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Analysis of Local Stakeholder Opposition to School District Consolidation: An Application of Interpretive Theory to Public Policy Making

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In this paper, we attempt to understand the opposition to school district consolidation. In the mid-1980's in Illinois numerous studies attempted to show the advantages of larger schools and consolidated school districts. However, local opposition to consolidation remained strong, and efforts by state officials to consolidate school districts produced limited results. We explore the resistance to reorganization and consolidation of schools by local-level school district stakeholders.

Introduction

Few public policy issues touch the heart of a community more than the loss of the local public school through reorganization or consolidation of school districts. In rural areas the closing of the local schools can mark the beginning of the disappearance of the community as a social center. Often, economic and political atrophy follow. However, small schools often provide a constrained curriculum and limited opportunities for children to achieve the results that their counterparts in larger and more cosmopolitan schools have learned to expect as a matter of course. Is this sufficient reason to close a school building and eliminate some local jobs? For many communities in the heartland of the nation, "the effect of consolidation on a town's pocketbook is slight, however, compared to the damage the process does to the heart of the community, for the red brick schoolhouse sitting squarely at the center of most small towns is to be found at the crux of community life" (Davidson, 1990, p. 62).

Between 1945 and 1955, the number of public school districts in Illinois decreased from approximately 11,000 to just over 2,000. By 1990-91, that number had fallen to 955. Pressures from lower enrollments, increased unit costs of operations, population migration, and increased national attention to educational performance brought the issue of school district consolidation onto the public policy agenda in the state of Illinois in the mid-1980s. Impetus for an increased rate of consolidation came from both Governor James R. Thompson and State Superintendent of Education Ted Sanders. Reports from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) emphasized both educational quality and financial efficiency in larger school districts. In 1985, the Illinois General Assembly adopted legislation calling for the establishment of committees of school district reorganization in all regions of the state to study the issues of school district size and possible consolidation of smaller units into larger districts. Plans were to be developed for submission to the voters, although there were no provisions to actually force consolidation without electoral consent.

Vocal opposition to school district consolidation arose across the state. The controversy became a campaign issue in the 1986 gubernatorial battle between Governor Thompson and Adlai Stevenson, his Democratic opponent (Walker, 1988). School district consolidation also emerged as an element in the failed attempts to reform the state's school finance system in 1985-87 (Ward, 1987). Parents, community members, and school officials joined in an angry cacophony of anti-consolidation arguments. Studies and counter-

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studies were produced and the issue was debated in numerous sessions at state level conferences and workshops of many organizations. A number of new coalitions and organizations appeared.

The Study

This study is an attempt to understand the local opposition to school district consolidation. In the consolidation battles in Illinois in the mid-1980s, there were volumes of information and numerous studies produced which attempted to show the advantages of larger schools and consolidated school districts. Yet, local opposition to consolidation remained strong and the effort by state officials to effectuate the reorganization and consolidation of school districts eventually produced limited results. The question we pose is why school district reorganization and consolidation is resisted by local level school district stakeholders?

The framework in which the study is embedded is taken from Carol Weiss' work on public policy which holds that "public policy positions taken by policy actors are the resultant of three sets of forces: their ideologies, their interests (e.g. in power, reputation, financial reward) and the information they have" (Weiss, 1983, p. 221). The dissemination of research findings and a description of how school districts apply that information to their own knowledge about consolidation reflect just one factor influencing the decision by school districts not to consolidate. In addition, there is increasing evidence that consolidation is a choice among values, not simply a choice among objective facts. Furthermore, special interests of school districts or of major actors within those districts may influence the outcome of public policy decisions. The purpose of this study is to provide a deeper understanding of the reasons why major stakeholders in local school districts continue to resist consolidation efforts. In a broader sense, the study will enhance our understanding of the local school district decision making process.

The research literature on school district size and school district consolidation does not present clear guidance for policy makers. There is little evidence suggesting a causal link between school size and financial efficiency, curricular adequacy, or educational quality (Haller & Monk, 1992; Monk, 1988; Monk & Haller, 1986; Walberg & Fowler, 1987). While there is some evidence that consolidation does provide some favorable results, a direct case for consolidation is hard to justify on the basis of the research literature alone. However, there is a strong attitudinal opposition to consolidation among those most affected by it. The situation in Illinois can best be summed up as follows:

> Small, rural schools may present some unique problems as well as opportunities, but as a class of districts, they neither exceed nor lag behind in their ability to offer adequate educational services. What is implied . . . is a change in attitude toward small, rural schools and a focus on educational performance in general (Ward, 1988, p. 7).

