used today, where the mayor makes his own decisions
independent from approval of any organization, the SBNC would appear cumbersome. Interestingly, parent and community respondents did not identify the process as cumbersome or slow. Rather, they seemed to understand that while it may have been political due to competition for representation on the board, that this was an acceptable price to pay for representation. The most important question is therefore, the extent to which school board members nominated under the SBNC selection process were responsive to the community for which they made decisions.

The interview schedule used for parent and community members included several questions designed to illicit an evaluation of administrative responsiveness. One of the more general questions was whether an individual felt more connected to the Chicago Public Schools after the creation of the 1988 school reform initiative. This question was designed to determine if the respondent believed they were incorporated in the system. All parent and community activists indicated that they did feel more connected based on their knowledge of the school board selection process, or their involvement with the LSC in their neighborhood. From the variation in responses to this question, it was evident that there was not one clear avenue for participation used by all of these non-elite respondents. Rather there appeared to be many different ways that respondents felt connected to the school system, often for the first time.

Clearly the most important interview question related to school board responsiveness was whether the school board was responsive to individual’s concerns after the 1988 reform was established. Some respondents, especially those community
activists responsible for the 1988 legislation, were aware that Mayor Daley retained his seven member interim Board of Education for the first year and a half after the reform package passed in the legislature. These respondents pointed out that these temporary board members were only responsive to the mayor who had appointed them and that this interim board selected Superintendent Kimbrough (1989-93), an individual who was not the community’s choice. However, after the new board was finally seated, there was a consensus among interviewed parent and community respondents that the board was finally responsive to their concerns. This was emphasized by several respondents who said that previous school administrations had included token Black members who did not increase the responsiveness of the system to the inequalities in Chicago’s schools based on race.

The publicity around the 1988 reform legislation, while it largely concentrated on the creation of LSCs, also brought attention to the expanded and more racially diverse school board. Among the parents and community members interviewed, several had contact with the new school board regarding problems or concerns with the school system. One former Chicago Public School parent and current school volunteer said:

I used to go down to the Board of Education meetings, either once or twice a month after that ‘88 law. I’d go and they’d have meetings and if you had a problem with the schools you could go talk to them. You only had something like two minutes to make a case, but if enough of us got together we could usually persuade a board member to combine the time and let one person speak longer (community member interview 10/29/98a).

Parents and community representatives typically explained that they were aware that they could attend and have their voices heard at board meetings. However, while parents and
community respondents believed their views were heard by board members and that the members did care, there was a sense that board business often took too long. For example, the same parent who claimed he routinely attended board meetings said, “they sure took their time getting around to doing things,” (parent interview 10/29/98a). One former community activist and current school administrator shared a story about the post-1988 school board and their inability to act quickly. In the early 1990s he and a number of parents wanted to volunteer and paint their children’s school with some donated paint. Assuming this would be an easy activity for the board to approve, as all the paint and labor were donated and because the school had not been painted for over thirty years, they were wrong. After thirteen months of meetings with the board they finally produced the regulations for the painting and approval (former activist interview 10/24/98a). The accusation that the fifteen member board micromanaged was an issue that occasionally emerged with parent and community respondents, but was voiced even more frequently by the current school administration. One current administrator and former Chicago Public Schools lobbyist said that with the post-1988 school board there were too many committee meetings and that board members could often be found milling around the board office (administrator interview 7/13/98b). This alleged “inefficiency” appears to be associated with the amount of time board members spent addressing community concerns and also precisely what parent and community members seemed to value, even if they made slow progress.
The slow rate of response among school board members to community concerns complicates a clear measure of responsiveness. Although board members appeared more accessible and interested in the concerns of community members after the 1988 legislation was enacted, their inability to act quickly became a problem. Depending on how responsiveness is operationalized, evaluations of this variable can be analyzed differently.

If responsiveness is a product of listening, holding regular public meetings, making themselves available at the Pershig Road office, and eventually enacting policies that met the needs of the community, then the 1988 school board members were very responsive to minority concerns. On the other hand, if responsiveness is the result of board members rapidly enacting policies that rectify community grievances, then responsiveness cannot easily be argued. In this study I operationalize responsiveness as the ability to meet the concerns of the community, despite the pace of action. One current Chicago Public School administrator and pre-1988 school board member explained:

The school board that I was a member of, similar to the board after the 1988 legislation, had one extremely important restriction—money. We used to see huge surpluses in something like the playground fund, but we couldn’t touch it because it was earmarked for the playgrounds. Never mind that the schools’ roofs were caving-in and that schools were crumbling, we couldn’t touch it or borrow money because of the deficit and the School Finance Authority’s oversight. Those new board members listened, but they got tied-up in red tape and restrictions. With that committee system there was just no way around it (administrator interview 10/23/98).

One current school administrator suggested that reading board minutes after the fifteen member board was seated would provide insight into why response time was not timely (administrator interview 8/3/98). Spending a day reviewing post-1988 school board
minutes provided some additional insight into responsiveness. The most interesting findings were the sheer number of issues post-1988 school boards addressed, the frequency of their meetings, and their elaborate committee system which offered access to the community through open meetings.

The 1988 legislation incorporated a number of standing, special, and ad hoc committees as part of the school board structure. These committees included six standing, two ad hoc, a special committee on desegregation and one regarding the teachers’ pension fund. In addition to the board meetings that were held twice a month and open to the public, board members served on four or five board committees. Committee meetings, similar to board meetings, were open to the public and held at various times throughout the weeks between board meetings. After reviewing hundreds of pages of board minutes and committee reports, it was evident that school board members consistently addressed concerns of their constituents. However, the committee process also seemed to impede timely board assistance due to the delegation of responsibilities and the variety of problems brought to the board. The school board archivist explained:

Those boards would deal with every little problem that came their way. If one of the cafeteria workers in a particular school was causing problems, they’d deal with it. If they needed to get supplies for a different school, they’d deal with it. It was definitely micromanaging, but that was how the board was set-up (administrator interview 6/26/98).

The procedures followed by the Board of Education, with their elaborate committee system, reporting procedures, and openness to public input, clearly slowed progress of the system. The other important problem that always plagued the Chicago Public Schools
were the financial problems experienced by the school system. Budget deficits created severe financial strain on the school system. This appears to be another reason that the school board was slow in responding. Any requests made by the community that involved funding were extremely difficult to honor.

Another important indicator of responsiveness that was mentioned by community activists was the role of the superintendent. Several respondents explained that they believed that Superintendent Argie Johnson (1993-95) was one of the most accessible superintendents that the school system ever had. One respondent explained:

Johnson was very accessible and interested in improving the CPS. Her term was short, but it held a lot of optimism for the Black community, especially since the other Black superintendents did not seem beholden to the minority community (parent interview 1/30/99a).

Given the agonizing defeats experienced in the Black community over the selection of Black superintendents whom they felt did not substantively represent their interests, the selection of Superintendent Johnson by the new school board reflected a clear indication that the board was responding to the Black community’s interests.

Overall, it appears that the school board created under the 1988 legislation was responsive to the minority community and democratic. This is not to say that the structure established after 1988 was flawless or ideal. The SBNC reflected the pluralist ideal where multiple groups compete on an equal footing for resources and power. While the commission did not make selection for the mayor easy, often creating slates of candidates that made decisions a challenge, they did open a previously closed selection system. The diversity on the school board that emerged due to the goal of representativeness on behalf
of the SBNC, also increased the descriptive representation on the board. Moreover, the 
fact that community members witnessed an increase in descriptive and substantive 
representation on the school board after the 1988 legislation was enacted appears to be 
highly correlated with an increased level of political efficacy among the minority 
community, specifically in the area of educational policy making.

Because parents and community members believed that school board members 
were available and willing to listen to their concerns, evidence of board responsiveness 
was present after the 1988 law was enacted. Although the board was often slow in 
addressing grievances, this was likely a result of the cumbersome structure of the school 
board’s elaborate committee system and financial strain. The perception that board 
members were interested and were viewed as representatives seems to have empowered 
many parents and community activists.

The Local School Council

Chicago’s 1988 school reform act was widely heralded as a radical decentralization of 
administrative control in a large urban school system. Several important factors 
contributed to the reputation the school system developed. Certainly one of the most 
notable aspects of the legislation was the involvement of the community in school board 
selection and the diversity that was subsequently reflected on the board. The other 
esential part of the 1988 legislation was the move toward school site-based management. 
The creation of LSCs essentially opened the doors for parents and community members to 
make educational decisions at their local school. This was only possible because of the
union between the Black community and the business community who lobbied the legislature for decentralization and an organization that would allow the community to have direct involvement in their neighborhood schools. Because LSCs are elected by voting-age individuals in the school’s neighborhood, the creation of LSCs granted the community a great deal of influence.

The 1988 legislation mandated that each of Chicago’s then 541 schools would have its own LSC composed of eleven members: six parents, two community representatives, two teachers, and the school’s principal. The parent and community members were elected by voting-age residents in the school neighborhood and the teacher representatives were elected by the teachers in the school. Beyond the organizational structure of the LSC, they were granted tremendous discretion in curriculum and financial decisions for their school, in addition to the ability to hire and fire principals. Bypassing the school board, LSCs were directly allocated state Chapter One funds based on their low-income student enrollment. LSCs were also given the final approval on the school’s expenditure plan. The broad and expansive power granted to LSCs made them essential parts of the school administration as they made most of the decisions for their schools. The school board retained the power to oversee the school system, but it was largely restricted by the fact that the School Finance Authority (SFA) actually managed the budget. In effect, while the school board was able to monitor the school system and

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3 At the high school level there is also a non-voting elected student representative.
4 Although principals were members of the LSC, they obviously did not have the power to vote on principal selection.
mandate standards and system wide requirements, the LSCs operating across the school district were the locus of educational policy. The balance of power between the LSC and the board favored the LSC in many respects because the SBNC was composed of LSC members and there was a sense of LSC oversight of the board (former activist interview 10/24/98a). According to the three post-1988 school board members, the board and the numerous LSCs worked well together and shared a mutual respect based on their individual autonomy and shared community based concerns (Bristow interview 3/8/99; Cox interview 3/11/98; James interview 3/10/99).

When I began my interviews with parents and community representatives I quickly realized that the most important aspect of the 1988 legislation for many of these actors was the creation of the LSC. Never before had parents been integrated into school decision-making. These school-level elected bodies provided a sense of inclusion and efficacy among community members. The energy that was continuously identified by respondents regarding the first LSC elections indicated that these councils reflected the highest source of political incorporation ever experienced at the school level. Those respondents who had actively participated in the 1988 legislative process professed their sense of accomplishment in creating these councils. Even more important was the description among parent and community interviewees that the LSC made them feel more important in their neighborhood school. Many individuals said that their LSC members encouraged them to volunteer, to attend LSC meetings, and to consider running for election themselves. Seeing their friends and neighbors, many of whom did not have
prestigious occupational backgrounds or extensive educational backgrounds, brought people together based on their common interest in improving educational opportunities for children. One community representative commented:

When a spot opened on the LSC, people knew me because I was always coming to LSC meetings and volunteering whenever they needed help. You see, my children went to this school and I know not all these children don’t have a parent like the kind I am. So, they said to me, “Mrs. (name), won’t you think about running.” So I did....I call a lot of these parents and talk to them about activities in the school and concerns that they need to know about. I called them about the leaking sky lights and the crumbling swimming pool. I also contacted a lot of people when we heard the school was being reconstituted. They need to know what is happening in their child’s school and what they can do to help (community member interview 10/30/98).

The concept of descriptive representation, or sharing demographic characteristics with representatives, certainly increased on the school board after the 1988 legislation was enacted. The creation of LSCs offered an entry way into the political system for many of Chicago’s minority residents. A tremendous shift in the number of minority elected officials occurred after the first LSC elections. By 1994, LSCs were composed of 1,800 Black (42%) and 700 Hispanic (16%) members (Shipps, Kahne, and Smylie 1998). Table 4.2 (below) provides voter turnout figures for the first LSC elections held between 1989 and 1998. Table 4.4 documents the number of candidates running in these elections. Both voter turnout figures and the numbers of candidates who ran during the first LSC elections are high and appear to indicate a high level of interest in these elections compared to the decline in both areas that emerged in subsequent elections. According to one former community activist and current director of Schools and Community Relations
for the Board of Trustees, voter turnout for LSC elections was near 30% during the first round of LSC elections (former activist interview 7/7/98). Given the low level of voter turnout for elections in the United States and the estimated 10% turnout for elections in cities where school board elections are held (Gittell 1998: 155), this level of participation is quite considerable. However, the community empowerment that can be seen in the first elections significantly declined by the next round of LSC elections. The 1998 LSC elections reflected the fewest number of candidates and voter turnout among all previous LSC elections. Although mayoral elections and LSC elections have never taken place at the same time, table 4.3 presents voter turnout figures in recent mayoral elections as a comparison for the level of participation in LSC elections.

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5 The Office of Schools and Community Relations maintains voter turnout figures. However, they do not provide information on the percentage of eligible voters who actually participate in LSC elections.
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<td>1996</td>
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a. Information provided by the Office of Schools and Community Relations.

**Table 4.2 LSC Election Voter Turnout Figures**

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<td>531,107</td>
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a. Information provided by the Chicago Board of Election Commissioners.
b. The (*) denotes years when LSC elections were also held.

**Table 4.3 Mayoral Election Voter Turnout Figures**

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<th>Year</th>
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a. Information provided by the Office of Schools and Community Relations.

**Table 4.4 LSC Candidate**
Although voter turnout and the number of contenders in an election is not a direct measure of responsiveness, I have considered these statistics to determine whether neighborhood voters are sending a message about their faith in the system. With any newly-created low-level political office there is an expectation of participation, especially if the community is largely responsible for the creation of that office. I asked those whom I interviewed about the level of LSC responsiveness to their concerns during the 1988 school reform period and whether they felt that participation as voters or candidates was important. Careful not to confuse respondents about LSCs after the 1995 legislation, I concentrated questions on the first two to three LSC elections.

Local school councils between 1988 and 1995 received extremely positive evaluations from my sample of parents and community members. When asked whether their LSC was responsive to their concerns, the response was consistently “yes.” They also indicated that they recalled the excitement surrounding the first LSC elections. Respondents felt that the LSC was able to allocate money for programs that specifically met the needs of students at their local school. One frequently mentioned attribute of the LSC was that members would talk to parents in the schools and ask them what types of programs they would like to see developed. Because LSC members were seen as “common folk,” they seemed approachable to many of the parents I talked to (parent interview 10/29/98a). As one principal noted:

I really liked that each school was allocated resources to make decisions about what is needed in the school. I think this is a lot better than having someone outside decide how the pie will be divided without understanding the needs of the particular school (principal interview 7/21/98).
In addition, many LSC members were said to call parents to encourage them to attend LSC meetings or volunteer in the schools. They also indicated a very high degree of satisfaction with the principal selection process at their schools, mentioning that they believed principals became more interested in parents’ views after the LSC took control of hiring principals. One of the drastic results of allowing LSCs to select principals for four year contracts, therefore eliminating tenure, was that a number of sitting principals were removed or retired. As one former principal who was not re-hired by her LSC noted:

Three years into reform 83% of the principals were new and so they just didn’t know how to do it. And while the experienced people may have been stuck in the old system there is a certain amount of craft knowledge in how to do things that these new principals did not know how to do (administrator interview 7/15/98).

One fall day in 1998 I visited an elementary school on Chicago’s south side. I interviewed three parents who volunteered at the school. All three provided positive evaluations of early LSCs and the empowerment they felt after the 1988 legislation was enacted. They indicated that they are some of the only parent volunteers around since the 1995 school reform was enacted, but that after 1988 it was not unusual to find about twenty parents volunteering in the school each day. This fact was attributed to the creation of the LSC and all three of these parents began volunteering after the 1988 legislation was enacted. These parents, and one was a former LSC member, said that pictures of LSC members were placed in the entry way of the school building so that parents were aware of who their representatives were. All three of these volunteers
concluded that prior to 1988 they were intimidated about going into the schools because of their low level of education compared to teachers'⁶. One parent explained:

I didn't feel welcomed at the school before. Before the LSC, if a parent said something it didn't count. Then the LSC came along and we (parents) and teachers and the principal started making decisions hand in hand (parent interview 10/29/98b).

The insight these respondents provided regarding the importance of this early legislation offered the perspective of a few individuals who have consistently maintained a high level of participation and witnessed many changes in the school system. The fact that all three became active in their schools after the 1988 legislation and that they all believed early LSCs were responsive, adds to the level of administrative responsiveness in the school system after the passage of the 1988 legislation. In addition, their shared sentiment that limitations placed on their LSC after the 1995 school reform was enacted both depressed parent involvement and faith in the LSCs ability to respond to their concerns, provides an explanation for the decline in parental involvement in the school since 1995.⁶ If parents came to believe that LSCs were not influential or able to address their concerns, it comes as no surprise that the power of the LSC to maintain a high level of parent involvement virtually vanished. This finding also provides a strong contrast to high level of LSC responsiveness prior to the 1995 school reform act (parent interviews 10/29/98).

One accusation that rarely emerged among parent and community respondents was that LSC members micromanaged. Because these organizations were able to address

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⁶ The one exception to the decline in parental involvement occurred in 1996 when there was a temporary and small increase in participation (see table 4.3).
immediate concerns in their schools and because all members had a very direct connection to the school, there appeared to be a sense that these early LSCs were very open and willing to address the concerns of fellow parents, community members, and staff. The two current principals I interviewed had extremely positive reactions to questions pertaining to the LSCs that appointed them. One elementary school principal characterized the 1989 LSC that appointed him as “the pulse of the school,” implying that the members were aware of the concerns of parents, students, and community members (principal interview 10/29/98). Another elementary school principal concurred that it is critical to have parent involvement in the principal selection process (principal interview 7/21/98). Interestingly, in the cases of both these principals, parents and LSC members in their schools feel that they have been able to work well together with the shared goal of helping students.

Although the perspectives of these two principals cannot be said to represent the views of all Chicago’s principals, their perspectives offer some useful information on two Chicago LSCs.

Parent and community respondents clearly felt empowered by the 1988 legislation, especially with the creation of LSCs. In probing respondents as to why they felt their LSC was responsive, I received answers in the following categories: they felt comfortable talking with their representatives; LSCs tried to provide money for programs that parents believed in; LSC members shared the goal of improving the educational environment in the particular school; during LSC meetings parents felt welcome; and that parents felt that their presence in the schools was valued and appreciated for the first time. I interpret
these comments as strong indicators that there was a high level of responsiveness among LSC members after the initial LSCs were created after the 1988 law took effect.

The decline in voter turnout and the reduction in candidates seeking LSC positions, however, remains a concern with regard to responsiveness (see tables 4.2 and 4.4). While it could be an indication that participation declined because LSCs were seen as inconsequential political bodies, the responses I received from parents did not fit with this analysis. When I asked parents and community members if they continued voting for LSC elections after the initial 1989 election or considered running, some respondents said they really did not participate very often after 1989. One parent said that she felt the LSC at her school did a good job and that she trusted that good people would continue to hold positions on the council (parent interview 10/29/98b). Another parent indicated that while she consistently voted in the first three LSC elections, her defeat in 1989 destroyed her interest in running again (parent interview 10/29/98b). The most common response was that the LSC did a good job and people felt that they really did not need to vote. As for running for LSC, individuals who had served and those who had not, said that the time commitment was challenging, especially when holding a full-time job and raising a family. In analyzing the decline in participation, one activist made an analogy between serving on the LSC and being a member of a condominium board. In both cases you serve because you have a stake in policies, but it is a thankless duty that takes time and provides no compensation (community interview 6/25/98).
One common problem that some parent and community respondents indicated regarding LSC service was that many opposed to the 1988 legislation claimed that parents and the average community member were not educated enough on the whole to make important policy decisions. These sentiments were present among many current Chicago Public School administrators. A related issue was the potential for too much parental interference with classroom instruction due to the elevation of parents and community members after passage of the 1988 school reform act. Regarding LSC training, the initial legislation did not mandate training in budgetary decisions or curricular decisions that LSCs needed to create. One former community activist and current CPS administrator commented:

Think about what happened in 1988. We (Black community activists) finally had some say in the schools. But the legislation came back revenue neutral. So you had all these really interested parents who felt the energy and they were elected to LSCs. Many of them had no experience with budgets or curriculum or hiring a principal because they’d never been invited in the past to do these things. Without the money for training and because the system was bad shape in terms of money, it seemed as if they wanted us to fail. That way the blame could be placed on these unqualified, undereducated activists (former activist interview 10/24/98a).

As a result, some of the programs enacted by LSCs were scrutinized and criticized by observers due to the shift in governance. However, despite the fact that the legislation did not mandate training, there were a number of grassroots community organizations that conducted training sessions for interested LSC members. This notion of training elected officials is more complicated then it appears at first glance. Although it would be ideal for all elected officials to receive comprehensive training about making decisions, elected
officials in the United States do not usually receive mandated training. If legislators require that parents and community members receive mandatory training for the unpaid office they were elected to, this could have been seen as hypocritical or a statement that voters in LSC elections were unable to select qualified candidates.

The high degree of satisfaction expressed by parents and community activists about LSCs contrasts with what I often discovered in elite interviews. Many of the current Chicago Public Schools administrators believed that LSC members under the 1988 legislation were unqualified and should have never been granted such vast policy discretion. This was often linked to the financial problems that lingered after the 1988 legislation and the complaint that because the board’s central office was weakened there was not an accountability mechanism for the school system.

This “bottom up” analysis places emphasis on those individuals at the bottom of the hierarchy because they are the direct recipients of services and are frequently the group excluded from policy evaluations. The variation between elite and non-elite evaluations of the level of responsiveness of the post-1988 administration were striking. While elites frequently found that the system was inefficient, too responsive to community needs, and complained that the absence of centralized power created an accountability vacuum, parents and community activists analyzed the reform quite positively. My findings regarding the 1988 school reform act indicate that parents and community respondents were largely pleased with the level of administrative responsiveness to their concerns through the SBNC, among school board members, and LSC members. High levels of
responsiveness were also linked to an increased sense of inclusion in educational policy and an increase in parental involvement in individual schools. The school board and the LSC also significantly increased descriptive representation in the city, and this new administrative structure signified the first time that minority residents were included in policy decisions. Despite the minor concerns expressed by some respondents about the slow rate of action on the part of the school board or their feelings of frustration after being appointed to the LSC due to a lack of training, these sentiments were the exception to the consensus on increased administrative responsiveness after 1988.

III. Administrative Responsiveness in the Post-1995 Period

The driving force behind the 1995 legislation was the school system's financial instability. Although the schools had been able to operate under financial strain for many years, by 1993 there was a $150 billion budget deficit and teachers' strikes were consistently causing schools to close their doors at the start of each academic year. No longer able to operate under the severe budget deficits that had plagued the school system for decades, a state-wide business coalition created a new school reform package aimed at solving the problems of the school system. The legislation that resulted, the 1995 school reform legislation, centralized administrative power in the hands of Mayor Daley. In addition to the ability to appoint a five member Board of Trustees and a Management Team without any external approval, an unprecedented amount of financial flexibility was granted to the mayor's board. Although LSCs remained viable under the 1995 legislation, their
autonomy, decision-making ability, and financial assets were restricted. Essentially, while the 1988 legislation had decentralized control of the school system from the school board to the local community, the 1995 legislation bypassed the school board and centralized power in the hands of the mayor.