This does not appreciably differ from the national situation, which has been described in the following manner:

> There is some evidence that the generally accepted assumptions that rural schools are the problem and/or that schooling is a generic proposition are being questioned. In a few communities, new thinking and new strategies are beginning to emerge (Nachtigal, 1982, p. 23).

Despite many studies over time relating to the issues of school district size and consolidation, very few address all the factors involved and their interplay that pervade the complex decision making processes in such districts. Most of the research literature addresses individual factors and provides little information from which to understand the dynamics of policy making (Davidson, 1990; Sher & Tompkins, 1977).

Decisions made within the political arena at local, state, and national levels are subject to many structural, political, and procedural influences (Weiss, 1983). In order to answer the question of what influences local stakeholders to oppose consolidation of school districts, a case study approach was employed using multiple methods of data collection and ongoing, interactive, and iterative analyses.

The Case Study Site and Methodology

The site for the case study is a central Illinois community with an active past and recent history relating to consolidation. The elementary (K-8) district was formed in the late 1940s through consolidation

and, because of its small size, has been the subject of consolidation efforts since then. These efforts increased as a result of the move toward consolidation by the state of Illinois in 1985. The community is served by both the elementary district and a high school (9-12) district. In Illinois terminology, this is known as a dual district. The high school district serves two other elementary districts. In terms of demographic and financial variables, the community studied is fairly representative of small, rural districts in the state, although no attempt was made to test statistical representativeness. The unit of analysis is the single elementary district serving the community. Data were collected through intensive interviews by a single researcher with representative stakeholders identified in the community; document analysis of public documents, newspaper accounts, minutes of meetings and other written reports, administrative records, letters, memoranda, and other communications; and observations of meetings in the community. Most of the data were collected from the 1988-90 period. Analysis of the case study data and field notes was conducted by both researchers using methods described in Merriam (1988) involving intensive data analysis techniques and triangulation of data. A full case narrative was developed and analyzed.

This case study is bounded by the adoption of school district consolidation legislation by the state of Illinois in 1985 and the announced retirement of the superintendent of the district under study in early 1990. The terminal date also marked the end of intense consolidation debate within the district. The central Illinois district that forms the focus of this case study had an enrollment of approximately 600 students in grades kindergarten through eight during the time of the study. The district covers 75 square miles, primarily farmland, with a village of 2,500 inhabitants and several unincorporated subdivisions. The single public elementary school building in this "central district" is located within the village.

This district is served by a high school district, with the high school building located in the same village, which draws from a wider area. The high school district has a student enrollment of approximately 725. Two other elementary districts and one Roman Catholic elementary school feed into this same high school district. One of the elementary district, the "western district," covers only 8 square miles, with a student enrollment of 550, and is primarily a white collar bedroom community for a nearby city. Just to the north of the "western district" is the "river district," which covers 13 square miles, with a student enrollment of just under 300, and serves a working class and lower income community. The parochial school serves all communities and is located in the village of the "central district." Thus, the large potentially consolidated school district area would cover about 96 square miles (approximately 10 miles by 10 miles), with about 2175 pupils, and maintain the existing one high school.

Background of the Study

The move toward consolidation began in 1967 when the four school boards (three elementary and one high school) in the area commissioned a study of the educational needs of the communities involved and the effects of consolidation. This survey was done by outside consultants from a prominent university in the area.

The consultants recommended the establishment of a single unit (K-12) school district for the area. In July 1967, the board of education in the high school district began action to move in this direction. The creation of a unit district was regarded favorably by the boards of education in the western district and the river districts, but was opposed by the board in the central district. Feelings ran high enough in the central district against consolidation that the board of education even began plans to erect a new school building addition in the district and tried to ignore the consolidation efforts. In the referendum of December 1967, the proposed establishment of a unit district was defeated, with strong opposition from the voters in the central district. The measure passed in the western and river districts. However, the proposal needed to win in all areas in order to pass. The proponents of the measure stressed the educational advantages of consolidation in the campaign, while the opponents argued the adverse impact on local tax rates. There were also strong elements of localism and community parochialism in the campaign, but these were not discussed as openly as the tax issues.