This section examines the 1995 school reform legislation and the extent of administrative responsiveness under this new legislation. As with the previous 1988 school reform section, interview data with seventeen parent and community representatives is analyzed with regard to administrative responsiveness to the minority community’s concerns. Elite interview data is also included to determine if there are differences between elite and non-elite perspectives. As incorporation in governance should be related to policy responsiveness, the racial diversity on the post-1995 school board and LSC will be compared to the composition of these same organizations under the 1988 legislation as an indicator of potential responsiveness to community concerns.

The Board of Trustees and the Management Team

The 1995 legislation eliminated the SBNC and established a five member Board of Trustees. Reverting to an earlier period when Chicago’s mayors exercised autonomy in school board nominations, this legislation granted Mayor Daley an added layer of authority. Throughout Chicago’s history city council confirmation of school board members was required. However, under the 1995 legislation the mayor was no longer required to go through this process. Eliminating the SBNC and the city council from

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7 These seventeen respondents include eleven parents and six community activists.
board selection was a clear reversal of the democratic aspect of school board selection. Another unique part of this legislation was the elimination of the superintendent. Because the school board was historically responsible for selecting a superintendent, this was a monumental shift. The position of superintendent was replaced by a five person management team, also appointed by the mayor, including a Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Operations Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Chief Purchasing Officer, and a Chief Education Officer. The Management Team's purpose is to work with the mayor and the board to efficiently address particular needs of the Chicago Public Schools.

Among the most striking aspects of the school system's new administrative structure is the number of business people and former employees of the mayor's office who now serve on the board and Management Team. The composition of the administration reflects the importance of the business community in designing this legislation and the influence the mayor has over the school system. Considering that the school board had diversified racially and occupationally, this new structure reversed the trends that emerged after 1988. The 1988 legislation had been strongly supported by the Black community and reflected its desire for community influence in education. In 1995, the legislative process was led by a new Republican majority in the Illinois Legislature. This change in leadership largely blocked participation of those active in 1988, including Democratic legislators and minority activists. Additionally, because activists in 1988 were occupied with LSC business, it has been suggested that they were unaware of the changes underway (Chicago policy expert interview 6/26/96). The two consistent organizations
active in school reform was Chicago’s business and Black communities. However, whereas the 1988 legislation was created by a Chicago business community coalition devoted to decentralization, the 1995 legislation was the product of a state-wide business coalition focused on financial stability for the school system.

Another important change in administrative structure which occurred after 1995 is that none of the board or management team members had a background in education. To parent and community respondents, this fact increased the concern about the decline in descriptive representation. In this regard, one parent noted:

If they know a lot about managing money or dealing with city bureaucrats, that’s all well and good if we need the budget balanced and the city to listen. But, if they need to create programs for our kids, how can they do it any better than me or you? If we aren’t trained in how kids learn and thrive academically, how can we know what’s best. It’s the same thing for the board (parent interview 10/29/98b).

Intuitively, it made sense to have educators on a school board. The knowledge of educational tools, techniques, and pedagogical understanding is certainly acquired through experience. The teachers I interviewed indicated that the exclusion of professional educators from the mayor’s board indicated the consistent disregard for educators’ input in school reform (teacher interviews 7/14/98). In an interview with a Black community activist and radio talk show host, he shared an anecdote related to the educational expertise of board members:

I had one of the board members on my show, and I didn’t want to embarrass him, but he admitted he doesn’t know a thing about education. These board members just don’t know anything about education. I think their orders are coming from the top and they are told, ‘sign here,’ (community member interview 10/31/98).
Gene Saffold, the one Black Board of Trustees member and the managing director of Salomon Smith Barney, said:

My background is in finance and I do municipal finance work. This means that I help local governments and school districts raise capital. Having done some of that work for the city and knowing that there is a big need for it in the schools, I think that kind of became the reason I was interviewed to be a member of the school board. If you look at our board it is structured like a corporate board. We have a lawyer, a bank president, myself, a physician, and a public affairs specialist, much like you might find in corporate America. So we really have some expertise in public finance issues, which is obviously important for CPS. Our job has been to let the education people do their job and for us to serve as a policy board. One thing I have learned about the education industry is that there is a certain way of looking at things. I would hesitate to have that become a dominant voice in how policy is set (Saffold interview 7/23/98).

Although everyone I interviewed, including elite and non-elite respondents, reported that the finances of the school system necessitated improvement and that having financial experts on the board is understandable, there was not agreement on whether a school board should be dominated by business professionals and political experts. In fact, even some middle level Chicago Public School administrators said that when the Board of Trustees expands to seven members in the summer of 1999 that educational experts should be placed on the board.

If descriptive representation is seen as an indicator of minority incorporation in policy, there is no question that the 1995 legislation led to a decline in minority incorporation at the school system’s highest levels. As one example, a tradition had emerged in 1981 where Chicago’s superintendents were Black, even if the community’s first choice candidate was not always selected. In replacing the superintendent with a
management team, the highest ranking school administrative position was replaced with a team headed by a White CEO. Paul Vallas, the CEO of the system, was the mayor's former city budget director and there was a high amount of frustration expressed by Black community activists when he was selected. One former activists noted:

The mayor, by hook or by crook, stumbled across this board and team that we were really concerned about. The CEO was White and the last four superintendents had been African American. The President of the board, Gery Chico, was Latino and the last two or three were African American. Because of this, African Americans wondered, 'what are you doing?’ these people had fought so hard to have resources handed out more evenly, and it was just taken away (former activist interview 7/7/98).

The frustration in the Black community in the wake of the 1995 legislation was evident in all community and parent interviews. With respect to descriptive representation, the new board and management team have only four Black members from a total of ten members (see table 4.1). Given that the Chicago Public Schools currently serve a 54% Black and 34% Hispanic population, the 1995 legislation significantly decreased the number of Black and Hispanic school board members. In addition, the minority members who are serving on the board and management team are occupationally and economically disconnected from the majority of families served by the school system as most members have business prestigious backgrounds or were formerly high ranking municipal employees.

Although not all respondents knew the exact figures of the new administrative structure, they readily mentioned the decline in Black mayoral appointees and linked to a decline in responsiveness. Another interesting comment that I received from an anonymous administrator, was that the board members (including the management team)
did not send their children to the public schools. In researching this, I discovered that the board president, Gery Chico, sends his children to one of the newly established charter schools (journalist interview 8/3/98). Aside from Mr. Chico, other board and management team members with school-age children send their children to private, parochial or suburban schools. One community activist who was aware of the fact that high level administrators were not sending their children to the Chicago Public Schools summarized this situation:

Having children in the school system indicates a certain faith in the system. If board members won’t send their own children to the public schools, what sort of message is that to those of us who have no choice? I mean, you at least used to know that they were sending their kids to school with yours or that they were interested in the schools for this reason. If they are making decisions for children that don’t go home to them, why should they care? (parent interview 8/7/98).

The school board, after enacting the 1995 legislation, became more homogenous in occupational background, racial characteristics, and in their shared concern for financial efficiency. The structure of the board also changed considerably. Replacing the twice a month meetings and elaborate committee system, the board now meets once a month, televises their meetings, and has eliminated the previous committee structure. This has increased recognition of board members for those who watch reruns of the board meetings on Saturday afternoons. The committees that formerly met have been substituted with a management team that receives delegated responsibilities based on their area of specialization. I quickly discovered during interviews that the term “Board of Trustees”
was seen as encompassing term that included the board and management team. I also realized that respondents were frequently confused about the purpose of the management team's purpose as many asked questions about their responsibilities.

Reviewing post-1995 school board minutes revealed an extremely efficient organizational structure with a shared consensus on the direction of school operations. When board members convene, their meeting agenda is "very well planned with a set course of objectives," according to one board employee (administrator interview 6/26/98). Because the mayor's board has introduced a large number of new policy initiatives, the board meetings seem to respond directly to Mayor Daley's ideas for change. One parent characterized the board meetings more as a public relations broadcast than a what one would consider a democratic board meeting (parent interview 8/7/98). Because the management team has replaced the committee structure, board members are also freed from details related to the operations of the schools and spend limited time in their board office (administrator interview 7/13/98b). While community participation at board meetings continues to be encouraged, parent and community respondents indicated that there is not the same "behind the scenes" interaction with board members. In comparison to comments regarding the post-1988 boards which were often in contact with community activists before meetings, board meetings after 1995 were characterized as being more exclusive.

At first glance it appears that the board is making concerted efforts to reach community members through televised meetings. However, the fact that meetings are held
less frequently was seen as a drawback for many respondents. While many parent and community respondents claimed they had seen televised board meetings, few had actually attended one. Of those I interviewed who claimed to have interacted with post-1988 board members or spoken at a meeting, only two of those individuals claimed to have interacted with the Board of Trustees or attended a board meeting (parent interviews 10/29/98). One woman claimed:

I thought the meetings would be democratic, like they were before. I went to two meetings and it seemed to me that people are cut off quicker than before (parent interview 10/29/98b).

As an indicator of board members' responsiveness, this characterization does not reflect positively. If respondents do not feel they are incorporated by today's board compared to the school board created under the 1988 legislation, it certainly appears that those individuals at the bottom of the educational policy process feel excluded from having their voices heard, much less having their problems solved.

In the case of the post-1988 school boards, I asked parents and community members whether they were familiar with school board members after the 1988 legislation was enacted. Along the same lines, I inquired about familiarity with the post-1995 board as well. Whereas these respondents claimed to have known the names of a few school board members or to have personal contact with them after the 1988 legislation, these same respondents were primarily familiar with only CEO Paul Vallas if they identified any members. I also found that respondents did not have contact with board members prior to their appointment, as some claimed to have had with school boards after the 1988
legislative initiative. This was not surprising given that more board members sent their children to the Chicago Public Schools after the 1988 law than had ever in the past (administrator interview 6/26/98).

There are several interesting aspects about respondents’ unfamiliarity with school administrators since the 1995 law was enacted. Respondents said they did not know Mr. Vallas prior to his appointment as CEO. According to one former grassroots activist and current Chicago Public Schools administrator:

The traditional activist or community member did not know the new board members or management team members. Some of the elected officials certainly knew them, but I would not have known Paul Vallas if he saw me on the street and said, ‘Hey James.’ At first we were upset that some of our people weren’t chosen by the mayor for the board. We had people we asked our alderman to suggest to the mayor. But in fact, nobody really wanted the job because they didn’t want to be abused. People thought members would be fired and the last thing we wanted was for Black men to get board positions and then lose them (former activist interview 7/7/98).

The fact that an individual like Mr. Vallas was virtually unknown among the public before the 1995 reform contrasts with his public recognition today. Probably the most interesting thing I found about Mr. Vallas is that even among people who criticize the mayor’s centralized administration, they often believe that he really cares about children. This was even noted among some individuals who felt the board, mayor, and management are totally unresponsive to the minority community.

Part of the positive evaluation for the CEO appears to be correlated with the news coverage of the mayor’s administration. In a media coverage content analysis of the
mayor's school administration, Hess found that reports were overwhelmingly positive (Hess 1998). When asked how respondents received their information about the school system today, they said that they get information from their local school, their children, and the media. Because Paul Vallas' name is well recognized and often associated with policies praised by the mayor, there could be a correlation between news coverage and parent/community perceptions. After discovering that respondents were familiar with the CEO, I inquired about his responsiveness to their concerns. This was where evaluations often shifted. For those who tried to contact Mr. Vallas regarding specific problems, they were predominately unable to reach him or any responsive central office staffer. A staff associate from Parents United for Responsible Education, noted in this regard:

Even when I have gone public with stories because the administration refuses to listen, the media will cover my side of the story and end with Paul Vallas saying he will 'look into the problem,' or that he wished I had gone to him first. The fact is that I try to contact him and don't get answers! (parent interview 1/30/99a)

Affirming this complaint one Chicago community activist and academician commented:

Vallas is able to respond quickly. But my impression is that he is like a firehouse dog, he jumps and runs each time the bell rings. And there's little strategy or long range planning that is shared with the public. Let me provide some examples. Let's say a kid is left on a bus half the night. There will be a big flurry about changing the bus system the next day. There might also be a flurry of discussion about guns in schools after some gun incident. But there is no discussion about how we want the school system to be ten or twenty years from now. If you had a responsive traditional school board the citizens could force the system to do this (community member interview 7/14/98).

In addition to these many indicators of responsiveness, my interview questionnaire item asking respondents whether they believed the Board of Trustees and the Management
Team were responsive to their concerns provided essential information for this study. Both community members and parents overwhelmingly indicated that they felt the school board was unresponsive to their concerns. With the exception of some individuals who thought CEO Vallas was trying to improve the schools, most respondents felt they were excluded from the educational policy process because board members are inaccessible and because LSCs have been stripped of a great deal of their powers. As one parent noted:

When my daughter was held back the LSC said they didn’t have the power to help, that it was the board’s decision. Then I couldn’t talk to anyone at the board because they wouldn’t return my calls (parent interview 11/9/98).

Board member accessibility and LSC authority under the 1988 legislation was critical among respondents in their discussions of what a responsive school administration ought to resemble.

Consistent complaints were made by respondents regarding new policies implemented by the Board of Trustees. Among the most serious complaints, were criticisms of board actions in the areas of reconstitution of their child’s school, the reliance on high-stakes tests to measure achievement and to determine grade promotion, the creation of charter schools, and the elimination of LSC power. Responses who mentioned these policies emphasized that these were not the policies they advocated and that the rapid increase in new programs is probably related to the mayor’s concentration on making the Chicago Public Schools look good due to his control of the school system.

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8 High-stakes tests refer to standardized tests used to determine whether or not a student is able to move on to the next grade level without consideration of a student’s grades or other indicators.
Mayor Daley

With the creation of the 1995 school reform act, the relationship between Chicago’s mayor and the school administration became closer than ever before. In addition to Mayor Daley’s new power to autonomously appoint the school board, he was also able to take credit for any favorably evaluated new educational policies. The mayor’s relationship with the school board is an essential component of my responsiveness variable as the impetus for placing the mayor in charge of the school system was intended to create a strong level of accountability in the school system. As the chief executive of the city, legislators responsible for the 1995 legislation assumed that the mayor’s city-wide constituency would hold him responsible for any problems in the school system. Much of the emphasis on “accountability” stemmed from the criticism that the 1988 school reform had weakened the central authority of the school board and created a chaotic system controlled by LSCs. With the mayor in charge of the school system, it was assumed that there would be a clear place for city residents to register their discontent or frustration with the system. Essentially, if residents were dissatisfied it would be reflected in Mayor Daley’s re-election bids.

One important goal of the 1995 school reform was to facilitate administrative accountability in the school system. In placing the city’s chief executive at the center of the new reform, clearly drawing upon the attributes of representative democracy, responsiveness to community concerns was though to follow. However, when reviewing Mayor Daley’s record among minority residents in light of his municipal policy
responsiveness, he has not received high ratings. Daley's electoral coalition has not included a large Black component, but rather a White constituency and growing Hispanic support component (Pinderhughes 1998). This fact was noted among virtually all parent and community respondents. Among Black respondents, there was a strong sense that Mayor Daley had not made concerted efforts to help the Black community. One Chicago journalist commented on the mayor's objectives:

I think he recognizes that in order to keep middle class people he has to have a decent school system. I think he cares about kids, but I think the first priority is certainly to keep his middle class residents happy. The mayor has created magnet schools to keep the middle class, and it remains to be seen what the impact will be on schools with poor kids because the magnet schools tend attract middle class parents who know how to manipulate the system (journalist interview 8/3/98).

If the mayor is indeed more concerned with the economic growth of the city at the expense of lower income minority residents, the prospect for responsiveness to minority concerns seems unlikely. Whereas all mayors must consider economic stability as a top priority in their municipal governance, economic growth should not come at the expense of poor and minority residents. Because achieving a balance between economic growth concerns and minority interests is a challenge for all big-city mayors, mayoral control over public school systems brings this challenge into a vital policy arena. One community activist expanded on this idea of mayoral responsiveness by analyzing the improvements in school buildings after the 1995 legislation:
One of the assets of this system could be seen in the improvements in school buildings. Although wealthier areas are clearly getting faster service and more new schools, there has been an increase in fixing problems across the city. This has a lot to do with the fact that the school system is now an official part of the city. The mayor can send his sanitation people or parks people over to improve the schools. The big question we need to consider is why didn’t he do this before? There were always broken windows and playgrounds that were dangerous, why the sudden interest? (community interview 8/7/98).

Many current school administrators emphasize the new level of accountability in the school system due to mayoral control, identifying school building improvements, the recently balanced school budget, or standardized test score increases as indications of success. However, I did not encounter a consensus that granting mayoral control of a school system leads to educational improvement. In contrast to the relatively positive evaluations I received regarding CEO Paul Vallas, I discovered a skepticism about Mayor Daley’s control. The primary concern among teachers was that the mayor has no educational training and that selecting a board based on political factors does not increase educational achievement (teacher interviews 7/14/98). Parents and community respondents cited their concern that the system is more political than ever before and that the mayor has continued to ignore complaints about new policies enacted by the board.

During the summer of 1998 I conducted interviews with two very active and disgruntled parents. During the Spring of 1996 these parents learned that their daughters would not be allowed to enter high school the next year due to their low test scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS)\(^9\). This new board policy on grade promotion is based

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\(^9\) The ITBS test is given to students in grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. It is used to determine whether a student may progress to the next grade and it also determines whether a school will be placed on probation due to chronically low scores.
solely on test score results, and these parents reported that their daughters were depressed and demoralized with the unfortunate news that they were being retained in the eighth grade. While these young women would be able to go on to the next grade if they passed the ITBS test after attending summer school, both parents thought this was unfair given the fact that their children had received A’s and B’s in school. Both parents sought the assistance of their LSC, but they were told the LSC did not have the power to override school board policy. They then tried to contact school board members, all of whom refused their calls or took weeks to return calls. In discussions with low level school administrators, both parents were told that this was official policy and that they should follow the procedures and send the girls to summer school. Both mothers also relayed that the mayor’s staff gave them the same answer about following policy. One of the mothers decided to go to the media with the issue because she believed that shared frustration among other Black parents she knew regarding the “end to social promotion policy” necessitated action. She explained:

I only went to the press after nobody from the LSC, the principal, the regional officer, Paul Vallas, and Blondene Davis (the Chief Education Officer) would help or listen to what we had to say. Nobody returned my call for two weeks. When Mayor Daley was interviewed about my complaints he said that there were standards that now needed to be met by CPS students so that a diploma actually meant something. I was then told by the principal that had I not gone to the press and made Paul Vallas and the Mayor look bad that they probably would have granted her a waiver because she was only two tenths of a percent away from passing the test. Because I went public, there was a Catholic school that followed the story and offered (her daughter’s name) a scholarship for high school. What bothers me more than anything is that this reform is hurting the Black community. Our kids make up the majority of the CPS students and they are the ones who are suffering. Vallas and Daley give lip service to the idea of their accountability, but it is really our kids who are being held accountable. My daughter felt like a failure, and she was a good student (parent interview 8/7/98).
Individual stories of frustration and an unresponsive administrative system was a continuous theme throughout my research. As I listened to parents and community activists register their dissatisfaction with policies enacted by the administration and how powerless they felt, I was also reviewing media reports about the success of the Chicago Public Schools under Mayor Daley's control. As President Clinton continuously praises Mayor Daley for improving a school system that was once called the "worst in the nation," the minority community appears to feel locked out of educational policy once again. Therefore, the concept of placing a chief executive in charge of a school system may not necessarily increase accountability if the official is insulated from complaints and attracts positive media coverage. One parent commented:

Think about it, Chicago has long been criticized as having the worst public schools. Now, if the mayor can say that he turned this around single-handedly, without coming out with the financial flexibility he was given to do so, it makes him look really good. From the outside looking in, the statistics make the system look wonderful and the idea of having a diploma mean something is ideal. But it's not really true. These statistics are not truthful. But, it helps him get re-elected (parent interview 1/30/99b).

Despite these high levels of frustration among parent and community respondents, Mayor Daley claims credit for great improvements in the Chicago Public Schools since he assumed control in 1995. Running for his third term this year, he has continuously referred to increases in test scores and the fact that the school system has lost its reputation as the worst in the nation. Although assessments regarding the actual improvements of the school system since the mayor assumed control in 1995 differ
between community groups and the mayor’s administrators and supporters, there is consensus that the mayor has been able to use this educational reform to his advantage. To his credit, the mayor and his Board of Trustees have successfully balanced the school system’s budget, a challenge others were unable to conquer and something that is certainly important in any efficient school system. Chapter six examines several indicators of student achievement or systematic effectiveness to determine where there has actually been considerable improvement and what such improvements are most likely attributable. The mayor has used reports of increased student performance for his political advantage despite continuous questions regarding the accuracy of performance statistics (see chapter six for details). In addition, the financial flexibility granted to the mayor and the new board has freed previously earmarked resources, attracted corporate investment in the schools, and possibly limited some middle class exodus due to the creation of new charter schools and the building of new schools in more affluent areas. None of these new educational policy initiatives appear to have required the involvement of low income minority residents. Therefore, based on the character of these policies and their assessment by parents and community members, the city’s chief executive does not appear responsive or accessible for these individuals.

Based on community and parental evaluations, the level of responsiveness from the Board of Trustees and Mayor Daley is low. Post-1995 evaluations are much lower than the school boards created after the 1988 legislation was enacted. All together, the reduction in descriptive representation on the school board, the absence of educational
experts at the top of the administrative hierarchy, the inaccessibility of board members, and the creation of policies that many parents and community members believe are problematic, paint a picture of an undemocratic policy process that does not meet the needs of those directly served by the school system. As LSCs were an important component of the 1988 legislation, they will be evaluated according to their responsiveness under the 1995 legislation.

Local School Councils

Although the LSC itself was retained under the 1995 legislation, several significant changes were made regarding their discretion and policy making authority. Because the Board of Trustees was established largely to create a financially stable school system, it received broad discretion over the finances of the school system. As chapter three detailed, the 1995 legislation created two large block grants for the board to manage, as well as allowing for the combining of several tax levies into one lump sum. In addition, the dispersion of Chapter One funds, which under the 1988 legislation went directly to individual schools based upon the number of impoverished students, were frozen at 1994 levels. All of these financial provisions strengthened the budgetary authority of the board, and in some instances limited the discretion of LSCs.

Chapter One funding provided a great source of individual school funding, reaching close to $1 million dollars in some of the city’s less affluent neighborhoods.
(Shipps, Kahne, and Smylie 1998). However, in addition to the reduction in Chapter One funding, the board also attached mandates to the tax dollars that were provided to individual schools. These mandates restrict the individuality among schools in how they structure their curriculum.

In addition to the financial limits placed on LSCs, certain aspects of their governing authority were also limited. Principal selection was still the responsibility of the LSC; however, the board and the management team were authorized to replace principals whom they believed were not qualified. Additionally, if LSCs were found to operate "inefficiently," they could also be removed and replaced with interim LSCs. This aspect of the 1995 legislation has created a great deal of tension in the school system. The elimination of elected officials in a school system has been seen by some as completely undemocratic. LSCs at two schools have been removed due to the board's accusation that they were governmentally or financially ineffective. Reconstitution, one of the board's policies created for chronically low performing schools, also authorized the board to strip LSCs in those schools of their governing authority. Although the LSCs are free to meet and generate support for the school, they are essentially powerless.

The result of the financial and governance limits placed on LSCs has, according to many elite and non-elite respondents, made LSCs an ineffectual political post. It is important to note that there was not complete consensus on this point. Among

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10 As of March 19, 1999 two schools' LSCs had been eliminated by the Board of Trustees: Nathan Hale Elementary School and Prosser High School. Letter from Office of Communications 3/18/99.
respondents associated with schools where the principal and LSC work well together and where test scores have increased since the Board of Trustees instituted high-stakes testing, there was a sense that LSCs remain important despite limits on their fundamental authority. However, this was more of the exception than the rule. As an example, the LSC president from one Chicago elementary school commented on the success of her LSC members in their level of responsiveness to parents, their ability to work with their principal due to a shared goal of improving education for children, and the increase they have seen in test scores (parent interview 7/21/98). When I conducted this interview I was attending a mathematics training session conducted by the former Director of Mathematics for the Chicago Public Schools. At this elementary school I witnessed the ability of an effective school governance structure to implement a very successful program in this post-1995 reform era. Parents, community members, teachers, and the principal all volunteered their time to learn more about teaching mathematics to elementary age school children. The excitement, optimism, and clear minority inclusion in educational improvement techniques was impressive.

What I unfortunately came to learn was that the level of energy present at this elementary school did not resonate broadly. I discovered that the majority of LSC members who had either been active in their LSC or served prior to the 1995 legislation said they are now more restricted and have less power. Parents and community activists claimed that while LSC members were responsive to their concerns, they now seem unable to help even if they feel committed to doing so. One CPS administrator stated:
The administration would like to eliminate LSCs. What would be ideal is to have LSCs like the reconstituted LSCs—because they have no power. They are more advisory boards. In fact, it would be ideal if LSCs became part of the PTO (parent teacher organization). It just wouldn’t be politically feasible to recommend their elimination. This way parents have some organization they can claim as their own (administrator interview 10/23/98).

One parent commented on an interaction she had with LSC members about her child’s inability to meet the system cut-off for entering the ninth grade. She explained:

I went to talk to the LSC about my daughter’s situation and they just said that there was nothing they could do. I went to an LSC meeting the previous September because I had read about the possibility of a “social promotion” policy and when I brought it up nobody knew about it. It wasn’t until November that they started telling the kids and parents about the new policy. From what I could tell, there was very little communication between the board and the LSCs (parent interview 11/9/98).

The sentiment expressed among current LSC members was that they did not have very much contact with the board and if they had a problem they usually went to the office of Schools and Community Relations, not to board members. One member of the Office and Schools and Community Relations who was previously a community activist, explained:

LSC members come to me with concerns a lot. They really see this office as a support system. We are the ones out in the field, so they know us. They don’t know the board and they don’t think they will listen to them as closely as we will (former activist interview 7/24/98).

For those who had served on the LSC prior to 1995, there emerged a clear difference in how important the LSC was under the previous legislation. One parent who is no longer an LSC member commented:
The board can eliminate the LSC if they don’t like it. That certainly don’t seem democratic now? Now they also know that if they don’t do what the board wants, they’re out (parent 10/29/98a).

The connection and cordial relationship that existed between the school board and the LSCs after the 1988 legislation appears to have been replaced by a completely centralized power structure. The autonomy and school level authority that was once felt by LSC members and non-LSC parent and community members has diminished with the 1995 legislation.

Training for LSC members was also mandated in the 1995 legislation. LSC members are now required to complete an eighteen-hour training session. Prior to 1995, there were several community organizations existed that provided informal training for interested LSC members. These organizations, along with area universities, were given the responsibility of training LSC members in creating a school budget, making curriculum decisions, understanding Robert’s rules, and informing them about their responsibilities in the schools. On July 6, 1998 the board altered its training policies and determined that all required LSC training would be conducted by the Board of Trustees (Sheid 1998). The implication of this decision was that reform groups that had been active in the 1988 legislation, had informally trained LSC members prior to 1995, and had united with universities to conduct mandatory training from 1995 onward were eliminated from the process. The reason for this change in policy, according to the board, was to standardize training. Reform groups assert that it was an attempt to eliminate those groups that had publicly criticized the board and current administration from the LSC training process.
Although reform groups like PURE (Parents United for a Responsible Education) still volunteer to visit schools and provide additional training, this training does not count toward the eighteen-hour requirement mandated for LSC members.

My interviews with parents and community representatives, despite the limits imposed by my sample size, clearly demonstrated that since the restriction of LSCs under the 1995 legislation, they are no longer seen as an important place to go for assistance. Although the decline in voter turnout had begun after the first LSC election in 1989 (see Table 4.1), it is not surprising that turnout and the number of candidates has continued to decline given that respondents no longer see LSCs as the same influential institutions they once were. Because LSCs have been stripped of much of their power, there appear to be very few compelling reasons for individuals to seek office or vote.

Given the low level of LSC responsiveness, which appears to be correlated with the decline in authority after 1995, why has the Black community remained quiescent? This was one of the more important questions I had upon realizing the level of community discontent with the new system. Given the tremendous mobilization behind the 1988 legislation within the Black community, combined with my findings that parents and community members do not feel the post-1995 school administration is responsive to their concerns, the fact that there has not been a boycott of the system was surprising. Several individuals were able to shed light on the community’s failure to react. On the one hand, it is evident in the board’s decision to eliminate community organizations from LSC
training that community activists have been closed off from the system. A representative from PURE noted:

They do not want us to rock the boat. When we released our report about the problems with high-stakes testing they were not pleased. They don't like that we hold meetings and try to reach parents to teach them about what the system is doing wrong (parent interview 1/30/98a).

In addition to board opposition to the participation of community organizations in LSC training or any hostility that might be felt about these groups, there seems to be an even more significant reason for community quiescence. This stems from the fact that four of the most active community leaders have been hired by the Board of Trustees to work in the office of School and Community Relations. Three of these former activists were extremely active in mobilizing the community around the 1988 legislation and they all shared an initial opposition to the 1995 legislation. The director of the Office of Schools and Community Relations, and one such former activists, was also a close associate of the late Mayor Washington. One prominent community activist and academician offered his analysis on the quiescence in the Black community and the significance of former activists joining the administration:

Many people have really backed down on this issue because they don't see a lot of active ground swell. You have complaints galore, but people are not organized to fight. (name) was one of the most vocal opponents of the 1995 reform and he turned around and joined the board. How is it that he can go from being a leader of the vocal opposition to a lead participant in the manifestation of the 1995 reform? When people see that they feel discouraged. Plus, the mayor has some very astute people around him and he has been able to buy their support. The average person like (name) is making 70 to 80 thousand dollars a year. These people made 30 to 40 in previous jobs. They are not going to come out against a board that will pay them that kind of money (community member interview 7/14/98).
Similar comments about the correlation between the board's decision to hire some very important grassroots Black activists and the decline in community mobilization were frequently mentioned by long time observers of Chicago politics. An important fact to keep in mind is that in the aftermath of the 1988 school reform act, community groups became focused on making changes in their individual schools through their LSCs. Therefore, the strength of the 1988 movement had lost momentum after achieving legislative success. Although Mayor Daley did not rely on Black electoral support, his decision to appoint some very influential Black leaders seems politically strategic. Not only can the mayor claim credit for increasing the Black voice in the central office, but he also eliminated the leadership strength that these individuals provided in the 1988 school reform process. One Chicago journalist stated:

In 1988 you had a lot of minorities at the head of the school system. Now it's all White people. You had minority watchdogs who spoke put against the system a lot. Now, by and large, they are employees of the school system. It's an open question whether they have been coopted or how much influence they really have inside the school system. I don't know, but I don't see a lot as far as educational policy (journalist interview 8/3/98).

In their defense, during my interviews with these four former activists, they all claimed to exercise a great deal of influence on the inside. They generally praised the system under the new board and claimed that those reform groups who oppose them have lost sight of the goal of a quality education for children in favor of their confrontations with the administration. They frequently pointed to the assets of the LSCs and that these bodies operate more efficiently under board supervision, board training, and with the
support of their office. In his defense, the director of Schools and Community Relations said:

There is a lot of resentment in the reform community because Vallas is cutting out the need to have them. We are fighting to keep the schools open and to build new additions. Now the board is talking about achieving a balanced budget and they are building all that we fought for -- lunchrooms and annexes -- without a fight. Now they are going in, we are going in, I'm part of the system now. They call me a traitor, I don't feel like one. They say, 'you go in and take out principals who the LSCs hired.' Yup, they are not performing so we go in and snatch them out. Is that against the foundation of reform? Maybe. Maybe we will have to go in there ten years from now and make some adjustments. My fight is to keep power in the hands of LSCs (former activist interview 7/7/98).

It is apparent that those former community activists who are now employed by the board believe they have made a good decision in joining the administration. However, that sentiment is certainly not shared on the outside, among today's community activists and parents. The individuals who were previously responsible for mobilization are now critical of those reform groups that they once worked with. Because the Office of Schools and Community Relations is responsible for LSC training, and because the board has eliminated community groups from training activities, these former and current reform advocates have routinely disagreed.

Quiescence in the minority community can also be attributed to a reduction in minority political participation during the post-Washington era. Mayor Harold Washington's 1983 and 1997 electoral victories dramatically increased the level of minority political mobilization in Chicago. Since his untimely death in office there has not emerged another minority candidate with the ability to mobilize the minority community.
Considering that Mayor Washington was a strong force behind the evolution of the 1988 school reform act, it comes as no surprise that the absence of a leader in municipal politics and school reform has reduced the voice of the minority community.

In reviewing the impact of the 1995 school reform legislation on Chicago’s minority community, evidence of dissatisfaction with the level of administrative responsiveness to community concerns was prevalent. Although the school system continues to receive praise in the local and national media for improved student performance, the sentiment at the community level does not correspond with these reports. Specifically, parents do not appear as convinced that student performance has improved since the 1995 school reform was implemented (see chapter six). In addition to controversial student performance indicators, interviews with parents and community members revealed that respondents are unfamiliar with many of the board members, are concerned that members do not reflect their racial or economic characteristics, and choose not to send their own children to the Chicago Public Schools. These observations are associated with a growing sense of community frustration with the inaccessibility of board members and the programs they implement without community consent or involvement.

The school board is one of the most important administrative components of the 1995 legislation. That this board is appointed solely by the mayor places the city’s chief executive at the top of the administrative hierarchy. Respondents did not feel that the mayor had been responsive to their educational concerns. While most respondents indicated that they did not believe a mayor should be solely in charge of a school system,
they especially felt that placing Mayor Daley in control is dangerous as he has been unresponsive to the municipal concerns vocalized in the Black community. The mayor has reportedly been unresponsive to concerns expressed in the minority community at large and has not satisfactorily assisted those who sought his assistance with an educational concern.

The enthusiasm about the creation of LSCs under the 1998 legislation has significantly declined. Although there are LSCs that continue to work diligently at improving their schools, the limits placed on the LSCs after 1995 have reduced their power. This appears correlated with reduction in parents who believe the LSC is responsive. This lack of LSC responsiveness was not blamed on LSC members; rather, parents felt that these representatives no longer held the resources to assist them with their problems. The fact that LSCs can be eliminated by the board also appears to have resulted in elected councils that lurk in the shadow of the board. This is an important finding given that the LSC was one of the primary places parents believed they could go for assistance between 1988 and 1995.

If parents and community respondents do not rely on the administration to respond to their concerns, the question of where they do go when they need assistance becomes essential. It is evident that the decision by four influential Black community activists to work for the board has served to quiet the minority community at large. However, there remain several community groups which respondents indicated they may go to with their problems because they make a concerted effort to help such as PURE, Designs for
Change, or the former Latino Institute. While these groups serve as important support networks for discontent residents, they do not wield tremendous power, as can be seen in their elimination from LSC training. The most discouraging aspect of this research was the sense among respondents that while the 1988 reform act was not perfect, that the 1995 reform virtually eliminated the voice that the minority community had worked so diligently to have heard. Administrative responsiveness to the minority community today appears extremely low, especially considering the level of responsiveness identified with the 1988 legislation.

**IV. Conclusion**

Administrative responsiveness to the minority community’s concerns under the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts present two very different scenarios. The level of responsiveness under the 1988 legislation provided an unprecedented amount minority incorporation in educational policy making through the establishment of the school board nominating commission, the newly representative school board, and local school councils. Minority group activists, and those who simply experienced the results of the 1988 reform act, conveyed their feelings of empowerment due to their inclusion in the policy process. In contrast to the satisfaction with the 1988 reform which was evident in parent and community interviews, elite interviews revealed frustration with the school system during this same period due to accusations of micromanaging and competition among groups for influence. For this reason, the centralized nature of the 1995 reform was frequently favored by elite respondents. Since these individuals largely represent administrative
employees, it is not surprising that they identified their preference for the administrative structure they are a part of and claimed that the present administration is indeed responsive.

The 1995 legislation was evaluated much less favorably by parents and community respondents. With the elimination of the SBNC and the restrictions placed on local school councils, respondents felt that they were being excluded from educational policy making. In addition, when asked whom they believe has been responsive under the 1995 legislation, they did not express very much faith in the Board of Trustees or the Management Team. Mayor Daley, as he heads the school administration's hierarchy, was also not seen as responsive to the concerns of minority residents. I believe that one of the clearest examples of administrative unresponsiveness was the fact that the policies enacted by the administration are unsatisfactory to parents and community respondents. While policies like high-stakes testing and reconstitution generate reports that the mayor's school system is addressing tough problems, non-elite respondents believe these programs are hurting their children in the long run. These sentiments should be important indicators of any school reform evaluation. However, because non-elite perspectives are routinely excluded from evaluations, the 1995 reform has triumphed due to the financial stability and the test score performance improvements the mayor claims to his credit.

Whereas the parent and community respondents in this study did not perceive the current Board of Trustees as responsive to their concerns, the board appeared to have a different perception. Based on my interview with one of the current board members and
the media attention the board now receives, it appears that they are very responsive to community concerns. These differences in perception more than likely stem from the priority placed on community concerns. Whereas this is the top priority for parents and community groups, the Board of Trustees clearly has additional goals including the financial efficiency of the school system and raising student test scores. Therefore, it is conceivable that board members could find their limited contact with community members, usually at monthly board meetings, sufficient. On the other hand, the reduction in attention to the community since the reversal of the 1988 school reform act is judged harshly by community members who now feel locked out of the educational policy process.

The minority community now faces the predicament that some of the most influential Black community leaders from the 1988 reform have become board employees. In addition, the fact that a leader similar to Harold Washington has not emerged to mobilize the minority community appears to have increased minority quiescence. This lack of leadership is a tremendous set-back for disgruntled parents. At the same time, this strategy of incorporating community leaders into the municipal hierarchy exemplifies Mayor Daley’s skillful political tactics. Not only has he silenced minority groups, but his appointment of prior leaders potentially dilutes Black electoral opposition that might surface and harm his political fortune.

My bottom up analysis of administrative responsiveness to the minority community has identified the differences between two important school reform initiatives in Chicago.
If parental involvement in the schools is indeed associated with student improvement, policy makers should consider the administrative responsiveness to these residents when altering the structure of the school system. Although beyond the scope of this project, it is possible that if children observe the exclusion of their parents and community members in educational policy, they will come to believe their own political participation is not worthwhile. The larger dilemma is that this trend in minority exclusion from educational policy-making may continue in Chicago and be replicated in other large urban school systems.
CHAPTER 5
Administrative Accountability to the Minority Community

I. Introduction

This chapter addresses the level of school board accountability to the minority community. This notion of administrative accountability speaks directly to the pluralist notion of a decentralized political system where access to influence is available for all interested groups. If a system is truly open, school board accountability should reflect the interests of numerous groups. More importantly, there ought to be a considerable sense of accountability to those directly served by the school system, in this case Chicago’s minority community. To test this pluralist notion of openness, I explore whether school board accountability under the 1988 legislation differs from school board accountability today.

In the previous chapter, administrative responsiveness was found to be related to the 1988 and 1995 school reform initiatives, with the 1988 reform providing far more community involvement than the 1995 reform. In my quest to create a bottom-up analysis of school reform in Chicago, this chapter moves up from community evaluations to the policy makers themselves in order to determine where their policy making allegiances lie. By evaluating to whom policy makers are accountable when making educational decisions
under the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts, I will illustrate the connection between administrative accountability and responsive policy making. If minority incorporation in educational policy making is to occur, administrators must feel accountable, at least in large part, to the minority community on the receiving end of their decisions. If this does not occur and their allegiance is elsewhere, educational policy will not meet the needs of the minority community.

Accountability is measured by determining whom members represent in their policy decisions: the community, municipal politicians, interest groups, business organizations, or others. The 1988 community based administrative structure and the 1995 mayoral model present two vastly different administrative structures for examining administrative accountability.

The 1988 administrative arrangement created a racially, economically, and occupationally diverse school board through the establishment of the School Board Nominating Commission (SBNC) process. In addition to the community involvement the SBNC facilitated, the creation of LSCs under the 1988 legislation further increased community inclusion in educational policy making. On the surface, the 1988 school reform act greatly increased policy access for minority groups. However, because this reform decentralized the school system, too many access points for other interested groups may have reduced administrative accountability to the minority community. Therefore, the important question is whether the 1988 reform involved too many access points for organized groups to enter the policy arena, perhaps making minority policy
making less important than perhaps anticipated. Both Ester Fuchs’ (1992) and Martin Shefter’s (1985) research found that interest groups exerted more influence over policy in cities marked by weak and fragmented leadership, and the degree to which interest groups dominated city politics contributed to the city’s fiscal instability. The decentralization involved with the 1988 legislation may have involved too many access points for organized interests to exercise their power over school board appointments and subsequent policy making. Therefore, boards appointed under the 1988 nomination-confirmation system may have cast votes that catered to, in fact, too many special interests, including teachers’ unions, leading the district down the road to fiscal insolvency.

Accountability under the 1995 legislation is also evaluated according to the pluralist framework. On the surface, selection of board members solely by the mayor appears to create a direct system of accountability to the city’s chief executive. This was in fact one of the enumerated goals of the 1995 school reform legislation. However, if school administrators are selected solely by the mayor it is possible that they will initiate policies that cater only to the wishes of the mayor who selected them. If the mayor has succumbed to pro-growth municipal strategies that benefit business interests at the expense of minority residents or does not rely on the electoral support of the minority community, the pluralist notion of an open system will likely be absent.¹ Devolving

¹ “Growth politics can be defined, simply, as the effort by governments to enhance the economic attractiveness of their locality, to increase the intensity of land use by enticing mobile wealth to enter their boundaries.” (Swanstrom 1985: 3).
formal powers to the mayor may also limit the school board’s consideration of the city’s minority community and limit citizens’ access to the people who control city schools. Boards appointed with full mayoral autonomy may increase the business community’s control over educational policy, as mayors, even minority mayors, have been shown to be overly responsive to the business community (Stone 1989). Mayors have been openly motivated by fiscal factors to assume control of their cities’ school boards, and efficiency is a chief aim and general preoccupation of the city’s business elite (Peterson 1981). An important consideration for any city considering mayoral control of their school system is whether the mayor caters to the business sector and whether this is done at the expense of minority interests.

Determining to whom policy makers believe they are accountable is therefore a very important aspect of educational policy. Financial factors make political power plays over educational policy inevitable in large school systems. However, if it appears that politicians and other city elites are guiding educational policy decisions with a disregard for those served by the school system, administrative accountability becomes a roadblock for minority inclusion in policy making. If inclusion and responsive policy making are indeed important, it is essential that educational policy makers feel some tie to the community. If this does not occur and if minorities are excluded, minority empowerment will decline and could result in greater minority reluctance to participate in politics. This chapter examines Chicago’s two school reform acts to determine the level of
administrative accountability to the minority community under the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts.

Methodology

Determining to whom policy makers feel accountable when creating policy is a complicated undertaking because appointed or elected officials are unlikely to reveal that they feel an allegiance beyond those for whom they make decisions. In examining administrative accountability under the two school reform acts I examine school board members’ accountability, and briefly comment on the administrative accountability under the two administrative structures. Interviews with six school board members were conducted including two who served prior to the 1988 reform, three members seated after the 1988 legislation took affect, in addition to a current member of the Board of Trustees. These interviews provide information about to whom board members felt an allegiance, the path that brought them to their administrative positions, and their opinions regarding their accountability when casting votes. The two members who served before the 1988 reform were interviewed to gauge any changes in member accountability after the 1988 reform took affect. Although my sample of school board members is limited, I believe this sample is representative.

Due to the subjectivity of evaluating individuals’ accountability, I use several other indicators to strengthen my accountability measurement. In addition to asking respondents the direct question, “To whom do you feel accountable when making educational policy decisions?,” I examine the ties school board members have to outside
groups, their occupational backgrounds, the way they were recruited, and the criteria they used to evaluate the ideal school administrative structure. These factors are all important, especially as the ties members have to outside groups invariably influence their decision making process. In addition, occupational background may also shape board members’ priorities, as formal training in education, involvement in municipal politics, being a religious leader, or working in the corporate world all have a different effect on what an individual brings to his or her school board position. The method of recruitment is correspondingly important as there are likely ideological differences between members recruited by municipal politicians versus community activists. Concerning both occupational background and recruitment, previous ties to these organized groups may influence access for these groups with school board members. Finally, the criteria used by these past and present school board members to evaluate school board structure is useful because it indicates to whom members feel an allegiance and what they feel is truly important in a school district’s administrative structure. All of these indicators of accountability are used to evaluate school board members under the two administrative structures.

While I intended to evaluate school board votes to understand if votes predominately favored a particular group or groups under both school reforms, I soon realized that the substantial variation in the school board voting structure under the two pieces of legislation made this virtually impossible. The school board under the 1988 reform included an elaborate committee system that was open to the public and intended
to increase organization and facilitate thorough review of board business. Because votes and administrative business often took place in committees before going to the full board, there were many opportunities for interested groups to gain access to administrative decision making. In contrast, the 1995 legislation eliminated the committee system which subsequently limits access for outside groups and requires fewer board meetings each year. Another divergence from the previous school board is that the current board consistently votes as a block on new policy initiatives. Because of these structural differences between the two school boards and the lack of comparative data on the two board structures, I have examined differences according to the initiatives they developed and whom they favored as an indicator of board accountability.

The policies an administration implements are directly related to the educational governing regime's philosophy. Clarence Stone asserts that urban regimes are informal arrangements between public and private interests that carry out policy. Composition of the regimes also fluctuate as the regime adapts to social changes. Although Stone uses municipal governance as his level of analysis, his theory is useful in urban education as cooperation between various sectors of the city is important in determining whose interests are truly included in policy making. I have evaluated the administrative structures of the 1988 and 1995 reforms based on their coalitional or regime composition and the policies they implemented. These components of regime philosophy provide the final indicator of administrative accountability to the minority community under the two reforms.
II. Accountability Assessment via School Board Member Interviews

This section deals specifically with data collected during interviews with six past and present school board members. While this sample of school board representatives was asked general questions about school reform initiatives in Chicago, emphasis was placed on to whom they felt they were accountable during their years of service. They were also asked to discuss their occupational background, to explain the way they were recruited, and to suggest the best school administrative structure based on their experiences and assessment of administrative structures in the past and today. Their opinions regarding the best board structure is useful given their firsthand knowledge of Chicago's school administrative history.

Before discussing my accountability interview findings, I have a few comments regarding obtaining interviews. Contacting previous board members was relatively easy, largely because these individuals were committed to having their experiences recorded, and because many previous board members remain in contact with each other and were able to assist in my efforts to reach their cohorts. In contrast, current board members and management team members were extremely difficult to interview. Because current board members also hold prestigious jobs in the private sector, they spend very limited time at their school board offices. Members of the management team, while they spend more time in their board offices, were unresponsive to my requests for an interview. Requests for an interview with CEO Paul Vallas were unsuccessful due to a busy schedule emanating from the national attention he has received for Chicago's educational policy initiatives.
However, an interview on July 15, 1998 on Chicago’s public radio station (WBEZ) has provided some information that parallels some of the questions I asked school board members. For this reason, Mr. Vallas’s radio interview is also included in this section.

School Board Members Prior to the 1988 Reform

The two school board members who held office prior to 1988 provided some insight into school board administrative accountability that preceded the 1988 reform. One board member served from 1980 through 1984 and was selected by Mayor Jayne Byrne just after the school system’s 1979 financial crash. According to this member, Mary Smith, she was an “anomaly” on the board at that time for several reasons. First, as a homemaker she did not bring any formal management skills or training in education to the board. Although there were no required credentials to serve on this eleven member board, Ms. Smith had children in the Chicago Public Schools and was a member of the League of Women Voters. Her interest in school integration and educational equality caught the attention of the person organizing Mayor Byrne’s school board nomination process, and she was quickly selected by the mayor and confirmed by the city council. Another unique aspect of Ms. Smiths’ service was that she was not affiliated with the city-wide business coalition, Chicago United. She explained:

2 “Mary Smith” is used in place of this former school board member’s actual name.
Chicago United held the final card on who the mayor would consider for school board positions. Business groups had probably always been involved in the school system, but Chicago United funneled all these agencies and groups into one. I had a non-existent relationship with these business groups, so the day I heard one of them was putting my name in for the school board I figured I couldn’t do any worse than the others they’d chosen because the other members were mostly suburbanites whereas I lived in the city and was very concerned about the education provided to public school students (Smith interview 10/23/98).

Occupationally, Smith explained she also differed from her colleagues because many had ties to business groups or supported maintaining the segregated educational practices in the Chicago Public Schools, probably because many members were concerned about how integration would change the racial composition of their childrens’ schools. Although her recruitment reflected business involvement in the nomination process, Smith claims that she served based on her commitment to providing equal educational opportunities to Chicago’s students and because of a sense of civic responsibility. Based on her reason for accepting this position, she claims that she felt directly accountable to the students in the school system. While it is unlikely that any school board member would claim to feel accountable to anyone outside of those served by the school system, regardless of the administrative structure they were appointed under, I do believe that examining their connections prior to school board service is important. This is important because it indicates where and with whom they were connected prior to service, and prior connections undoubtedly influenced their decisions once appointed to the board.

Although the board Smith served on included an informal nomination process and city council confirmation, the ability for interest groups to exert influence was certainly
present. Because she served prior to the time of large-scale Black community mobilization around educational policy, Smith primarily recognized the influence of the business community as a force in decisions. Connections to Chicago United guided many board members’ decisions and helped them in reaching consensus on issues. Although Smith was reluctant to label other board members as directly accountable to the business community, their endorsement by Chicago United indicated the likelihood of policies supported by business groups.

Speculating on the level of accountability of pre-1988 school boards based on this one interview is difficult. Nevertheless, this interview did provide evidence of an existing connection between board members and Chicago’s business community. In examining how various groups are able to influence the policy process, business groups apparently played a considerable role prior to the 1988 school reform. Dorothy Shipps’s research specifically tracked the historical and ongoing interest among Chicago’s business community in educational issues (1995; 1997). She found that business associations in Chicago have facilitated and shaped school governance reforms due to their reliance on an educated workforce and the desire for financial stability in the city, and in the school system. Smith’s comments seemed to indicate that Mayor Byrne was a tertiary actor in the school board appointment process during her recruitment, with Chicago United and the city council playing more significant roles. The minority community, even though Smith claims she was a strong advocate of their interests, seemed to have been outsiders during her tenure. As far as the most notable external groups in educational policy during
her term, she identified business groups organized under Chicago United, the teachers’
union, and the state legislature that had recently bailed-out the school system from
financial collapse. The limited voice of the minority community during Smith’s tenure
suggests the pluralist concept of an open system was not in place.

The second pre-1988 reform school board member I interviewed, Francis Davis,
served from 1984 through 1988 and was appointed by Mayor Washington. Ms. Davis had
children in the school system and was the director of human services for Operation Push.
As a supporter and friend of Mayor Washington, Ms. Davis was recommended to the
mayor through colleagues at Operation Push where she was employed at the time of her
appointment to the board. According to Ms. Davis, although Chicago United was actively
interested in school reform, there was not an overwhelming business influence on the
school board when Mayor Washington sent his nominees to the city council. Regarding
whom she felt accountable to when creating educational policy, Davis explained:

I felt entirely accountable to my community. You see, when the day was over I
had to go home and I couldn’t go home without delivering to the children of the
community. I felt very passionate about this (Davis interview 8/1/98).

As for her allegiance to the mayor who selected her, Davis explained that she did
not feel accountable to the mayor, but that she shared his vision of an equitable school
system. In commenting on the best way for school board members to be selected in
Chicago, Davis explained:
Having a mayor select members on his own really depends on the mayor. Harold (Washington) was a very progressive mayor who brought an inclusiveness and made the people in Chicago feel that he was the mayor for all people. He believed and practiced coalition building and he respected us as a board and knew that we were doing our best for the children and to avoid strikes. I wasn’t accountable to the mayor, but we (the board) worked well with him, there was a shared vision. Today school board members are only accountable to Mayor Daley because he appoints them completely on his own and there is too much power in Daley’s five person board. At least when I was a member city council played a role, even if it was just a rubber stamp. There is nobody to advocate for the children today (Davis interview 8/1/98).

Both of these previous board members remain abreast of school board issues today and one is a current administrator for the board. Both agree that the SBNC process that emerged after the 1988 reform was cumbersome, but that it did create a board with a shared notion of accountability to the community at large rather than the business perspective that dominated prior to Mayor Washington’s term. They also expressed a shared concern that the SBNC process did slow school board action because members began to represent various interests in the community including: unions, parents, business, and reform groups. Davis asserts that the school board under Mayor Washington was the most efficient, balanced, representative school board based on his appointment decisions. She claims that the 1988 reform, in trying to legislatively replicate the representativeness Mayor Washington worked to create, made the process too cumbersome. Nevertheless, she explained:

Today it seems that you probably need something like that (the 1988 reform) where the community is involved in selecting board members. Otherwise, they don’t behave like they are accountable to the community (Davis interview 8/1/98).
Pluralists argue that an open system provides access for multiple groups to have their concerns heard. However, one of the possible results is that the system will become bogged down in representing too many diverse interests. This was a clear concern expressed by these two former school board members regarding the post-1988 school administrative structure. In this project, the pluralists idea of an open system where minorities feel they are included and where policy makers feel accountable to these groups is important as Chicago’s minority community has historically exercised little influence in educational policy despite their composition in the system. Essentially, if the system is slowed in order to incorporate minorities, this is a small price to pay for inclusion.

While these two prior board members were willing to elaborate on the strengths and weaknesses of the post-1988 boards, only one was willing to offer extensive comments about today’s five member school board. Because Ms. Smith is currently employed by the Board of Trustees, she was reluctant to make many comments about the 1995 legislative changes. On the other hand, Ms. Davis, who remains an ardent community activist, provided her analysis of the 1995 reform. She believes that the Black community has been relegated to an inconsequential position in education policy making. Although she also noted her dissatisfaction with the slowness of the SBNC process, she believes that it was the best way to ensure school board accountability to the community. Moreover, she believes that mayoral control of the school system can only work well if the mayor places priority on the children of the school system. Claiming that this priority seems absent in the current mayor’s administration combined with the unliklihood of
having another mayor like Harold Washington, she believes that mayoral control is an unfortunate way to organize a school system because board members are accountable to one individual who might not place minority inclusion as a priority over the unfortunate result is a return to minority exclusion in a policy area tied to future opportunities for Chicago’s minority youth.

School Board Members post-1988

Like the two school board members who served prior to the 1988 reform, the three board members serving after the 1988 legislation took effect all relayed a high level of commitment to the community and students during their school board service. Unlike previous board members in Chicago’s history, these members were nominated through the SBNC process. As noted in previous chapters, the SBNC was intended to include the community in school board selection and to diversify the board so that numerous interests would be represented. Diversity included the racial background of board members, but also added occupational, economic and geographic location in the city to the diversity equation. These three members did not reflect the traditional school board member of the past, but reflected a growing commitment for diversity on the school board.

While the nomination process through the SBNC did become complex, time consuming, and cumbersome due to the elaborate screening process, all three of these board members believed it was a useful process because it guaranteed that members were accountable to the community. These three representatives came from very different backgrounds, but shared a strong connection to the minority community in Chicago. A
priest, an educational specialist for Chicago's Urban League, and a college professor, all three were recruited by community representatives on the SBNC for school board positions. All three members claimed a direct connection to Chicago Public Schools' students either through having children in the school system, or in the case of the priest, having parishioners who were enrolled in the school system. According to these board members, these direct connections combined with their occupational diversity were assets to the board of education.

During interviews with these three former board members, all of whom were appointed in 1990 when the components of the 1988 reform were finally implemented, it was evident that the SBNC nomination process played a tremendous role in their assessment of their level of accountability. Because nominees were required to go through many interviews with members of the SBNC prior to having their names sent to the mayor, all three respondents reiterated their assertion of their accountability to the community. Father Darryl James explained:

I think the process by which we were selected was a good thing. If you are talking about reform coming from the people, or the people in the community having a sense of ownership of reform, then the people who are going to serve the children and the community should reflect the community from which they come. The way we were nominated guaranteed that you’d have dedicated representatives. We were raised up from the community, so we were directly accountable to our community (James interview 3/10/99).

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3 Again, immediately after the 1988 school reform act passed an interim school board was seated until the new school board was established. It was not until 1990 that the school board designed in the 1988 legislation was seated.

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Dr. Clinton Bristow, the school board president from 1990-1995, was in agreement with Father James about the entire board's accountability to the community under the SBNC process. He noted:

Our fifteen member board felt accountable to the community because for the first time members did not have major interests other than a commitment to the school system. If you look at the five member board today, in addition to school based issues, they have major business interests and other professional interests. A person only has so much time in a day, so you can't possibly run to LSC meetings, board meetings, talk to the community, and all sorts of other things when you have a significant number of additional responsibilities that consume your time (Bristow interview 3/8/99).

This quote reflects a major change in school board structure today. Whereas board members under the 1988 legislation attended school board meetings, subcommittee meetings, and random LSC meetings, they were also available in their board office for their constituents. Although they also held paying jobs, they were somehow able to balance their responsibilities and make themselves available at their board offices. Perhaps Dr. Bristow was correct in differentiating "major" business interests among current board members and his own cohorts, but former board members certainly had other time consuming responsibilities. This suggests that former members placed a premium on being accessible to their constituents. This observation about board member accessibility on Dr. Bristow's board was confirmed by many central office staffers who were also employed during the time that these school board members served (administrator interviews 7/13/98a; 7/13/98b; 10/24/98). One of Dr. Bristow's fellow board members, Florence Cox, explained:
I know we all felt accountable to the community. We disagreed on issues, but there were many of us who regularly stopped in schools we were driving by to make our presence known and to see how people felt about the job we were doing. I knew this was important for me to do in order to make good decisions for the students (Cox interview 3/11/99).

Although it is possible for any elected or appointed official to make the case that they are or were directly accountable to those whom they represented, it appeared that the sample of members who served after the 1988 legislation took hold felt a shared sense that they were giving their time to help their personal community and considered themselves stakeholders in education due to their community ties. If individuals usually act in their self interest, it is no surprise that these board members made decisions with community interests as a major component. On the other hand, if an individual is recruited based on prestigious occupational status, and has virtually no ties to the educational system except for his or her financial concerns, it should be no shock if representatives do not reflect the desires of the minority community served by the schools. All three of these post-1988 board members noted that they worked virtually full-time on school board responsibilities without compensation, that the nomination process was demanding, and that they were often frustrated with the financial problems of the system. More importantly, they all mentioned their connections with the community as a strength during their terms. Dr. Bristow commented:
Most people in the city, and I don’t mean to toot my own horn, felt some
closeness to the board president at that time, and I know they would say that
about other board members at that time too. I don’t think the community
organizers, especially in the African American community, would say that they
feel that they can sit down and get an audience with current school leaders— I
mean a serious and legitimate audience. They might get a perfunctory audience,
but they wouldn’t actually be heard and listened to now. One of the strengths of
our board was that there was community inclusion (James interview 3/8/99).

The comparisons made between the previous Board of Education and the current
Board of Trustees reflect the sense that these past members do not believe that the same
community concern is present on today’s school board. Whereas all fifteen of the school
board members who served under the 1988 legislation had a direct connection with the
community, this was not a component of the 1995 legislation. By eliminating the SBNC
and city council ratification of school board nominees, board members no longer have
strong community ties. Rather, the five board members currently serving, and their
management team members, come primarily from the business sector or worked as high
ranking municipal officials prior to their appointments. This is because the 1988
legislation brought nominations down to the community level and the 1995 legislation
made school board selection a part of city politics. The 1995 school reform act places
emphasis on formal training in finances or governance, therefore excluding many of the
community based qualifications brought by board members under the 1988 legislation.

The sample of school board members who served prior to 1988 and those who
served under the 1988 legislation were in agreement that board members must feel a sense
of accountability to the community. Although one former board member was reluctant to
comment on the current board because she is presently employed by the Chicago Public
Schools, the rest explained that accountability has changed under this new system. School board selection today eliminates the community involvement that all past school board members explained was important to them and made them feel accountable to the students served by the Chicago Public Schools. Father James elaborated on the difference between the school board on which he served compared to today’s board:

On the school board today there is an absence of people representing the grassroots. And because of that, there isn’t the same passion. I don’t mean to make a value judgment about those people, but because there isn’t a passion for the school system and the community, it’s just not the same as it was when we served. At that time you had a group of people who felt a passion—beyond a shadow of a doubt—to make certain that they would respond to the will of the people and make the best schools for the children (James interview 3/10/99).

One potential problem that the 1988 legislation created was the opportunity for many organized interests to penetrate the school system. If fragmented power is a characteristic of an administration, there may be many access points for organized groups to influence policy making. As Fuchs’ (1992) and Shefter’s (1985) research studies indicate, municipal governments that exhibit these characteristics can lead to interest group domination on policy making and fiscal insolvency. Applying these findings to the Chicago’s decentralized school system reveals interesting results. Prior to 1988 the school system operated under severe budgetary deficiencies. Therefore, the fiscal insolvency experienced by the school system after the 1988 legislation pre-dated the decentralized school initiative. Interest group competition, on the other hand, was a vibrant result of the 1988 reform. Not only did the post-1988 board members bring their connections to
outside groups to the administration, but their occupational diversity changed the nature of debates. As the chairman of the SBNC noted:

The competition was healthy. You had all sorts of people fighting to get their people on the board including reform groups, the mayor’s people, the PTA, unions. Not only did this prove that selection was democratic, but a lot of voices were heard on the board all at once (former activist interview 10/24/98a).

Competition for school board representatives who reflect various groups is one indication that the policy process was open. In addition, the school board members I interviewed indicated that although there was conflict on the board due to the access organized groups had to members, they believed that policy decisions ultimately rested on what was in the best interest of the community.

Business and community interests supported the 1988 school reform act and certainly influenced policy decisions. Part of the reason business interests influenced the process was because the School Finance Authority, the organization that oversaw all school board expenditures, was a constant presence. All former board members mentioned the oversight of the SFA, but identified the community as the group to which they were accountable. Unions exercised some influence with the board, but because the administration had few financial resources to meet union demands, strikes and unrest continued.

Despite the decentralization the 1988 reform provided, including the SBNC process, the power of LSCs, and the increased diversity on the school board, it does not appear that the 1988 reform parallels Fuchs’ (1992) or Shefter’s (1985) findings. The divergence between these authors’ findings and my own appear rooted in our levels of
analysis. Whereas Fuchs and Shefter examine broad municipal policies in Chicago and New York, my research focuses solely on educational policy making and minority incorporation in Chicago. Although Chicago’s 1995 school reform legislation centralized educational policy with other municipal arenas under Mayor Daley’s control, educational policy-making has always functioned as an important independent domain. Fuchs’ and Shefter’s research indicates that municipal decentralization and subsequent interest group competition leads to fiscal insolvency and policy crisis. However, my research indicates that when decentralization occurs in a specific policy arena, such as education, that successful minority incorporation may occur. In Chicago there is not a causal link between increased participation and policy crisis or fiscal insolvency. The fact is that financial crisis was an important characteristic prior to the 1988 school reform. In addition, no single group appeared to dominate the policy process. Therefore, the pluralist bargaining that did take place during the aftermath of the 1988 school reform act, provides an ideal model of successful pluralist bargaining that led to greater minority incorporation. This finding indicates that whereas pluralist bargaining at the city-wide level may result in insurmountable problems, it may be successful in a specific policy arena.

During all my interviews, elite and non-elite, I asked respondents whom they believed school board members felt they were accountable to under the 1988 and 1995 legislation. Here too, people overwhelmingly said that the post-1988 boards were
accountable to the community, whereas they felt that the 1995 board to be accountable only to the mayor who appointed them. Father James explained:

I believe that when you are appointed by one person, as opposed to coming through a process involving a number of people, you lose sight that being a school board member is not about any one individual, but about a whole collection of people. I personally believe there is a difference if you feel a total allegiance to one individual (James interview 3/10/99).

This quote reflects what the majority of community and parental respondents expressed as well. Probably because today’s board is less accessible to the community, there is the belief that board members are insulated and directly accountable to the mayor who appointed them. In fairness to the board, comments by one current board member indicate that the board is accountable to the community because they are accessible at monthly board meetings (Saffold interview 7/23/98).

**The 1995 Board**

Current Board of Trustees members understandably feel an allegiance to the mayor who appointed them. During my interview with Gene Saffold, one of the Black Board of Trustees members, he explained that the slogan used by the Chicago Public Schools today, “Children First” points to whom board members feel accountable (Saffold interview 7/23/98). He also explained that one of the assets of today’s “corporate style” board is that members are able to act as a block:

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4 As noted previously, quotes in this study reflect the views expressed by the limited sample of respondents in this project.
We are all working in one direction and while we all have our own ideas, it’s not me doing it because I’m representing a union or my side of town. There’s a benefit to knowing that the mayor and the board are accountable. So, if we put a new policy into place, we are responsible and we work out our disagreements more easily. This is one tremendous asset of our board (Saffold interview 7/23/98).

Board of Trustees members have experience in Chicago’s business community or as previously high-ranking municipal politicians, including several former office staffers of the mayor. This appears to affect the way that they evaluate their own current appointive positions. Whereas previous board members placed considerable emphasis on their contact with the community and their accessibility to those they claimed they were accountable to, today’s board and management team members appear to use different criteria to evaluate themselves. Using the slogan “Children First,” Mr. Saffold did identify his concern for Chicago’s public schools. However, the fact that he does not send his children to the Chicago Public Schools indicates a possible lack of faith in the school system. In addition, his comments regarding his sense of administrative accountability to the minority community all returned to the theme of the financial stability the Board of Trustees has made possible for the school system. The community centered analysis used by previous board members contrasts with the efficient, corporate management style analysis offered by this current board member.

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5 Board members include Mayor Daley’s former chief of staff, the president of LaSalle National Bank, the Vice President of Government Affairs at the University of Chicago Hospitals, the director finance at Salomon Smith Barney, and the medical director at the Madison Health Center which is affiliated with Mt. Sanai Hospital (Pick 1996).
Although this one interview can hardly prove that Board of Trustees members do not feel accountable to the community, this discussion regarding the board’s connection to the community indicates a weak affiliation in comparison to interview data from post-1988 school board members. When discussing his contact with individual community members, Mr. Saffold emphasized contact via monthly school board meetings, commenting:

We do have a bit of contact with parents. We begin each meeting with public participation, so many parents come to raise issues. If I step into the hall a lot of people come up to me with concerns. They will approach me about things on the agenda or things that their LSC has been discussing. We also try to have someone visit a school a month. When we go out in public people know who you are and sometimes people have positive things to say, sometimes it’s negative. But, the meetings are probably the main source of contact. The meetings are also televised on Saturday afternoons on a local cable network, so quite a few people watch on Saturday afternoons (Saffold interview 7/23/98).

In identifying more formal contacts with community members during board meetings, a striking contrast to the former administrative structure emerges. Whereas the post-1988 school board members had contact with the community prior to their bi-monthly board meetings, regularly held meetings with constituents in their board offices, and consistently visited individual schools, Mr. Saffold’s analysis of the current board’s outreach efforts paled in comparison. Accountability requires a strong familiarity with the wishes of those to whom you are accountable. If contact is limited or restricted to infrequent and formal public forums, the prospect for high levels of administrative accountability to community groups is unlikely.

Although today’s school board and management team members are largely unidentifiable among community and parental respondents (see chapter four), CEO Paul
Vallas is one exception. Although unavailable for an interview with me, he has become a popular figure in the media. During a radio interview he shared the attitude of Mr. Saffold on the strengths of the present board including their management style ability to use their political capital wisely, commenting:

Now you have a corporate board that is not involved in the day to day management of the system. This board is involved in approving broad policy changes, and obviously approving contracts. But, the board has a very limited role. So, you have a clear line of authority. The management team manages, and the board provides broad oversight. I think that selection of this small, focused, non-political board, appointed directly by the mayor, has been important to the success of the system as has the establishment of this corporate style management structure (Vallas interview WBEZ 7/15/98).

The emphasis placed on corporate management structure has apparently replaced the emphasis placed on community involvement by former board members. In addition to the emphasis placed on corporate strategies, the notion that the new board is non-political raises some interesting issues. The 1995 legislation officially tied the school administration directly to the city’s mayor, an elected political official. Whereas the 1988 school reform act allowed for the involvement of various interest groups and could therefore be seen as political, centralizing control in the hands of one official and limiting the involvement of newly empowered groups is also political. The main difference being that in the one case lower strata groups were brought to the table and in the other educational policy making returned to an elite centered agenda.

As noted earlier, school board members are unlikely to identify an allegiance beyond those they make decisions on behalf of. At the same time, the manner in which they evaluate their responsibilities provides some insight into where their allegiance lies.
Again, the community centered information provided by pre-1995 school board members was significantly different from the data collected on current board and management team members. In commenting on some of the programmatic changes the current board and management team have made, CEO Vallas said:

Let’s face it, we know we have to make some controversial decisions. The mayor wants people who can make decisions. The mayor’s impatience is with people who refuse to make decisions. He’ll support you if you make a controversial decision that he thinks is well thought out, and he’ll refuse to support you if refuse to make any decisions (Vallas interview WBEZ 7/15/98).

Former board members rarely mentioned the position of the mayor in their policy duties, reflecting a less formal connection to the city’s chief executive. Although the same Mayor Daley was ultimately responsible for their selection since he became mayor in 1989, the community involvement which occurred after 1988 lessened board members’ allegiance to the mayor. Because minority respondents in this study believe Mayor Daley has not responded to their interests, placing all educational policy in his hands may represent the downfall for minority empowerment in educational policy.

Because Mr. Saffold and his colleagues on the board and management team are well connected with the business community and Chicago’s municipal government structure, they implement policies that reflect the agenda of these interests. As the corporate philosophy values profit margins and tangible gains, it should come as no surprise that board member Saffold and CEO Vallas base much of their school system analysis on financial gains and test score improvements. The lack of ties to the community, the fact that parents are skeptical about supposed test score increases, and the fact that
only one current board member sends their children to a Chicago Public School indicates a
disconnection to those these policy makers are making decisions on behalf of.\textsuperscript{6}

I found the differences in the criteria used to evaluate school administrative
structure striking between the pre and post-1995 school board members. The community
inclusion that former board members stressed contrasts with the corporate management
structure mentioned by my post-1995 sample. This issue necessitates further research
because whereas corporate management emphasizes bottom line productivity, community
inclusion stresses the need to bring people in even if it is a cumbersome process. This
latter philosophy has a greater potential for minority inclusion. The corporate model, with
its top-down / centralized control features, mirrors the pro-growth strategy adopted by
many big-city mayors. This strategy encourages attracting mobile capital and maintaining
and expanding the tax base (Swanstrom 1985). With big-city mayors taking control of
large urban school systems, we must understand whether this corporate school
administrative structure indeed assists the minority student body or whether it is primarily
aimed at financial efficiency regardless of minority interests. If board members in Chicago
are accountable to a mayor with pro-growth strategies at the expense of the minority
student body, alternative administrative models must be developed to increase minority
involvement.

The idea of centralizing control of the school system in the hands of mayors so that
one elected official is responsible for all educational issues was one of the primary

\textsuperscript{6} Board President Gery Chico sends his children to one of Chicago’s new charter schools.
objectives of the 1995 school reform act. While this could theoretically work well if a
mayor is committed to the pluralist notion of equal access for all groups, it can present a
problem if a mayor favors certain groups over others. Centralizing municipal policy areas
can become a hindrance for minority inclusion if the mayor in control does not rely heavily
on minority groups for electoral support or establishes pro-growth policies at their
expense. While unifying city services under one person may improve or organize the
city's infrastructure, the redistributive aspects of public education are far too precious to
consider as another policy area to consolidate. My research indicates that parents and
community respondents feel alienated from educational policy since the 1995 reform took
effect and do not believe that the mayor is responsive to their educational interests.
Because the 1995 legislation eliminated broad community involvement in the selection of
high ranking educational decision makers, the connection that had been established
between the minority community and educational policy decisions was formally eliminated
in 1995.

Figure 5.1 illustrates the school board structure during the three periods discussed
in this study. The pre-1988 school board reflects Chicago's traditional board structure up
until that time. Under this structure the mayor created his own nominating commission,
selected his nominees from their recommendations, and city council was responsible for
confirming these nominees. The broken line to the community indicated the limited role
they played under this arrangement. The post-1988 school board contrasts the previous
board due to the hierarchical policy making structure rooted in community involvement.
Under this structure the community was directly involved in educational policy making, beginning with their election of LSC members, some of whom would serve on the SBNC. As in the pre-1988 structure, city council's approval of school board nominees was necessary. Finally, the post-1995 Board of Trustees offers a significant change in administrative structure. While business groups have consistently been involved in Chicago's school politics, the corporate structure of the administration and the appointment of prominent business people provides the most striking example of business involvement in the school system. Because the mayor has sole authority over board selection, there is a direct link between the board and the mayor. The broken line to the community indicates their exclusion from the policy process. Although LSCs are still present, they have decreased in strength, influence, and inclusion in the school board selection process.

In addition to the limitations the 1995 legislation placed on community involvement in educational policy, several of the Board of Trustees's attributes contribute to their ability to control interest group demands. Two of these important attributes are the high degree of agreement among members and the quiescence of external groups. Because community group involvement was limited in the 1995 legislation, it is not very surprising that they do not feel current board members are responsive to their concerns. However, in addition to the silencing of community groups, the teachers union has not protested the new board's radical programmatic changes. Whereas community groups lost momentum after the 1995 reform was implemented, the unions were given favorable
contracts due to the financial flexibility acquired by the Board of Trustees in the 1995 legislation. Similar to the way a political machine operates, selective benefits are provided to groups when disapproval with board policy emerges and creates potential problems. If board members are accountable to the mayor, their ability to silence groups and manage the school system in the way the mayor desires, they may achieve efficiency at the cost of minority exclusion in policy making. Controlling demands placed on the school system may give the impression of general satisfaction with the system despite a high level of dissatisfaction in the minority community due to policy makers who are unresponsive to their interests.

III. Regime Philosophy and Administrative Policy Initiatives

Evaluating the educational initiatives implemented by school administrations under the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts offers a concrete method for evaluating whom board members favor in policy making decisions. Depending on the philosophy of the educational governing regime, policies will reflect the interests of the groups associated with the regime. Again, this notion of a governing regime is derived from Clarence Stone’s theory which asserts that urban regimes include public and private interests that come together informally to carry out policy (1989). Because these arrangements are informal, they fluctuate according to social changes. In the case of educational policy, analyzing the informal administrative structure of the Chicago Public Schools provides data that enhances findings from interview information about the level of administrative accountability to the minority community under the two school reform acts.
As detailed in previous chapters, the 1988 school reform act emerged after members of the Black community and business groups joined forces to create a decentralized school system. The arrangement between these groups created a balance of power. Community groups were integrated in the school board selection process and LSCs increased parental involvement in school level policy decisions. On the business end of the bargain, the School Finance Authority (SFA) provided complete financial oversight of the deficit ridden school system. Essentially, the SFA gave individual schools great autonomy with their school budgets and the school board was limited in their financial authority. The Black community/business community coalition responsible for drafting the 1988 legislation became the primary coalitional partners in the post-1988 administrative structure and the administrative governing regime.

Once the 1988 legislation was implemented, the school system's governing regime developed into an organization that consistently created policies to meet the needs of the individual school. LSCs received a great deal of administrative power, designing curriculum, introducing new programs for their school, hiring and firing principals, and allocating moneys to various school programs. The school board served as a system wide organizational resource for the school district and the intricate web of decisions made by individual LSCs throughout the system. Although the school board was severely limited in its financial capabilities due to the SFA, it did operate as a system-wide sounding board for parents and community members.
Among the comments noted earlier was the slow pace of action by the post-1988 school boards. Resulting from a lack of finances, an elaborate committee system, and a diverse group of individuals appointed to the school board, they did implement policy incrementally. Because the 1988 legislation designed an inclusive administrative structure, this was probably an unavoidable result. In exchange for the slow pace of action was a school system that directly responded to the needs of individual schools. For example, LSCs could hire new reading specialists to assist the students in their schools. At the system-wide level, the school board’s Desegregation Committee held public meetings about how to address problems in Chicago’s segregated school system. Essentially, programs were implemented that met the needs of the community.

One of the major drawbacks of Chicago’s post-1988 school administration was the financial turmoil that plagued the system. For this reason, while individual schools were given freedom with their budgets via their LSCs, the school board was unable to make very many system-wide changes like negotiating satisfactory contracts with the teachers’ union, initiating massive school infrastructure improvement plans, or finding the money to assist schools with specific needs (Bristow interview 3/11/98). The business/community governing regime prioritized school board fiscal restraint and community involvement. Even beyond the school board, this was evident in the broad power exerted by elected LSC members in each individual school. This community centered philosophy, while the financial restrictions were detested by school board
members, resulted in policies that involved minority perspectives and indicated that board members did feel accountable to the community they served.

The 1995 school reform act grew out of a very different legislative coalition. Again, a state wide business coalition formed in 1995 and urged the newly Republican Illinois State Legislature to centralize control of the school system in the hands of Mayor Daley. By eliminating community involvement in school board selection, limiting LSC’s discretion and funding, and creating block grants and combining tax levies into lump sums without restrictions, the 1995 administrative governing regime diverged from its recent predecessor. The guiding philosophy in the 1995 legislation was to create a school administration that would eliminate the $150 billion dollar deficit and manage the system more efficiently. The corporately structured Board of Trustees’ regime philosophy has corresponded to the goals enumerated in the legislation.

Mayor Daley’s decision to appoint school board and management team members whose connections with municipal politics or business demonstrated a sharp contrast to a previously diverse boards. The board members and management team have consistently acted with speed and vigilance when implementing new policies. The financial flexibility granted to this new board has provided numerous opportunities. With the elimination of the SFA and access to previously earmarked funds, the new board has negotiated very favorable contracts with unions, privatized many school services like cafeteria and janitorial services, ended “social promotion,” implemented summer school programs for low test achievers, reconstituted seven schools, created charter schools, and introduced
transition centers for students who are unable to pass their Iowa Test of Basic Skills in eighth grade. To evaluate the regime philosophy and to understand to whom administrators feel they are accountable under this new administrative structure we must determine who these new initiatives favor.

The acknowledgment of the corporate management style of the 1995 administration by CEO Paul Vallas, board member Mr. Saffold, and numerous community respondents indicates a shared conceptualization of this new structure. While the concern with financial stability is obviously important in achieving an effective school system, concerns about finances must be balanced with a concern for the students and general community served by the administration, in this case the minority community. With this in mind, my interviews with parent and community respondents indicate that this post-1995 school administration is not responsive to their educational concerns. Along these lines, these respondents have consistently been disheartened by the policies enacted by the Board of Trustees, most notably policies like ending social promotion based solely on test scores, the creation of charter schools in more affluent neighborhoods, reconstituting schools, and eliminating LSCs. If these policies are not supported by the minority community, the most likely reason is because the current administration does not believe they are accountable to these individuals. Not surprisingly, these current administrators share Mayor Daley's apparent concern for retaining a middle class tax base and appeasing businesses so they will remain in the city. The creation of charter schools, public schools that are able to selectively admit pupils, is an enticement for middle class residents. The
primary group of students sent to transition centers and held back to repeat another year of schooling are poor minority students. The apparent two-tiered educational system is not what minority respondents indicated they want for their community. As one current board employee noted:

There's a certain degree of creaming going on today. The mayor wants wealthy parents to send their children to public schools rather than private or parochial schools. The board's tied to the mayor at the hip. Obviously they're willing to do anything to help him get these people to support the Chicago Public Schools. Charter schools offer the wealthy opportunities and the transition centers are a wasteland for the uninfluential (administrator interview 7/15/98).

Adopting the business strategy of concentrating on the bottom line, the emphasis on test scores as a concrete measurement of success matches corporate philosophy. Given the concern of Mayor Daley with the financial stability of the city and his pro-growth strategies, his school board appears to reflect corporate growth strategies at the expense of community concerns. The national attention and praise Mayor Daley regularly receives for his Board of Trustees and their ability to quickly implement new policies undoubtedly helped the mayor win re-election in February. However, whereas Mayor Daley has benefited immensely from the 1995 reform and board policies appease his desires, this has occurred at the same time that minority residents feel excluded from the educational policy process. The exclusion experienced within the Black community is evident in their low level of electoral support for Mayor Daley. Both the policies that the post-1995 board has

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7 Mayor Daley captured 71.9% of the vote (Neal 1999). He was able to capture three of twenty Black wards (Podgorski 1999).
implemented and the philosophy of the administrative governing regime point to board member accountability to Mayor Daley at the expense of the minority community.

One important issue that necessitates attention is the fact that all mayors, including minority mayors, must constantly consider the economic vitality of their city. For example, whereas a mayor like Harold Washington clearly relied on Chicago's minority community for his electoral base, he was also forced to consider growth strategies for the city. Because pro-growth strategies frequently clash with the interests of poor and minority residents, mayors must strive to achieve a delicate balance between various interests. Since Harold Washington was never granted control of the school system, it is difficult to speculate whether he could have met the educational needs of his minority constituents, achieved satisfaction among municipal tax payers, worked with business leaders, satisfied unions, and balanced the school budget. Although Mayor Daley has not encountered success in all of these areas, it may be virtually impossible for mayors to do so because of their competing interests. Due to the numerous demands placed on big-city mayors, specifically economic vitality, it is conceivable that centralizing control of school systems in their hands will likely result in minority interests taking a back seat to economic growth concerns regardless of the position of the minority community in a mayor's electoral coalition.

IV. Conclusion

School board members appointed under the 1988 and 1995 reform laws differ in to whom their actions indicate they are accountable. Although all members claim they are or were
accountable to the students and the community, more thorough examination reveals several striking differences. First, current Board of Trustee members are appointed directly by the mayor. Intuitively this indicates a strong likelihood of an allegiance to the mayor who appoints them. This is especially striking given that the 1988 legislation created a school board which was appointed with the involvement of the community. The alterations in the selection process provide the primary indication that members under the two administrative structures are accountable to different interests.

The occupational background of school board members after the 1988 reform took effect diversified the school board and brought people from various sectors of the community together. In contrast, today’s board members reflect experience in corporate America or as high level municipal politicians. This difference in occupational status appears to have affected educational policy making. Whereas board members under the 1988 legislation were recommended by the community, the 1995 appointees can be considered elites with very little connection to the community they serve. This missing community link virtually insulates current board members from those they make decisions on behalf of and strengthens their connection to Mayor Daley.

If we consider Board member’s ties with outside groups, we again see the exclusion of minorities under the 1995 reform. Because former board members came from diverse sectors of the city, including clergy, non-profit groups, and individuals from higher education, they brought diverse, though sometimes competing, interests together. The competition that flourished under the SBNC process gave many groups a chance to
enter the formal school administrative structure. Once representatives were seated on the school board, it appears that healthy and democratic participation occurred. Unions, business interests, community, and reform groups all had their voices heard. However, the direct connection between the school board and the community appears to have favored community groups. While this may seem lopsided it is important to note that these are the individuals directly served by the school system and their concerns should logically be a priority.

The policies implemented by an administration provide an indication of their regime philosophy. Because of Mayor Daley's concern with pro-growth strategies, his hand picked school board reflects growth strategies in education. Among their most notable strategies include offering exceptional educational opportunities for some students in order to retain a middle class tax base in the city. In addition, the "bottom-line" strategy used by the board, as seen with their emphasis on standardized tests, also stresses their growth concerns. In contrast, the 1988 school reform act facilitated an educational governing regime that included the community and attempted to give multiple groups access to the policy making process. This tactic not only led to more responsive policies to the minority community (as indicated in the previous chapter), but appears to have made school board members feel accountable to the minority community they made decisions for.
Source: Chicago Public Schools

Figure 5.1: Administrative Structure
CHAPTER 6

I. Introduction

One important dimension of school politics in Chicago is the effect of educational reform on student achievement. The quality of education received by students ought to be the top consideration in any educational policy reform as students are the number one stakeholders in educational policy. Even when a reform centers on issues other than the quality of education received by students, namely governance, the fact that education is tied to future opportunities for students reinforces the need for thorough investigation of educational quality and student performance in the post reform period. My research to this point has examined the level of minority inclusion under the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts by evaluating administrative responsiveness to the minority community and school board accountability to those served by the Chicago Public Schools. The issue of minority empowerment and student performance are intertwined as Black and Hispanic students compose eighty-eight percent of the students in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS Race Ethnic Survey 1998).

In this chapter I examine the effectiveness of the school system based on student performance under the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts. However, my emphasis on
minority empowerment in educational policy carries over into this assessment of effectiveness by including interview data regarding the issue of school reform effectiveness. Interviews with parents, community activists, teachers, and administrators are included, but I place emphasis on my eleven parental evaluations of student performance under the two reforms. The combination of statistical measures and firsthand evaluation of student performance offers a unique perspective on student performance under Chicago’s two influential school reform acts. This is especially important for urban school districts interested in adopting provisions of Chicago’s 1995 school reform act.

This third variable in my study, effectiveness, deals specifically with the quality of education received by students in the Chicago Public Schools under the two school reform initiatives. I assess effectiveness by examining several performance measures to determine whether administrative structure is related to student performance. In addition to examining concrete measures of student performance (test score results, student attendance, graduation rates, dropout figures, ACT scores), I also examine some less obvious measures of student performance. I consider the assessment of several groups familiar with the two school reform acts. I consulted parents concerning their children’s level of achievement under the two reforms, community activists, teachers’ evaluations of these reforms, and the evaluations of school administrators. Consistent with my concern with minority incorporation in educational policy, I believe the concerns expressed directly by the individuals affiliated with the school system, most importantly parents, offer an enriched measure of school system effectiveness.
The findings I present in this chapter are important beyond the Chicago scenario because as other cities establish mayoral control of the school system they must try to understand how political structure affects the overall effectiveness and management of urban school systems, especially as it relates to student performance. While turning control of the school board solely to mayors is likely to improve the management of the district’s finances, it is possible that a less municipally-centralized school system may better address student performance issues since parental and community involvement is critical to urban educational improvement. If parents, those with firsthand knowledge of their children’s performance, exercise substantial decision making in local school policy, the quality of education may improve in the long run.

II. Methodology

Gauging effectiveness under the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts required the collection of numerous statistical measures of student and school system performance. Some of these data were easily collected and consistently measured over time. However, several of the performance indicators I requested from the Board of Trustees were either unavailable, not compiled in a systematic manner, or inaccessible due to the Board of Trustees’ move from the South Side to the downtown area. I discovered that these data collections problems are not unique as several parent based reform organizations and the editor of Catalyst Magazine reported similar problems obtaining information from the Board of Trustees. Due to the lack of availability of certain data, such as the student-teacher ratio and teacher retention statistics, I was unable to compare the two school
reform acts in the manner I anticipated. In addition, some inconsistencies in the measurement of things such as graduation rates and dropout rates further complicated my initial plan for assessing effectiveness of the two school reform acts. Nevertheless, I have included statistical data for several indicators I was able to collect and adjust. I have complemented the statistical measures I was able to collect with interview data from parents, community activists, teachers, and administrators. These assessments go beyond the standard statistical evaluations of a school district and identify problems and prospects for the future of the Chicago Public Schools based on firsthand knowledge of the school system.

This chapter is arranged in three sections. The first section discusses the most traditional form of educational evaluation, standardized test results. Intuitively this is an important component for any educational quality assessment as tests provide a logical and consistent way to measure student performance over time. Examining test scores is particularly important as Chicago’s Board of Trustees now uses standardized tests for high stakes purposes—to determine whether students may progress from one grade to the next, and to decide whether an individual school will be placed on probation or reconstituted based on compiled student test results—and most notably cites test score improvements as an indicator of their success. Because critics accuse the board of misusing test results, claiming the numbers are manipulated to the board’s advantage, that the tests are racially biased against minority students, and potentially damage students who do not test well, I believe test performance necessitates thorough review, accompanied by
the evaluations of those knowledgeable about the school system. Therefore, the first section of this chapter discusses how the tests are currently used in Chicago and increasingly across the country, the advantages and drawbacks of standardized tests, test results under the two reform initiatives, and the assessment of individuals I interviewed, notably parents with children in the school system between 1985 and the present.

The second section addresses several additional performance indicators which also relate to student performance and are associated with educational opportunities. Included in this section are attendance figures, graduation rates, dropout statistics, and composite ACT scores in Chicago compared to national scores.\(^1\) I believe that these are important issues that must be considered when evaluating a school system as they move beyond the controversy involved with Chicago's standardized tests and emphasize whether students are in fact able to take advantage of their right to a public education.

The third section of this chapter specifically deals with interview data from parents, community activists, teachers, and administrators. Because these individuals are closely connected to the school system and have witnessed the two reforms firsthand, their assessment of the two reforms is important. I contend that beyond concrete and statistical measures of student performance, that minority inclusion in educational policy-making is an essential part of school system effectiveness. The disputable accuracy of many student performance indicators must be balanced with parental evaluations of their students' achievement. Aside from the teachers who spend their days teaching students, parents are

\(^1\) As noted previously, inconsistencies with some of these data exist. These inconsistencies are noted accordingly.
the next most likely people able to judge whether their students are actually improving their base of knowledge. My interviews with parents and community activists are an extremely important component of this project because any school reform initiative labeled as "successful" ought to consider the level of community faith in the school system along with concrete measures of student performance. Although my inclusion of parental interview data reflects aspects of another of my dependent variables, responsiveness, I believe there is a relationship between administrative responsiveness to the concerns of those served by the school system and the level of student achievement. This final section also makes recommendations for evaluating school reform in a manner that considers student performance and minority inclusion in educational policy making based on the responses I received.

III. The High Stakes Controversy in Chicago

Establishing standard measurements of student performance is a necessary component of public education. Not only must students receive adequate classroom instruction, but it is also important that students master basic skills that will provide future educational and occupational opportunities. For these reasons, standard measures of performance are instituted throughout school districts across the country. Although standardized tests have been used to evaluate student achievement throughout the history of public education, the emergence of the Excellence Movement during the 1980s heightened the awareness of excellence and achievement in education.² The 1983 National Commission

² See chapter two for additional details regarding the Excellence Movement.
on Education's report "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform," shocked the nation with results of low student achievement and failing public schools. In response to reports such as these, the Excellence Movement emerged, emphasizing what they viewed as important objective measures of performance including the use of standardized tests, more stringent graduation requirements, teacher testing, and tightened state curricula standards (Gittell 1998). Among the numerous standards-based assessments of student performance, standardized tests have become one of the primary statistics used to evaluate student achievement in this country.

During the 1980s the Chicago Public School's reputation continued to decline as reports surfaced of low student achievement. Although test scores were one indication of poor student achievement, so too were graduation rates, incidence of violence, and truancy (Designs for Change 1985). Notably, following Secretary of Education William Bennett's famous denunciation of the Chicago Public School System being "the worst in the nation," the haste to improve test scores, increase graduation rates, and decrease the number of students dropping-out intensified (Chicago Tribune May 1988). The influence of the Excellence Movement did not exclude Chicago, especially since the school district was the new educational failure example for other school districts to scoff at.

Chicago's 1988 and 1995 school reform acts emphasized the need to increase student performance, largely based on test scores as an objective indicator of student achievement. The biggest difference between the two reforms was the variation in governance structures they established to achieve the same ends. The overriding
assumption with the 1988 reform was that increased parental involvement and school site-based management would tailor educational opportunities for students in a particular school, and therefore result in long-term student achievement on tests. The approach was one that dealt with each school's individual needs. In contrast, the 1995 reform ushered in a new philosophy of education centered on high stakes testing to increase student, teacher, and school accountability. High stakes tests are used as the sole indicator of things like student promotion to the next grade level, individual school probation for overall low scores, or teacher retention. Consequently, the 1995 reform has resulted in a system that typifies the Excellence Movement's emphasis on standardized test achievement.

Using standardized tests to determine whether students will progress to the next grade has gained national attention recently, largely in response to the policies implemented in Chicago. President Clinton continuously praises Chicago for ending "social promotion," the practice of graduating a student from one grade to the next regardless of their mastery of basic skills (Rossi and Spielman 1997; Johnson 1997). During the spring of 1996 the Board of Trustees implemented a program whereby eighth grade students' test results on the reading portion of the ITBS (Iowa Test of Basic Skills) would determine whether they would enter high school the following fall. Students who did not meet the board's pre-determined level of achievement based on their grade level were sent to summer school and allowed to re-take the test at the end of summer.
instruction. If their scores remained beneath the high school entrance standard they would repeat eighth grade. If a student was over the age of 15 and failed to meet these requirements they would be sent to a transition school. Chicago’s nine transition schools were created in the fall of 1997 and focus on remedial instruction for eighth graders (Pick 1998a). Approximately 1,020 eighth graders were sent to transition schools in the fall of 1997 (administrator interview 7/2/98). Those who did not meet the score requirements by the end of their year in the transition school were sent to one of the newly created Alternative schools, designed to offer a GED type diploma to low achievers (Rossi 1998). Figures on attendance, test scores, and dropout statistics have not been released by the Board of Trustees on either student achievement in transition or alternative schools. What is evident is that summer instruction has not been successful in boosting scores (Duffrin 1998b). Low attendance and a lack of test achievement have been reported despite the board’s unwillingness to release detailed results of these innovative new programs.

The creation of transition schools and alternative schools during the 1997-98 school year provided some specific educational alternatives for low achievers in the Chicago Public Schools. At the same time that low achievers’ needs were being addressed, an alternative for high achievers was also being created. Advanced placement courses, International Baccalaureate programs, and charter schools were developed. This

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3 Eighth grade students were required to score a 6.8 on the test which is the national average score for students in the eighth month of sixth grade (Shipps, Kahne, and Smylie 1998).
process, known as "creaming," or skimming the best students off and providing them enhanced public school opportunities, has won criticism. One community activist explained:

The mayor wants to bring the white families back to the public schools. If he can give them a way to avoid the kids seen as bad students, he can do it. We see charter schools that require students to apply, and then we see the transition schools where low scorers are thrown because they don’t seem to be bright.... It’s creaming and those predominately poor students in the transition centers don’t have a voice (community member interview 7/14/98).

During the spring of 1997 the use of standardized tests for high stakes purposes were extended to third, sixth, and ninth graders and included math as well as reading. The high school counterpart to the elementary grades’ ITBS test is the Test of Achievement and Proficiency (TAP), another nationally normed standardized test.⁴ Any student who is unable to meet the established standard in either math or reading was sent to summer school, and potentially retained in the grade they had just completed. In the end, approximately 10,250 students were retained (Shipps, Kahne, and Smylie 1998:9).⁵

In addition to Chicago’s strict crackdown on social promotion, it has also emphasized the philosophy of holding children accountable for their educational achievement on standardized tests. Test scores are the sole measure used to determine whether a student may progress to the next grade and other factors, notably student grades and teacher evaluations, are not factored into the decision to promote a student to

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⁴ Norm-referenced tests sort and rank students on a curve.
⁵ Among students whose end of summer test scores prevented them from promotion to the next grade were 15.3% of third graders, 13.2% of sixth, and 8% of eighth grade students (Rossi 1997 in Shipps, Kahne, and Smylie 1998: 22).
the next grade. This system of ending social promotion has attracted nationwide attention for Mayor Daley and his Board of Trustees. Despite research and evidence that retaining students increases the dropout rate (Pick 1998b; Shepard and Smith 1989), this new technique has become politically attractive, especially as siphoning off low achievers may decrease the number of low testing students and ultimately increase graduation rates—something that would reflect favorably on the Board of Trustees and Mayor Daley.

Today, as a result of the policies implemented in the aftermath of the 1995 school reform act, test scores in Chicago are used not only to increase student accountability, but also to assess the level of teacher and individual school accountability through the practice of placing schools on probation or reconstituting them all together in the worst cases.6 After the 1995 legislation went into effect the Office of Accountability was created. This office is responsible for evaluating the overall test performance of individual schools and a number of subjective assessments to determine whether a school will be placed on probation due to low student performance (administrator interview 7/15/98). In June 1997, 109 of the district’s schools received notice that they were on probation. These schools were forced to modify educational practices with the assistance of a central office support team, and remain on probation until deficiencies are corrected (CPS Web). In more extreme cases, the process of reconstitution was initiated, meaning that all school level employees must re-apply for their jobs, a new principal would be selected by the

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6 Reconstitution refers to the practice of having staff re-apply for their positions, firing the principal, and suspending the powers of the LSC in schools with the lowest test scores. This occurred in 7 schools after the 1996-97 school year.
Board of Trustees, and the LSC power would be suspended. All together, seven schools were reconstituted after the 1996-97 school year. Establishing accountability benchmarks through the use of standardized tests has been viewed by many as a courageous step taken by the mayor and his new board.

Considering the corporate experience of the current board, the practice of using bottom-line measures of performance is not surprising. Just as businesses are concerned with profit margins, so too is the Board of Trustees. This concern is also increasingly prevalent among state and national policy-makers. In many ways their concern with achievement is well placed as standardized tests reflect how students are fairing in the school system. In addition, the fate of urban school systems across the country have remained dim for decades as middle class residents move to surrounding suburbs, businesses relocate, and faith in the school system plummets. The position taken by Mayor Daley and the Board demonstrates their commitment to restoring faith in the school system, especially if it is to remain financially afloat. There is no question that the movement of middle class tax payers due to poor urban schools is a serious concern for the mayor. However, at the same time that the mayor receives praise for instituting stringent educational standards in the school system, questions regarding the accuracy and fairness of high stakes testing for the purposes used in Chicago continuously surface.

Before evaluating specific student test results under the two reform acts, several important factors need to be assessed regarding the weaknesses and strengths of using standardized tests as a sole or primary determinant of grade promotion or individual
school evaluation. One of the primary complaints among community groups is that the use of high stakes tests is a violation of the way the ITBS and TAP tests are to be used. According to the producer of the ITBS and TAP tests, Riverside Publishing Company, it is inappropriate to use these tests to decide whether to retain students at a grade level (Hoover et al 1996). This position was reiterated by a number of parents at a Parents United For a Responsible Education (PURE) meeting regarding high stakes testing (1/30/99). One parent said:

We are here today to get out the word about these tests. Many parents and students are uninformed about the problems of these tests. In order for us to help our children, we need to let the people know that the Mayor and Mr. Vallas are using these test results in an irresponsible way. They were never intended to hold kids back or reconstitute schools. We all need to work together—parents, teachers, and other concerned people—to make sure that performance of the students and the schools is done responsibly (parent interview 1/30/99a).

In addition to questions regarding the appropriate use of these tests, some critics of high stakes tests also question whether students who do not test well should be evaluated based on such tests. Because it is possible for a student to be able to read and do math, yet not do well on a single standardized test, some argue that these tests are problematic. In support of this position, it is possible to argue that the omission of tests in writing, science, social science, or the arts presents a skewed image of an individual child. Because these other areas are important, critics complain that these tests are no indication of a child's ability to function or succeed in life (community member interview 7/21/98). Therefore, holding them back based on a math or reading score on one single test is unfair. One parent said:
Ashley has never tested well, but she was an A/B student across the board. I wanted the board to consider what her teachers had said and to factor in the fact that she was on the honor roll. They wouldn’t do it. So I hired a coach to train her on test taking. She did well with him, but then when she took the test in school she missed the cutoff and penalized for her testing skills as she watched some of her girlfiiends with Cs and Ds in math pass the test and graduate into high school. I know how scared she was going into the test and it’s unfair to do this to children. The message is clear, your grades don’t matter, so just learn that test (parent interview 8/7/98).

This parent’s comments reverberated throughout my parent interviews. Several of the parents I interviewed commented that their children were disheartened after learning that they did not pass the test or were required to attend summer school. One educational expert in Chicago contends that the long term impact of the demoralization among these students will inevitably lead to higher dropout rates and truancy because the incentive to do well is limited to one day a year, the day the test is administered (Chicago policy expert interview 6/18/98).

Another common complaint voiced about reliance on test scores was the issue of equity for poor and minority students. Because question wording on tests relies on the use of formal grammar, many students are unable to meet test expectations on these tests (Popham 1995). Because waivers are rarely provided to students as a way around their low test scores, many people argue that additional measures of performance are needed. Although most of the individuals I interviewed said they agree that standard measures of achievement are necessary, they also said that additional measures, possibly including student grades, teacher evaluations, or individual test improvement over the year, would help to balance the biases of standardized tests.
The need for measures beyond high stakes tests was noted among the many people I interviewed, including parents, teachers, community activists, and administrators. Although there was no consensus on how much tests should count in the grade promotion equation, they did believe that other measurements would provide a more rounded view of individual student competency. I discovered a very high level of discontent among the teachers I talked to about the use of high stakes tests. They reported that because they know low student performance in their classes could result in the loss of their jobs, they feel a great deal of pressure to "teach the test" (teacher interviews 7/14/98). Because these standardized tests do not match curriculum, teachers reported that scripted education or test preparation has restricted more creative pedagogical tools they previously used. One teacher said:

We can't really complain because the union and the board negotiated our raises. But we know we aren't helping these kids by preparing them for tests rather than helping develop lifetime learning skills. We don't help them learn to deal with high school level assignments—we teach them to take standardized tests. I know they'll need to take ACTs or SATs or civil service tests or tests for the military in the future, but there are other things that they also need to learn.... If they don't pass the test it's their butt and mine (teacher interview 7/14/98a).

The absence of an emphasis on professional development in the 1995 reform was identified as a problem among school teachers and academics whom I interviewed. Whereas the 1988 legislation stressed the importance of individual school innovation in the classroom and teacher-parent collaboration, the result of the 1995 reform has created an educational philosophy stressing a scripted approach to education that is designed to improve basic skills as measured on standardized tests. Shipps, Kahne, and Smylie (1998)
argue that because Chicago’s standards and assessment are aimed at minimal levels (for example, the eighth grade requirement of a 6.8 score on the reading and math ITBS test which is the national average score for students in the eighth month of the sixth grade), the non-inclusion of long-range goals constrains school development and opportunities conducive to student learning. This position was re-stated by a teacher who said:

I have to concentrate on getting the low test achievers up to the standard. This leaves the high achievers on their own (teacher interview 7/14/98b).

A similar complaint was voiced by a parent whose childrens’ scores have been at the top of her class. She complained that the system is really hurting her children because their creativity is stifled as teachers stress testing that helps low achievers meet the threshold. She commented:

I worry that when my children get to college that they’ll be unprepared for the type of work required—writing, study habits. Everyone talks about how unfair these tests are for the poor kids who can’t pass, but I have to say that it’s also unfair for kids who do well and stay in the regular schools [as opposed to the specialty schools] because they aren’t challenged. Maybe this will come out one day (parent interview 11/8/98).

The issue of high stakes tests is extremely complex. At the same time that measurements of student performance are important, it is very difficult to find objective evaluation techniques that do not short-change certain strata of the student body. Additionally, some, including one current board member, believe that using high stakes tests is advantageous because parents are able to understand the concept of passing the test or failing. Adding more complex measures of student performance to this process
would only make the process "too challenging for them to grasp" (Saffold interview 7/23/98).

One former school board member mentioned that while student test performance has always been an important part of evaluating a school system, the attention being given Chicago has neglected gains made under the 1988 reform, especially since that reform addressed specific challenges faced by many urban school students because it allowed individual schools the resources to deal with their problems. He explained:

Students were always evaluated to make sure that they were learning, and this is important. Now, you must remember that the Chicago schools, like all other public school systems, must deal with social and economic problems that these kids are bringing with them to the schools. Test scores don't factor in the problems of urban schools. Standardizing curriculum don't factor this in either. Dealing with each school and the needs of individual students does. With the '88 reform we saw people working together--teachers, parents-- and they were bringing in innovative programs that excited students. These ended after we lost out in 1995. This new performance garbage and accountability garbage neglects the gains that were made after 1988 and really neglect the long term impact the 1988 law could have made (Bristow interview 3/8/99).

Shipps, Kahne, and Smylie (1998) assert that innovation and improvement did result from the 1988 legislation, especially as demonstrated in a study indicating steady test score gains in elementary reading after 1990 (Designs for Change 1997). However, these authors also contend that reports of test improvements by advocates of either the 1988 or 1995 reform initiatives are often confounded as they were so close together. Similarly, Byrk, Kerbow, and Rollows' (1997) research found that individual school improvement resulting from a school reform usually takes at least five years to fully develop. In order to see district-wide improvements, it is likely to take longer. Further, they caution against
reliance on test scores to evaluate a reform as "it is unclear to whom or to what we should attribute these positive trends" (192).

Before reviewing specific test performance trends during the time frame of this study, I would briefly like to summarize some of the advantages and disadvantages of using standardized tests to measure student achievement. Regarding advantages, test offer a potentially consistent way to assess the progress and competency of students. Moreover, becoming accustomed to the influence of standardized tests at a young age will prepare children for the tests they will need for higher education or occupational requirements. If students are not achieving on standardized tests, something that is evident when results are calculated, necessary arrangements to reverse trends can be made. Also, because math does not involve language variation, as is the case with reading, it is an objective measure of student performance. Consistency in testing also ensures that teachers are covering adequate material in classes. Furthermore, although it would be ideal to include subjective measures of student performance such as teacher evaluations or grades, creating a formula for this would be extremely difficult in a large urban school district. Additionally, people are able to understand this simple formula whereby students are expected to reach a predetermined level of academic proficiency before moving on to the next grade. Using tests to end social promotion also places greater emphasis on the value of a high school diploma.

For each of the arguments in favor of reliance on high stakes tests, there is another side. First, scholarly research points to the fact that these tests are not as objective as
hoped. Standardized tests are culturally biased and therefore discriminate against poor and minority students. In addition, students who do not do well on multiple choice exams are penalized when their academic career suddenly relies upon them. There is no doubt that we live in a society where standardized tests are used frequently, but to use them for such high stakes at such a young age seems extreme. Scripted education and the stress teachers now experience based on the performance of their students also reduces the level of creativity and depresses the development of alternative pedagogical tools. Finally, as I discovered during my interviews, parents react furiously when told that they are considered incapable of understanding measures of their child’s performance beyond the standardized tests. In fact, they were more aware of the problems with their use than perhaps anticipated by the Board of Trustees.

The most important debate raging in Chicago is not whether using standardized tests to assess student performance is acceptable, it is whether these tests should be used in a high stakes manner, mandating that students and school employees pay hefty consequences if students do not perform adequately. However, this issue extends beyond the city school district boundaries. Nationally, Chicago is becoming the model other cities seek to replicate based on the mayor’s staunch emphasis on achievement and the results he claims based on student test score increases. Beyond the legitimate concerns about high stakes tests, especially those expressed in Chicago’s minority community, the fact remains that these tests are important and require evaluation to determine whether the
improvements claimed by Mayor Daley are valid and worthy of replication in other urban areas.

**IV. Test Results Under the Two Reforms**

Pronouncements about the increases in student performance among Chicago’s public school students have consistently hit the news since the 1995 school reform was implemented. Despite criticism that there will be repercussions for the use of high stakes tests, there is indisputable evidence that test results on the ITBS and TAP tests have increased since the mayor and the board assumed control of the school system and seated his board of trustees during the 1995-96 school year. To recount, the ITBS test is used to measure math and reading comprehension in grades three through eight. Scores in grades three, six, and eight determine whether students will attend summer school or be promoted to the next grade. The TAP test assesses high school math and reading comprehension and is given in grades nine and eleven. Schools identified by the Accountability Office for probation and reconstitution are those with low cumulative test scores. The formula for determining this is unclear, largely because they may use “subjective” measurements of performance to compliment the concrete test scores (administrator interview 7/15/98). In addition, the Board has refused to reconstitute additional schools “until the results from the seven they placed on probation are clearer,” (administrator interview 6/25/98). Therefore, facts about school evaluations are actually difficult to evaluate. Figures 6.1 through 6.8 present test score results on the ITBS and TAP tests from the 1990-91 through the 1997-98 school years. Scores for these tests are
only available starting in the 1990 school year as the Board of Trustees only releases data
going back to the 1990-91 school year (administrator interview 10/10/98). Considering
that there is undoubtedly a lag before the results of a reform can be seen in student test
scores (Byrk, Kerbow, and Rollow 1997), this should not interfere terribly with
assessments of the 1988 reform.

The ITBS test results presented in figures 6.1 through 6.6 reveal some clear test
score improvements at the elementary level since Mayor Daley and the Board of Trustees
assumed control of the school system during the 1995-96 school year. As the figures
indicate, test scores in both math and reading comprehension improved significantly
between the 1990-91 and 1997-98 school years. Whereas score increases, although
present, fluctuated on reading and math tests between 1990-91 and the 1994-95 school
years, there were consistent improvements after the 1995 reform went into effect. Except
for a 1.1 percent decline in math scores in the third grade, considerable improvements
occurred after the first year of mayoral control of the school system. Regarding the effect
of the 1988 reform on student achievement on the ITBS test, here too there appears to
have been improvement. In support of Mayor Daley, reading comprehension
improvements in higher grades may be more difficult to raise as these students are perhaps
beyond their formidable reading levels.

TAP test results, the test used at the high school level, during the same period
reveal different trends (see figures 6.7 and 6.8). Math scores in grades nine and eleven
show rather consistent improvement throughout the years assessed. Like the ITBS test
results for the younger cohort, fluctuations during the 1990-91 school years stabilized during the 1995-96 school year and reflect a positive upward trend. This finding substantiates the mayor’s pronouncements about increases in student performance since he assumed control. TAP results for reading comprehension paint a more alarming picture. Scores during the 1990-91 and 1994-95 school years, the time when the first reform was underway, indicate a relatively steady rate of decline. These later reform figures do not meet the 1990-91 levels, even if they are close for eleventh graders.

Evaluating these tests results introduces a number of problems. First, without knowing the specific lag time before the results of a school reform are reflected in student test scores, my assessment remains extremely speculative. Whereas the mayor may legitimately claim that his administration is the cause of any test score increases seen after the 1995-96 school year, critics who claim that this demonstrates the effect of the 1988 reform may also be correct. One of the dangers that emerges when student test scores become the focus of political arguments about school governance is that the students behind the scores seem to get lost in the shuffle. If standardized tests do in fact provide some level of student achievement assessment, it is clear that Chicago public school students are suffering considerably as test scores have been low during both reforms, never reaching even 50% at or above national norms. Therefore, I believe that if these tests are to be used to assess students, credit claiming for student achievement should be limited until more respectable statistics emerge.
Several additional issues must also be mentioned regarding the compatibility of test scores between the two reform eras under study. First, one of the issues receiving attention among those following Chicago’s school system under mayoral control is that students retained in a grade based on their test scores are re-tested at the same grade level the following year, therefore inflating scores. If students are re-tested after an additional year of training this could prevent an accurate assessment of student performance under the two reform periods. One of the most influential analysts of Chicago school reform, Tony Byrk, asserts that the policy of holding back students who receive low scores on tests inflates citywide test gains (Duffrin 1998a). Linda Lenz, editor of *Catalyst: Voices of Chicago School Reform* asserts that because in 1997 some 15,000 students with low scores in grades three, six, eight, and nine were forced to repeat the same grade, that the following year fourth, seventh, and ninth grade tests benefited from the elimination of low scores. Along the same lines, those who were retained helped scores in third, sixth, eighth and ninth grade scores the following year because those who had been retained had an extra year of preparation (Lenz 1998). Therefore, although comparing standardized tests under the two reforms is helpful, there remain some concerns about the validity of doing so based on some inconsistencies in testing procedures under the two reforms.

**V. Other Performance Indicators**

In my search for other objective statistical indicators of student performance and the overall effectiveness of the school system under the two reforms, I have encountered several obstacles. I initially planned to study teacher-student ratios, dropout rates broken
down according to race and ethnicity, graduation figures according to the same criteria, and teacher retention figures. However, these data were unavailable from the Board of Trustees. According to central office staff, the data analysts in the board’s Office of Accountability have access to limited student performance data and figures preceding the 1989-90 school year, and in many instances data are simply unavailable (administrator interview 10/10/98; administrator interview 10/23/98; administrator interview 11/1/98). Additionally, some of these “unavailable data” have not been entered in the board’s computer system or are in the process of being transferred from the board’s former office to their new location. This is particularly frustrating, especially for those wishing to evaluate student performance under the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts. However, my problems in collecting data and being able to create an innovative way to assess student performance illustrate the problems policy analysts experience consistently. The reliance on standardized tests, despite their clear drawbacks, represents the easiest way to measure student performance. Even if this is the easiest way, I do not believe it is accurate enough to function as the sole indicator of school system effectiveness. The problems previously mentioned regarding reliance on standardized tests create a strong argument for additional measurements of student performance.

In this section I include four measures of student performance based on the data I have collected from the Board of Trustees, including attendance rates, graduation rates, dropout rates, and ACT scores. There are problems with some of these measurements, including that many of the figures were not available preceding the 1988 school reform
act. Nevertheless, I have included what I was able to collect, making note of any limitations. The most important finding is that in the areas I have examined there is not evidence of considerable improvement under either reform. With the exception of student attendance increases under the 1995 reform, neither provides impressive jumps.

The increase in student attendance at both the elementary and high school levels after the 1995 reform implementation is a fact the Mayor and the Board of Trustees are justifiably able to claim credit for. Although attendance statistics are not indicative of student improvement, it is clearly crucial that students attend school in order to receive an education. Therefore, I view this measurement as a precondition for student improvement. Figures 6.9 and 6.10 provide data on average student attendance at the high school and elementary levels between the 1989-90 and 1997-98 academic years. Despite requests for data back to the 1985-86 academic year, so that the pre-1988 school reform period could be considered in this attendance review, this data was unavailable. Although the board only provides data from the 1989-90 school year forward, it appears that the 1988 reform was possibly responsible for a period of relative attendance stability at both the high school and elementary levels followed by a rather sharp decline during the 1993-94 and 1994-95 academic years. Conversely, student attendance embarked upon an upward trend, especially at the high school level, during the 1995-96 school year when an increase of .4% at the elementary level and 2.9% occurred at the high school levels. This trend presents a favorable post-1995 school reform trend, and something Mayor

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7 I do not know what the decline between the 91-92 and 93-94 years was attributable to.
Daley may justifiably use to strengthen his new reputation as the “education mayor,” (Shipps, Kahne, and Smylie 1998). At the same time, speculation regarding the lag before the results of a reform may be seen complicates generalizations. Research indicates that urban school reform initiatives often take five or more years to develop and that test scores do not reflect improvement for several years (Comer 1980).

Student graduation rates reflect an important indication of the overall educational success of a school system. Although complaints about socially promoted students who graduating from high school without basic skills have raised questions about the meaning of a high school degree, the importance of a diploma remains essential for occupational opportunities and higher education. Therefore, the number of students graduating is important as the degree is a prerequisite for employment and educational opportunities. As Figure 6.11 illustrates, graduation rates declined considerably (12.5%) after the 1986-87 school year, the period just preceding the 1988 school reform act. The graduation rate continued to decline or hover in at the low fifty percent range until the recent 1996-97 increase. Unfortunately, while the 1995 reform has resulted in a slight improvement, two or three percent increase, it has not restored the rate to its earlier levels. However, the board’s emphasis on raising standards and making a high school diploma from a Chicago public school meaningful could result in a temporary dip in graduation rates as those who

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* The board reported a change in the way graduation rates are calculated. This change occurred during the 1994-95 academic year. Because they included graduation rates calculated under the old and new formulas for two consecutive school years (1994-95 and 1995-96), I was able to estimate the difference and adjust the graduation rate under the old formula for the 1996-97 and 1997-98 academic years. The new formula differs as it includes students who graduate late.
had previously been socially promoted through grades are now halted based on their high school TAP test results. Nevertheless, the picture of abominable levels of high school graduation during the entire time period reflects an alarming trend. If education is truly associated with increased opportunities, the students in the Chicago Public Schools do not seem to be succeeding at a rate that increases their long term opportunities.

The dropout rate illustrated in Figure 6.12 reflects an increase in the percentage of students dropping out during the time of both the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts. Although neither reform presents positive results in this area, the average dropout rate under the new reform is higher, making the 1988 reform appear slightly more effective with regard to the number of students dropping out of high school.

The final statistical measures I have examined are the composite ACT scores for Chicago Public School students compared to national figures. These figures are related to the effectiveness of a school system as they indicate how potential college students from the Chicago Public Schools compare to other potential college students. As Figure 6.13 demonstrates, Chicago students have remained behind national averages throughout the 1991-92 and 1997-98 academic years. There are a few notable problems with this measure of performance. First, taking the ACT is no indication that students are going on to college. Unfortunately, the board does not track graduates to find out how many are

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The board reported a change in the way dropout rates are calculated. This change occurred during the 1992-93 academic year. Because the old and new formulas were used for four consecutive years (1992-93 through 1995-96), I was able to estimate the difference between and adjust the dropout rate under the old formula for the 1996-97 and 1997-98 academic years.
actually pursuing higher education. In addition, because the board does not have record of the number of students taking the ACT, the importance of this measurement is further weakened. Furthermore, the board does not have ACT scores prior to the 1991-92 school year available.

The questionable statistical accuracy of some of these measurements such as the graduation and dropout rates, combined with the question of whether ACT scores actually provide information about future educational opportunities for students, complicate any reliable assessment of student performance based on these figures. Attendance rates, seemingly the most accurate indicator of the Chicago Public Schools effectiveness, are even problematic as the board claims to have this data back only as far as the 1989-90 school year.

When I began this research I anticipated that I would encounter limited problems retrieving accurate data, largely because I assumed the measures I sought were standard and readily available. Not only have methods of calculating figures like graduation rates and dropout rates changed during the two school reform initiatives under study, but the board’s research team in the Office of Accountability reports that many data from the 1980s have not been included in their data base, or is still in the process of being entered in their data system due to the move that remains underway (administrator interview 10/10/98). Creating a comprehensive assessment of student performance, or the effectiveness of the school system, is therefore extremely problematic. Without data indicating long term trends in a number of areas, it does appear that standardized tests
remain the most attractive standard to use in evaluating student performance. However, given the controversies around the use of standardized tests for high stakes purposes, this does not seem to be a measurement that instills a great deal of confidence. The final section of this chapter offers interview data that provides some additional insight into how those with firsthand knowledge of the Chicago Public Schools evaluate student performance under the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts. In addition to assessments, those interviewed also offered recommendations regarding how to improve student performance. I believe these recommendations are important to consider as they come from individuals with firsthand knowledge of the school system. In addition, as I believe minority incorporation is important in educational policy making, these suggestions necessitate attention because these people are the recipients of policy changes.

VI. Parent, Community, Teacher, and Administrator School Reform Evaluation

Having discussed the challenges of relying on statistical indicators of student performance and overall school system effectiveness, I will now move to some less concrete, yet very important, indicators of effectiveness under the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts. Because my research relies heavily on interviews with parent and community stakeholders in education, I have drawn upon interview data specifically designed to assess student performance under the two reform laws. Among the most striking findings from these interviews was that virtually everyone I talked to, including high ranking current school administrators, admit that there are problems with the new reliance on standardized tests. Although complaints range from minor issues with high stakes tests, to accusations of
blatant abuses of power by the mayor and the Board of Trustees, it is apparent that even
supporters of the current administration system have some problems with new test
policies. In contrast to a level of consensus on the use of high stakes tests, evaluations of
the 1988 reform revealed strong differences among the groups I interviewed. Whereas
parents and community members largely praise the 1988 reform due to the student
improvement they claimed to have personally witnessed, administrators took a very
different critical position on the 1988 reform based on standard measures of student
performance. Teachers and principals reflected moderately positive evaluations of student
performance or system effectiveness under the 1988 reform law. Interestingly, the biggest
complaint voiced among professional educators regarding both reforms was that they have
been excluded from the school reform process. As a result, they contend that staff
development has not received adequate attention under either reform, something that they
feel could truly improve student performance.

Because parents and community residents rely disproportionately upon the public
school system for future opportunities, these people are potentially the most important
people to defer to about the effectiveness of the two school reform laws under review in
this study. Parent interviews revealed some very positive evaluations of student
performance under the 1988 school reform act, combined with some very negative
assessments of student performance under the 1995 school reform act. Because
community respondents reflected these same sentiments, I have combined comments from
these groups. I have also included some of the recommendations for student improvement
made by this sample of parent and community members as their suggestions reflect their experience as insiders over the course of the two school reform acts.

Many parents and community residents drew upon their own experiences in the Chicago public schools during the 1960 and 70s during interviews. This cross generational assessment of the school system added depth to the picture they presented about the pre-1988 reform period. Respondents identified consistent low student performance throughout the 1960s through the 1980s as problematic, especially for Black students due to segregation and failed desegregation attempts. This consistent rate of decline, according to these minority residents, began to change with the introduction of the 1988 school reform act. In one parent’s assessment of the period up to the 1988 reform, she explained:

We’d gone through the failures with desegregating the schools, but we finally worked out a way to make the schools a better place for our kids. One of the biggest reasons we made them better was that we were there and working with the principal and teachers (parent interview 7/24/98).

Among parents who were active in the 1988 school reform legislation, there was a certain pride respondents conveyed, especially those who became LSC members in their schools. The notion of cooperative management in the schools between parents, teachers, and principals who were all united to address the students, in their individual school was seen as an asset among many whom I interviewed.

Despite the sense of togetherness and empowerment the 1988 school reform gave parents and community members, the important question remains whether student
performance or the overall effectiveness of the school system improved. Interestingly, statistical measures of improvement after 1988 were not mentioned by respondents. Rather, the level of analysis most commonly used among these respondents were the creative academic programs introduced in individual schools, and respondents felt these were improving their child's education. While test score increases did not necessarily correspond to the introduction of new programs, parents overwhelmingly believed that the unique programs introduced with the new money allotted to individual schools was a move toward students' academic improvements. One parent said:

We (the LSC) brought in reading specialists to come into the schools and work one-on-one with kids, we encouraged teachers to use different types of classroom instruction to teach students, and we invited in speakers from the community to talk to students and help instill a sense of pride in who they were. We also found money for field trips, and art activities for the children... These are some of the same things we lost after 1995 (parent interview 10/29/98a).

Although a few respondents said any test gains seen today are a result of the 1988 school reform act, they overwhelmingly asserted that standardized tests don't measure "all the important things in life," (parent interview 10/29/98a).

Just as I have consistently stressed minority inclusion in educational policy making, my research revealed a confidence among parent and community respondents surrounding the 1988 school reform act. All of the parents I spoke with indicated that despite the problems that continued in the Chicago Public Schools after the 1988 reform, namely crowded classrooms, truancy, and violence, the reform was helping their students. Although standardized test results, attendance rates, graduation rates, and ACT scores do
not support the claim that student performance increased under this reform, I do believe that the parental sentiment that children were in fact doing better is important. If there is a relationship between parental involvement in schools and increased performance, as these parents were identifying, then the empowerment within the minority community may have been making some positive, yet statistically immeasurable improvements in student performance. Additionally, the finding that parental expectations for the schools and satisfaction with the delivery of education to their kids was on the rise after 1988 is a powerful message in support of this reform.

Largely because the 1995 reform rolled back the clock on many of the attributes of the 1988 reform, specifically the fact that administrative power was taken from individual schools and placed in hands of the mayor and his Board of Trustees, parents and community members expressed many problems with the new administrative system. During interviews I heard many upset Chicago parents and residents complain about the use of high stakes tests for social promotion and the reconstitution of schools. Parents reported that their children were depressed and demoralized after receiving news that they would have to attend summer school or that they would not be going on to the next grade. One parent commented:

Do you think Vallas and the Mayor care that kids feel bad? I don’t think so. My son tells me he doesn’t understand how these tests can say whether he goes to high school or not. I have no answer for him. He knows that Black kids don’t do well on them too. What should I tell him, that it doesn’t matter that they don’t because that’s the way the world works? I don’t know. Now, he’s not in any danger, he tests well. But I am worried about my youngest who does well on report cards but bad on tests (parent interview 1/30/99b).
Because grades are not factored into the Board of Trustees' grade promotion formula, many parents said this hurt their children and lowered the status of teachers by eliminating the importance of their expert experience. Although teacher evaluations and conferences were said to matter to parents, they also said that teachers cannot help children who are in danger of being held back. One parent also added that the Board's policy on reconstituting schools resulted in the elimination of several teachers she believed had helped her students (parent interview 10/29/98c). She asserts that reconstitution, which requires new principals and central office staff to come into the school and make hiring and firing decisions, is doing a bad job because "they don't know these teachers or the help they have given" (parent interview 10/29/98b).

Aside from the majority of parents who felt that these tests short-changed their children, I did speak with two parents who complained that the stress on tests has hurt their children who test well. Rather than teachers taking the time to create challenging academic programs for these high test performers, they are spending time on getting their classes up to the minimum passing levels for the tests. Scripted education and teaching the test are the negative terms associated with these practices. It appears that in the Chicago Public Schools, aside from the more creatively structured charter schools, International Baccalaureate schools, and magnet schools, most schools are moving away from creative pedagogical tools to a greater focus on test preparation. More importantly, as several parents mentioned, college courses require that students do more than answer
multiple choice tests, so the long term results could truly limit these kids in higher education.

Among community activists, comments reflecting parental discontent with the 1995 reform compared to the 1988 reform initiative abounded. In addition to complaints about high stakes testing used by the current administration, many complaints also surfaced over the larger issue of tracking low achievers on a path destined for failure, while providing educational opportunities for higher income residents' children (parent interview 7/21/98). The idea behind both of these issues is that high achievers, frequently upper income or White students, are siphoned off into public schools that are more prestigious. This issue is precisely the controversy surrounding the issue of charter schools and voucher programs across the nation. For some, it is unethical to use tax dollars to support a school system which offers more opportunities to some children at the expense of other less fortunate students. In Chicago, the time it takes for a parent to apply and have their child accepted into a specialty school (such as a charter school or an international baccalaureate school), may exclude many low income parents who are busy with family and work responsibilities. One community expert on Chicago School reform commented:

I don’t know how much of this was planned, but the mayor has created a bunch of schools to attract those middle class folks. To his credit, he’s paid attention to the poor kids who don’t test well. But they’re sent to pitiful excuses for schools after they don’t meet the testing bar. I mention that this is strategic because without doing something for the poor kids, the mayor would have received too much attention for creating elite schools. My label for this is educational triage (journalist interview 8/3/98).
This same individual criticized the use of the ITBS and TAP tests for high stakes testing. She commented:

The administration relies on these tests because, to a large extent, the general public can understand them. When people propose more sophisticated assessment mechanisms, the administrations response is that the ITBS and TAP tests are simple and that people will understand them. Well, people, including administrators have a misunderstanding of standardized tests if they think they are easy to understand (journalist interview 8/3/98).

Comments from parents and community members reflected the same sense that students were actually achieving under the 1988 school reform act due to the increased parent, community, and teacher unity around academics. Although statistical evaluations do not substantiate this claim, parents asserted that their children were doing better. This was especially emphasized when comments were made about the 1995 school reform.

Complaints about high stakes tests were said to demoralize students, especially those who failed. Many parent and community respondents expressed a concern that more students will drop out in the future because they are afraid of the test and assume they will fail. Along the same lines, respondents criticized the omission of teachers’ expertise on issues of grade promotion. These comments often appeared intertwined with the feeling that the school administration is unresponsive to parental concerns because the mayor and Board of Trustees continue to receive national praise for instituting strict standards.

Because parents had problems with the 1995 reform, I asked that they identify some possible alternatives for improving long term student performance. The most common recommendation was that additional indicators of student performance could be
used, primarily grades. One community activist suggested that student portfolios be created so that a well rounded assessment of student performance could be made (parent interview 11/8/98). Parents also said that class size needs to be reduced, something receiving great attention across the nation due to the success of students in smaller classes and President Clinton's emphasis on this issue. They also said that parents must feel included, like they were during the 1988 school reform era. Evidently, the limits placed on individual schools after 1995 have resulted in disempowered parents. The comments I received emphasize my assertion that minority empowerment is important in educational policy. Not only do policy experts stress the importance of parental involvement with long term student achievement, but parents identified periods of greater parental involvement as a factor in better student achievement.

The sentiments among teachers, those who were employed under both school reform acts, reflected some of the same sentiments of parents and community members. Teachers claimed that the increase in parent involvement following the 1988 reform was a benefit in the classroom because parents started to become more involved in the classroom and with what their children were learning. One teacher said:

I believe that some parents who weren't highly educated had a fear of coming to the schools. The LSCs helped them get over some of these feelings and get them more involved (teacher interview 7/14/98c).

Interestingly, several teachers also expressed their initial hesitation about the power granted to parents during the 1988 legislative drafting process. They mentioned that although the idea of elevating the position of their students' parents in the schools
sounded like a positive step, the legislation lacked the involvement of professional educators in the drafting process. While this could have led to tremendous failures, most professional educators said it has not. One teacher said:

It's always the case that teachers, the ones' doing the teaching, are left out. Who's more worthy of designing a reform that will improve the learning of these students? (teacher interviews 7/14/98d).

Although teachers were excluded from the creation of both the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts, there is no doubt that teachers' professional credentials have been taken for granted since the 1995 school reform act. Not only do the grades they assign students carry little weight, they are also held accountable if students do not do well. During interviews, I discovered that teachers are generally disappointed in student achievement under the current school administration. Although they complained that student performance did not improve sufficiently after the 1988 reform, the agreed that the new system is placing serious limits on student achievement. They report that they must rely on teaching test taking techniques if they want to remain employed.

Similar to parents, teachers stressed the need for standardized tests as only one of the indicators for grade promotion. They explained that professional development and the introduction of new pedagogical tools would probably increase academic achievement for students in the long run. In addition, as any person trained in a field like teaching would argue, teachers feel that their assessment of their students should count. Not only can they identify those who tend to perform poorly on tests, but they can measure progress
over time and identify steps to improve academic performance (teacher interviews 7/14/98). The need for smaller class size was also a consistent comment.

Much to my astonishment, many of the Chicago Public Schools administrators I interviewed also complained that the emphasis on standardized tests by their administration is problematic. While these individuals largely said the 1988 reform did not improve student performance and was a reform deficient of any accountability mechanism, they also recognized some problems with current student performance measures. A high ranking member from the Office of Accountability and a current school board member commented that the use of high stakes tests is problematic. Mr. Saffold, a current board member noted:

Using the TAP test is a way to measure achievement. It is an objectively verifiable way, and by that I mean that it is one that can be applied evenly across the board. We were passing kids who were graduating from high school and reading at the 6th grade level. Our goal was to restore the value of the CPS diploma so employers and schools would know that there were certain standards that were met. I do understand that test scores are not the best or only approach for determining who moves forward, but they are probably the best available tool (Saffold interview 7/23/98).

This comment reflects my finding that accurate and concrete measures of student performance are difficult to find. However, my interviews with parents, community activists, and teachers indicate that some less “objectively verifiable” measures are still useful in gauging student performance.

Although administrators were less critical of student performance under the current administration than parent, community, and teacher pools, they were generally more critical of student performance under the 1988 reform. Although this perspective
could be viewed as self-serving, it is nevertheless an important perception to discuss. Because measurements of student performance based on parent assessments are completely subjective, it is unlikely that the current board would find a great deal of strength in these assessments. However, I remain convinced that the frustration and discontent over student performance and the reliance on high stakes tests is a very important part of school system effectiveness. If those served are unhappy and have recommendations for improvement, their positions merit attention. However, the Board and mayor rely on statistical measures of student performance that do reflect some favorable trends since they assumed control, namely test results and attendance. As a result, the complaints among many powerless constituents go unnoticed in light of the national attention the board attracts with their few concrete improvements.

**VII. Conclusion**

Minority incorporation in educational policy-making is important as minority residents are disproportionately served by urban public school systems. This theme has resonated throughout my dissertation and provided a unique tool in this chapter on the overall effectiveness of the Chicago Public Schools under the 1938 and 1995 school reform acts. Evaluating student performance traditionally involves concrete measures of student performance such as test scores, graduation rates, or dropout statistics. However, I believe that an important component of the success of the school system is the assessment of those served by the system. If parents and students are dissatisfied with the quality of education provided in their public schools, this ought to be a concern among
administrators. Although a concern with parental assessment is a less concrete measure of student performance than test scores, it is nonetheless critical as education is an essential tool for future opportunities.

To create an in-depth evaluation of student performance under the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts, I have examined several traditional measures of student performance (test scores, attendance figures, graduation rates, dropout rates, and ACT scores), along with interviews data from parents, community activists, teachers and administrators regarding student performance under the two policy initiatives. Not only do my interviews with stakeholders in educational policy add depth to evaluations of student performance, but the deficiencies with some standard measures of student performance and the inaccessibility of some data are sufficient to necessitate additional measures of performance. For this reason, interview data with individuals familiar with the two reform initiatives was useful.

The preceding chapters have offered favorable evaluations of Chicago’s 1988 school reform initiative according to administrative responsiveness to the concerns of the minority community and the level of accountability among school board members to these same individuals. In contrast, this chapter has not provided the same high level of praise for the 1988 reform. Although the parents and community activists I interviewed praised the system for creating a welcoming environment where teachers and parents could work together to help students in a school, statistical data on student performance did not parallel this praise. In addition, administrators were extremely critical of the 1988 reform
because student performance did not improve and because accountability mechanisms were not in important part of this reform.

My research revealed that although the 1995 mayoral system has coincided with some increases in student test scores and attendance rates, that parents are unhappy with the emphasis placed on high stakes testing. The crackdown on student, teacher, and individual school accountability that occurred in the wake of the 1995 school reform act has outraged many parents as their children are flunking grades and feeling demoralized. As my chapter on responsiveness indicated (see chapter four), parents do not feel that they have a voice in the school system. Interestingly, all of my samples (parents, community activists, teachers, and administrators) admitted that the reliance on standardized tests in Chicago is not the ideal way to assess student performance. This sentiment, and the fact that parents, teachers and community residents I interviewed are not satisfied with student achievement under the new system, does not match the national praise Mayor Daley continuously receives for improving the school system. Including the assessment by those who are served by the school system and teachers is clearly not considered when the system is praised. This chapter has attempted to balance the improvements Mayor Daley can claim credit for, with the voices of those served by the school system.

There are several important findings from this chapter. First, the views of those with firsthand knowledge of the school system offer contrary assessments of the two school reform acts than traditional measures of student performance would indicate. This, I believe, indicates the need to consider opinions, especially of those served, when
devising educational policy. If those served are unhappy with the end result, there must be changes. Several recommendations made by those I interviewed are certainly worthy of consideration. Many parents and community activists recommended that test scores should be emphasized less and that children should not be held accountable for poor test performance due to the demoralization they experience. In place of test score reliance, several individuals believe that report cards and teacher evaluations should be given more weight. In addition, there was an overall consensus that more parents need to be brought back into the schools, since there has been a considerable decline after the implementation of the 1995 school reform. One parent who praised the 1988 school reform for facilitating parents to get more involved, suggested that the state should provide financial rewards for parent volunteers who are simultaneously trying to get off welfare. Teachers were also in favor of greater parent involvement, a de-emphasis on test scores, and an emphasis on their evaluations. In addition, they stressed the need for greater professional development in the school system so that they may expand their pedagogical skills. Even some administrators offered recommendations including the need to test children in other subject areas, and the creation of individual student portfolios so student evaluations are more comprehensive.

Another important finding from this chapter is that neither of these reforms have resulted in impressive student performance gains. This finding is especially important as education is critical for future educational and occupational opportunities. Perhaps the emphasis placed on governance in both reforms needs to be balanced with the input from
professional educators and parent/community members. The sentiments of those with firsthand knowledge of the system require consideration if a successful reform is to be implemented and maintained over time.
Source: Chicago Public Schools

Figure 6.1: ITBS Test Results - Grade 3
Source: Chicago Public Schools

Figure 6.2: ITBS Test Results - Grade 4
Source: Chicago Public Schools

Figure 6.3: ITBS Test Results - Grade 5
Source: Chicago Public Schools

Figure 6.4: ITBS Test Results - Grade 6
Source: Chicago Public Schools

Figure 6.5: ITBS Test Results - Grade 7
Source: Chicago Public Schools

Figure 6.6: ITBS Test Results - Grade 8
Source: Chicago Public Schools

Figure 6.7: TAP Test Results - Grade 9
Figure 6.8: TAP Test Results - Grade 11

Source: Chicago Public Schools
Figure 6.9: High School Attendance 1989-1998

Source: Chicago Public Schools
Source: Chicago Public Schools

Figure 6.10: Elementary Attendance 1989-1998
Figure 6.11: High School Graduation Rate 1986 - 1998

Source: Chicago Public Schools
Source: Chicago Public Schools

Figure 6.12: High School Dropout Rate 1986-1998
Figure 6.13: Composite ACT Scores - National & CPS 1991-1998

Source: Chicago Public Schools
CHAPTER 7
Urban School Reform: Trends and Prospects

1. Introduction

For many decades the public schools have played immensely important roles in the service delivery process of major American cities. Discussions of municipal crisis in the contemporary literature of urban politics encompasses issues relating to the accomplishments as well as the failures of city based public schools. The goal of "improving public education" has become a key ingredient in the reform proposals presented by public officials and policy analysts to save cities and improve the quality of life available to citizens living in urban environments. Because the quality of urban education is intimately linked to occupational opportunities available to students, reports of failing public school programs in cities have moved the issue of school reform to a central place on our nation’s social policy agenda. School reform has extremely important implications for the future of minority social and economic mobility in America. Constituting a majority of students matriculating in many urban school systems, racial minorities have become dependent upon public schools to provide them with the training,
discipline, and motivation they need to realize the fundamental promises of the American dream.

The urgent need to improve urban schools has led cities like Chicago to create and implement radical new school reform initiatives. Whereas other cities have concentrated on school “choice” plans, privatization, and charter schools, Chicago has implemented two reform initiatives centered on improving urban education by altering the administrative control of the school system. Chicago’s shift from a decentralized school system characterized by community involvement after the 1988 school reform act to a centralized system with mayoral control after the 1995 reform act demands evaluation to determine how minorities fare under the two administrative models and the effect of these two reforms on student performance. This is especially important due to the recent rush to emulate Chicago’s most recent reform in other cities.

This study has evaluated Chicago’s 1988 and 1995 school reform acts to shed light on the level of minority inclusion in policy-making, and to assess the impact of these reforms on student performance. My research emphasizes the importance of minority empowerment, specifically in urban governance, as a fundamental aspect of democracy. I have drawn upon Browning, Marshall, and Tabb’s (1984) assertion that minority group mobilization at the local level can lead to minority incorporation in city governance, and ultimately result in governmental responsiveness to minority residents’ concerns. As a result, I have structured my research questions around whether minorities benefit or lose power under Chicago’s two school reform acts.
Whereas the minority empowerment literature (Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984; Eisinger 1982) emphasizes mayors and city councils as principal policy actors, my research examines the school board as a third policy member. Both of Chicago’s recent school reform acts focused on who would ultimately control the school system, and this led to tremendous shifts in the balance of power among municipal politicians, school board members, business leaders, and the community. In the 1988 school reform the Black community and the business community forged a relationship and convinced the state legislature to decentralize control of the Chicago Public Schools primarily so that the community could exercise greater control over the education of their children. Although business leaders sought financial efficiency of the troubled school system centered around their financial oversight, the larger change was the devolution of individual school control into the hands of the community. School board members in Chicago were, for the first time, selected in a system that formally included the community. Local school councils (LSCs), parent majority councils elected for each school, were also created and offered residents the chance to actually elect educational policy makers in their own schools for the first time. These, and other changes that occurred in 1988, demonstrated that political coalitions mattered, and that control over the administrative structure of the school system, especially via the school board, is a coveted prize.

This emphasis on administrative control of the school system again emerged in 1995 when the state legislature was persuaded by a state-wide business coalition to re-
centralize control of the school system due to financial chaos and a lack of accountability to city government in the Chicago Public Schools. Rather than returning the city's school district to the pre-1988 model whereby school board members were selected by the mayor and required city council confirmation, the legislature decided to grant Chicago's mayor complete autonomy in school board selection and oversight of the entire school system. This new responsibility allows the mayor to bypass the community and the city council in selecting board members, and places the school budget under his authority. Whether or not the newly Republican Illinois state legislature intended to watch the city's Democratic mayor fail, or whether the mayor actually desired control is debatable. What is not debatable is that Mayor Daley has created a corporate structured Board of Trustees, a management team, and a CEO to replace Chicago's historic Board of Education and superintendent. While the new administrative model has facilitated a great deal of fiscal stability in the historically troubled school system, specifically four consecutive balanced budgets, such stability does not necessarily translate into minority incorporation or empowerment. Specifically, in light of the community involvement associated with the previous reform, a major issue that emerges from my research is the extent to which minority gains are affected by the two reform initiatives and in what direction.

Understanding the effect of altering the political structure of a school system is important for a number of reasons. In addition to the fact that mayoral control is being instituted in other large-city school systems, we must understand what impact this shift to mayoral control has on minority communities. If residents are locked out of the policy
process under one administrative system over another, this could have broad implications for the political efficacy of these groups, their future participation in politics, and ultimately their democratic representation. The rapid pace of new school reform plans and the desire by politicians to assume control of school boards demonstrates that this is a political process. In addition to the power one receives having control over the budget for public education, the potential credit claiming for educational improvements may serve as an influential political resource. The findings of this research are at variance with the findings of previous researchers who argue that school boards are inconsequential policy players (Danielson and Hochschild 1998; Stone 1998; 1996). The Chicago case demonstrates that the school board politics is critically important both for those relying on the schools for a competitive education and for municipal politicians.

I have examined both of Chicago’s school reform initiatives according to the level of administrative responsiveness to the minority community’s concerns, the level of school board accountability to the community, and the overall effectiveness of the school system based on student performance under the two plans. In doing so I have discovered significant differences in the level of minority incorporation in educational policy. My responsiveness and accountability variables provide evidence of an increased level of minority incorporation under the 1988 school reform act. In contrast, the 1995 reform does not reflect similar increases in minority incorporation due to the reduced community role in policy-making and the board’s subsequent policy decisions. My effectiveness research does not reveal findings that are as clear-cut as my responsiveness and
accountability variables. Statistical measurements of student performance, specifically increases in students' test scores and attendance rates, support the 1995 reform. On the other hand, interview data with parents indicates contradictory assessments of student performance and emphasizes some significant problems with the reliance on high stakes testing. The variance between statistical measurements and individual assessments indicates that conflicting results emerge depending on how student performance is operationalized. What is even more apparent regarding student performance is that neither reform has led to dramatic increases in student performance. This leads to the question of whether urban school reform initiatives should concentrate so heavily on political structure if student performance is not flourishing.

This chapter summarizes my findings from the previous chapters regarding responsiveness, accountability, and effectiveness of the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts. In addition, I offer an overall assessment of the two reforms and their impact on the minority community based upon my findings. Finally, as this study is designed to offer some suggestions for improving urban schools for the students, I offer some possible recommendations for future reforms, issues that necessitate more research, and discuss the prospect for change.

II. Responsiveness and Community Action

Any democratic school reform must take into account the needs and concerns of those directly served by the schools. If these needs are not met, not only is the initiative undemocratic, but it could have a long range impact on the political efficacy of the groups
served. Furthermore, if the community feels disconnected from the school system, this will likely lead to declining parental involvement in schools, something researchers have identified as related to student achievement (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler 1997). My responsiveness variable is based upon the importance of minority inclusion in educational policy-making, and builds upon the assertion made by urban politics scholars that bottom level inclusion in the policy process is essential in a democracy (Berry, Portney, and Thompson 1993; Parenti 1970). Precisely for this reason I have relied heavily on firsthand evaluations by parents and community activists familiar with the two school reform acts, asking them whom they have sought for assistance with their educational concerns and who has responded under the two administrative structures. Although my sample size is small, I believe the sentiments expressed by individuals with firsthand knowledge of and contact with the school system are an important tool in any school reform evaluation. Although I do not contend that all parents and community members in Chicago reflect the same sentiments, I do believe the respondents in this study provide extremely valuable information on some prevalent perspectives held by residents concerning the school system. This bottom-up approach contributes to the current school reform literature that largely overlooks the perspectives of parents and community members. Understanding their positions and the level of importance policy makers place on their perspectives offers an essential evaluative tool.

Administrative responsiveness to the minority community's concerns under the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts present two very different scenarios. The level of
responsiveness under the 1988 legislation provided an unprecedented amount of minority incorporation in educational policy-making through the establishment of the school board nominating commission (SBNC), the newly representative school board, and LSCs. Minority group activists, and those who simply experienced the results of the 1988 reform act, conveyed their feelings of empowerment based upon their inclusion in the policy process. One parent explained:

I didn't feel welcomed at the school before. Before the LSC, if a parent said something it didn't count. Then the LSC came along and we (parents) and teachers and the principal started making decisions hand in hand (parent interview 10/29/98b).

In contrast to the satisfaction with the 1988 reform, which was evident in parent and community interviews, elite interviews revealed frustration with the school system during this same period due to accusations of micromanaging and competition among groups for influence. For this reason, the centralized nature of the 1995 reform was frequently favored by elite respondents. Since these individuals largely represent administrative employees, it is not surprising they identify their preference for the administrative structure they are a part of and claimed that the present administration is indeed responsive.

The 1995 legislation was evaluated much less favorably by parents and community respondents. With the elimination of the SBNC and the restrictions placed on LSCs, respondents felt that they were being excluded from educational policy-making. In addition, when asked whom they believe has been responsive under the 1995 legislation, they did not express very much faith in the Board of Trustees or the Management Team. Further, they did not express the same faith in the LSCs ability to respond to their
concerns due to the restrictions placed on these community based bodies in 1995. One
parent, commenting on the unresponsiveness of the current administration, noted:

When my daughter was held back the LSC said they didn’t have the power to help, that it was the board’s decision. Then I couldn’t talk to anyone at the board because they wouldn’t return my calls (parent interview 11/9/98).

Mayor Daley, as the head of the school administration’s hierarchy, was also not seen as responsive to the concerns of minority residents.

I believe that one of the clearest examples of administrative unresponsiveness is the fact that the policies enacted by the administration are unsatisfactory to parents and community respondents. While policies such as high stakes testing and reconstituting schools generate reports that the mayor’s school system is addressing tough problems, non-elite respondents justifiably suggest that these programs are hurting their children in the long run. These sentiments should be important indicators of the value and effectiveness of school reform. However, because non-elite perspectives are routinely excluded from evaluations, the 1995 reform has triumphed in the wake of the financial stability and the test score performance improvements the mayor claims to his credit.

If parental involvement in the schools is indeed associated with student improvement in the long run, policy makers should consider the administrative responsiveness to these residents when altering the structure of the school system. It is possible that if children observe the exclusion of their parents and community members in educational policy they will arrive at the conclusion that their voice does not matter and that their own participation is not valuable. This trend in minority exclusion from
educational policy-making could therefore continue in Chicago and be replicated in other large urban school systems. A decline in minority participation could have a devastating impact on minority participation in municipal politics.

**III. Administrative Accountability to the Minority Community**

The groups which policy makers consider, consult, and include in policy-making have a tremendous impact on their subsequent policy decisions. Therefore, determining whom board members identify they are accountable to and their subsequent behavior is important if we want to determine whether these people are consistent in their words and actions. My accountability variable tested the pluralist notion of a decentralized political system where access to influence is available for all interested groups. Clearly, those served by the school system should occupy a major position in the minds of policy makers. I test this notion of school board members' accountability to Chicago's minority community because the school district serves an 88% minority student body. Accountability is measured by determining whom members represent in their policy decisions: the community, tax payers, municipal politicians, interest groups, business organizations, or others.

By evaluating to whom policy makers are accountable when making educational decisions under the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts, I have illustrated the connection between administrative accountability and responsive policy-making. If minority incorporation in educational policy-making is to occur, administrators must feel accountable, at least in large part, to the minority community on the receiving end of their
decisions. If this does not occur and their allegiance is elsewhere, educational policy will not meet the needs of the minority community. Furthermore, as these people are important stakeholders in educational policy and their childrens' futures are tied to this policy process, any long-range school reform plan should meet with their approval and receive their endorsement.

The 1988 community based administrative structure and the 1995 mayoral model present two vastly different administrative structures for examining administrative accountability. School board members appointed under the 1988 and 1995 reform laws differ in their perception of accountability. Although all members claim they are or were accountable to the students and the community, more thorough examination reveals several striking differences. First, current Board of Trustees members are appointed directly by the mayor. Intuitively this indicates a strong likelihood of an allegiance to the mayor who appoints them. This is especially striking given that the 1988 legislation created a school board which was appointed with the involvement of the community. The alterations in the selection process provide the primary indication that members under the two administrative structures are accountable to different interests. In addition, the importance that mayors must place on economic stability, tax payers’ faith in the school system, and their concern for reelection introduce factors that may conflict with the goal of providing educational opportunities to students. If school board members are accountable to a mayor, as is the case in Chicago today, they will likely prioritize issues that the mayor finds important.
The occupational background of school board members after the 1988 reform took effect diversified the school board and brought people from various sectors of the community together. In contrast, today’s board members reflect experience in corporate America or as high level municipal politicians. This difference in occupational status appears to have affected educational policy-making. Whereas board members under the 1988 legislation were recommended by the community, the 1995 appointees can be considered elites with very little connection to the community they serve. This missing community link virtually insulates current board members from those their primary constituents and strengthens their connection to Mayor Daley.

If we consider Board members’ ties with outside groups, we again see the exclusion of minorities under the 1995 reform. Because former board members came from diverse sectors of the city, including clergy, non-profit groups, and individuals from higher education, they brought diverse, though sometimes competing, interests together. The competition that flourished under the SBNC process gave many groups a chance to enter the formal school administrative structure. Once representatives were seated on the school board, it appears that healthy and democratic participation occurred. Unions, business interests, community, and reform groups all had their voices heard. However, the direct connection between the school board and the community appears to have favored community groups. While this may seem lopsided, it is important to note that these are the individuals directly served by the school system and their concerns should logically be a priority.
There is no disputing the importance of student achievement in any urban school reform initiative. However, the method used to measure student achievement can have a vast impact on results. Building upon my belief that minority incorporation in the educational policy process is important, I have also used student achievement to assess the 1988 and 1995 school reform acts. My effectiveness variable deals specifically with the quality of education received by the students in the schools because I believe that political structure plays an important role in the overall effectiveness and the management of urban school systems. Consolidating municipal services and turning control of the school board over to mayors may improve the management of the district’s finances, but this does not ensure student academic achievement or minority inclusion in policy-making. Given the debatable aspects of standardized tests as measures of student achievement, I have also examined other statistical indicators related to student performance under both school reform initiatives including student attendance, graduation rates, dropout rates, and composite ACT scores. These findings have been complemented with interviews with parents, community activists, administrators, and teachers centering on their assessments of student performance. While an ideal reform would balance statistical measures with these assessments, this was not evident under either reform, signifying a finding that necessitates greater research.

Although the parents and community activists I interviewed praised the 1988 school reform act for creating a welcoming environment where teachers and parents could
work together to help students in a school, statistical data on student performance did not parallel this praise. Whereas the benefits of the 1988 reform could have needed more time to materialize via standardized measures of student performance, the lack of such improvement led to criticism. The decentralization of educational policy-making in the hands of community members was also identified as problematic by opponents of the 1988 reform. As a result, my interviews with administrators revealed a high degree of opposition to the 1988 reform because student performance did not improve and because accountability mechanisms were not an important component of this reform.

My research revealed that although the 1995 mayoral system has coincided with some increases in student test scores and attendance rates, that parents are unhappy with the emphasis placed on high stakes testing. The crackdown on student, teacher, and individual school accountability that occurred in the wake of the 1995 school reform act has outraged many parents as their children are flunking grades and feeling demoralized. Interestingly, all of my samples (parents, community activists, teachers, and administrators) admitted that the reliance on standardized tests in Chicago is not the ideal way to assess student performance. This sentiment, and the fact that parents, teachers, and community residents I interviewed are not satisfied with student achievement under the new system, does not comport with the national praise Mayor Daley continually receives for improving the school system.
V. Recommendations, Future Research, and Prospects for Change

My research has identified a dichotomy in minority empowerment between Chicago’s 1988 and 1995 school reform acts. The community involvement during the 1988 reform initiative heightened minority incorporation in educational policy making, leading to an unprecedented level of administrative responsiveness to the minority community. Additionally, the incorporation of minority parents in the entire educational policy process, notably the school board selection process and the importance of LSCs, fostered the selection of school board and LSC members who were committed to their constituents. Although significant statistical gains in student improvement were not apparent, parents, community activists, and teachers did note that they witnessed student performance improvements under the 1988 reform due to the creative and unique programs introduced in the schools. As one parent noted:

We (the LSC) brought in reading specialists to come into the schools and work one-on-one with kids, we encouraged teachers to use different types of classroom instruction to teach students, and we invited in speakers from the community to talk to students and help instill a sense of pride in who they were. We also found money for field trips, and art activities for the children.... These are some of the same things we lost after 1995 (parent interview 10/29/98a).

In addition to the creative programs designed to boost student performance, another asset of the 1988 reform initiative was the increased presence of parents in schools through LSC membership and their efforts to recruit parental volunteers. These educational gains were the product of the broad autonomy granted to LSCs, and the financial resources allocated for each individual school.
In contrast to the praise I discovered among minority community respondents regarding the 1988 legislation, I discovered a great deal of frustration among these same individuals regarding the 1995 school reform act. The parents and community members in this study do not feel that the Board of Trustees or Mayor Daley are responsive to their concerns. This lack of responsiveness within the current school administration provides compelling evidence that the statistical evidence they use to demonstrate their achievement is not correlated with political incorporation. Further, whereas LSCs were viewed as responsive political organizations under the 1988 legislation, today they are seen as inconsequential policy makers due to their restricted role after 1995. Several of the policies Mayor Daley and the board have implemented have negatively affected those served by the schools. Parents and teachers identify numerous problems with the new emphasis on high stakes tests. The demoralization among many students and the reduced role of teachers’ evaluations of their pupils was mentioned throughout my interviews as key problems emanating from the 1995 reforms. Therefore, despite statistical evidence of moderate student improvement, there appears to also be a great deal of frustration in the minority community, indicating a serious decline in minority incorporation and empowerment.

Despite high levels of frustration with policy makers who do not behave as though they are accountable to the community and with their policy-making that does not take into consideration the concerns of the minority community, the community appears quiescent. This quiescence stems from Mayor Daley’s skillful practice of symbolically
addressing selective problems of the minority community. The minority community now faces the predicament that some of the most influential Black community leaders from the 1988 reform have become board employees. Additionally, the absence of a leader capable of mobilizing the Black community in the way Harold Washington did, has left a leadership vacuum in Chicago’s minority community. Altogether, this lack of progressive leadership is a tremendous setback for disgruntled parents. At the same time, this strategy of incorporating community leaders into the municipal hierarchy exemplifies Mayor Daley’s skillful political tactics. Not only has he silenced minority groups, but his appointment of prior leaders potentially dilutes Black electoral opposition that might surface and harm his political fortune.

The policies implemented by an administration provide an indication of the administration’s regime philosophy. In addition to Mayor Daley’s ability to provide limited symbolic benefits to the minority community, his concern with pro-growth strategies, including in education, are reflected in his hand picked school board. Among the most notable tactics of school board members selected by Mayor Daley are the exceptional educational opportunities provided for some students in order to retain a middle class tax base in the city. Although all big-city mayors must face the reality that the economic stability of their city is of vital importance to tax payers, for bond ratings, and for their own political careers, the larger question is whether economic priorities impede the incorporation of poor and minority residents in educational policy. If mayors
are granted control of urban school systems, we must understand the impact this has on
the inclusion and participation of those directly served by the school system.

The "bottom-line" strategy used by the current school board, as seen with its
emphasis on standardized tests, reflects the same pro-growth concerns mayors must
address in municipal governance decisions. The board’s focus on test scores and financial
efficiency must be balanced with the evaluations by those directly served by the school
system. Including such evaluations demonstrates that despite statistical indications that
student improvement is occurring or that financial stability has occurred, this is not
indicative of resident satisfaction. This is an important issue that Mayor Daley ought to
consider, along with those interested in replicating Chicago’s 1995 school reform act.

In fairness to Mayor Daley, it is difficult to speculate as to whether a mayor such
as Harold Washington would have been able to balance economic concerns with minority
inclusion had he been placed in control of the school system. It might be the case that
even those mayors who are dependent on minority electoral support will rank these
individuals’ concerns second to economic factors. If this is the case, centralizing control
of urban school systems in the hands of mayors could be a poor decision if it necessarily
leads to less minority incorporation. Research on school reform in cities such as
Cleveland and Detroit, cities where Black Democratic mayors have been granted control
of their school systems, must be conducted. This research could end speculation on the
position of minority residents when minority mayors who rely on minority electoral
support are granted control of their school systems. It is my hypothesis that regardless of
the racial, ethnic, or partisan background of a mayor, that their concern with economic
vitality will relegate minority residents to a low position in educational policy-making.

In contrast to the governing regime under the 1995 legislation, the 1988 school
reform act facilitated an educational governing coalition that included the community and
attempted to allow multiple groups access to the policy-making process. Although this
decentralization could have resulted in tremendous conflict among various groups and
individual parents focused on their own children's needs, my research did not reveal such
problems. One of the largest problems encountered in the wake of the 1988 legislation
was the financial crisis that was inherited by reformers. However, while financial stability
in a school system is clearly important and could conceivably contribute to a greater
emphasis student performance once fiscal stability is established, the inclusion of parents
and community members in educational policy-making must also be accomplished. The
inclusion of parents and community members in the 1988 school reform initiative not only
led to more responsive policies for the minority community, but appears to have made
school board members feel accountable to the minority community they made decisions
for.

The decline in minority influence in Chicago's educational policy-making is not
only troubling, but will have tremendous political implications in Chicago in the future. I
emphasize the impact beyond school politics because the opportunities for school children
in Chicago, educationally and occupationally, are hindered if the school system is
incapable of meeting the needs of those served. Furthermore, the witnessing by children
of the inability of their parents to influence policy may decrease their own levels of political efficacy. Chicago's minority community has historically been excluded from policy-making, widening the path of machine dominance and the rise of unresponsive politicians with no permanent ability to place minority concerns on the political agenda. In order to end these trends in Chicago and other large urban areas, factors that hinder minority mobilization and incorporation in municipal politics must be identified. Because urban education is an important policy arena, I believe that we must seriously consider how this policy arena is being used to lock minorities out of the greater policy process. School houses have always reflected societal problems; now we must acknowledge the political aspects of public education and consider long range strategies for improvement and democratic inclusion.

Although my research relies on a limited sample of respondents, it demonstrates an alarming trend in minority empowerment in educational policy. If centralizing control of a school system in the hands of mayors causes minorities to lose power, influence, and policies that are responsive to their concerns, serious questions must be raised regarding plans by other cities to adopt the Chicago model. Moreover, national office holders must be cautioned against identifying early successes of urban school reform until assessments of those with firsthand knowledge are available.

One of the questions I have grappled with throughout my research is whether altering the administrative structure of a school system gets to the heart of necessary changes in urban educational policy or whether something else is needed. Whereas the
1995 reform stabilized the finances of the school system, it did not address the needs of the community. On the other hand, while the 1988 reform included the community, the preexisting financial troubles of the school system hampered the positive achievements produced by that reform. The fact that neither of these reforms has resulted in adequate student performance gains requires attention. Perhaps the emphasis placed on governance in both reforms needs to be balanced with the input from professional educators and parent/community members, and a permanent educational summit coalition including the primary stakeholders in educational policy. Successful implementation and support for any meaningful reform requires cooperation among groups. The absence of such a coalition will only intensify internal problems in the school system.

Throughout my interviews many respondents suggested changes that could increase student performance and increase the level of minority incorporation in policy-making. Teachers emphasized the need for more attention to professional development, smaller class sizes, and a re-emphasis on their evaluations of pupils. Because many teachers and parents noted the assets of increased parental involvement under the 1988 school reform, I believe that such involvement should also be considered in any attempts to improve the school system. The consistent complaints about reliance on high stakes tests and the de-emphasis on student grades and individual progress requires attention. In addition, because LSCs initially provided a great increase in minority empowerment, their authority must be restored as this low-level elective office established a critical link between the community and the school administration.
One possible improvement for urban school reform that would address the need for minority incorporation and the investment the business community has made in the school system would be to organize an ongoing and permanent summit between municipal politicians, community groups, and the business community. Although this was attempted during Mayor Washington’s tenure, a permanent organization was not developed. Such an organization could ensure that the dominant interests in school reform would have a voice and open the door for long term cooperation. Given teachers’ stake in education, their inclusion would also be desirable. This organization could review problems that plague the school system and devise plans together. Moreover, this arrangement could facilitate financial security based on business expertise, minority incorporation due to community involvement, and professional development based on the inclusion of educators. The feasibility of such a recommendation is questionable. Mayor Daley would need to relinquish some control if such an organization was to exercise substantial power and influence. Because the mayor has used his successes with the school system as a political resource, it is unlikely that he would cooperate.

Another reason I recommend a permanent educational summit is because coalitions in Chicago’s educational history have either excluded the minority community, offered only symbolic benefits, or been short lived. If the state legislature were to mandate an ongoing coalition among these groups, perhaps the past predicaments of the minority community would be resolved. This notion of reduced minority inclusion reflects
the anti-pluralist notion that coalitions are often short lived and minorities become the losing partner (Hero 1992; Reed 1988; Parenti 1970).

If altering the administrative structure of the school system is to be a method for improving urban education, then we must develop models that not only incorporate minorities, but also lead to financial stability and improve student performance. The 1988 reform included the minority community, and the 1995 reform has created a financially stable school system. The challenge is for the merger of these assets in ways that promote long term student achievement. In my view, creating a permanent committee composed of the various stakeholders in educational policy will lead to student improvement. Since improvement in the quality of the educational experience received by students must be the ultimate objective of any proposal for educational reform, a policy innovation that lends to this result must be warmly embraced and effectively implemented. This issue represents a critical component of the unfinished agenda of educational decision-making and policy implementation in the Chicago Public School System.
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Parent interview 10/29/98d

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