This defeat of the consolidation referendum was followed by the defeat of a referendum to increase the tax rate for the high school district in January 1968. In this vote, the majority of those who went to the polls in the central district voted for the tax increase, but it was opposed by the voters in the western and river districts. A petition to again seek a referendum on consolidation in 1968 became entangled in legal proceedings brought by the central district to halt the effort. The referendum was finally held in October 1969 and consolidation into

a single unit district was narrowly defeated this time with voting patterns similar to those that had occurred in the previous vote. Letters to the editor of the local newspaper, editorials, and other communications revealed a high degree of bitterness among community members over this issue. The two consolidation votes and the high school tax increase election had polarized the community and resulted in many personal verbal attacks and accusations. The high school district tax increase did pass finally in December 1969.

The issue of consolidation in the area passed from the active public policy agenda after the last referendum in 1969 and did not reemerge until the mid-1980s. During this period, all four school districts grew in enrollments and in their tax bases. By 1985, the high school district was in sound fiscal shape, but the three elementary districts were struggling to maintain balanced budgets. By late 1984, the boards of education of the four public districts and the parochial school had begun to meet to discuss cooperative activities to enhance educational services for children in all five districts, particularly in areas related to computers and technology, learning objectives, and other curriculum issues.

The 1985 Move Toward School District Consolidation

In July 1985, the Illinois General Assembly enacted a major, omnibus education reform act (Senate Bill 730) which contained provisions requiring each region of the state to conduct studies on school district consolidation and to present plans for the consolidation of school districts to the voters for approval. The legislation was permissive in the sense that the voters did have the choice to reject consolidation, which many of them did; but the effect was to prompt a discussion of consolidation in every part of the state. This reopened many old wounds in some communities and resurrected debates about the virtues of small, community schools versus large, regional schools.

In the area of the case study, a former member of the high school board of education was selected to be the local representative to the regional school reorganization committee, which spanned a three county area. While there seemed to be little enthusiasm for school consolidation on the committee, the members carried out their duties in compliance with the law. In December 1985, the secretary of the regional committee proposed three plans, two of which would result in the formation of a unit district from the three elementary districts and the high school district in this study. The third plan called for the creation of a county-wide unit district for the entire county, which would involve nine current districts. From further deliberations in early 1986, it became even more clear that there was little interest in disturbing the status quo. By March 1986, the regional reorganization committee had been informed that the state consolidation legislation had been amended and that, among other things, the committee was no longer compelled to present a consolidation plan. A public hearing in the central district in April was attended by mostly administrators and board members from the four districts and while there was little interest in consolidation, the group did decide to seek available state funds to conduct a consolidation feasibility study for the community. The regional reorganization committee met on September 22, 1986, for its final meeting and recommended that school reorganization and consolidation were not needed or desired in this area.

The consolidation feasibility study was conducted for the four public school districts by an outside consulting group and a final report was presented in early October 1986. This report noted declining enrollments, a stagnant tax base, increasing cost pressures, and limited options in raising new revenue. The consultant recommended that the three elementary districts and the high school district be combined into a unit school district. There was broad concern about the consultant's report because it seemed hastily written and was poorly presented. There was some ambivalence about the report for a number of reasons. The river district had been a traditional supporter of consolidation, but the report recommended the closing of its school building. The central district, a staunch opponent of consolidation, noted the additional state monies that would become available if consolidation were to occur.

A joint boards committee, consisting of two board members from each of the four public districts and from the parochial school, continued to meet into 1987 and additional studies were done. In 1987-88, the state actually cut general state aid to all districts, causing additional problems for the school districts in this study. Financial difficulties, in particular, kept the issue of consolidation alive and in January 1988, the joint boards committee took another comprehensive look at the advantages and disadvantages of consolidation. The representatives then went back to their respective boards to see if there was an interest in continuing the

consideration of consolidation. In April 1988, the joint boards committee reconvened and all the representatives with the exception of the central district expressed a desire to continue exploring consolidation. However, because of the central district's dissent and the resulting lack of unanimity, the joint boards committee chose to drop the issue of consolidation and to continue working on issues relating to cooperative ventures among the districts. Nonetheless, media attention to possible consolidation and school financial problems would not allow the issue of consolidation to disappear.

In a meeting of the joint boards committee in February 1989 which was well attended by the media, the high school board raised the issue of consolidation once again. This was strongly resented by the central district board and there was concern that all this publicity could have an effect on tax referenda in both the central district and river district that would be decided by the voters in April 1989. After intense campaigns, both referenda passed and both the newly acquired availability of funds and the cooperation achieved by all the districts in a number of joint ventures brought the end of the active interest in consolidation.

Findings

What caused local stakeholders to resist consolidation so strongly in the central district for well over a twenty year period when others in the nearby communities were much more open to the possibility? This is the research question that we attempted to answer.

The findings provided a number of dominant themes. The major arguments for school consolidation involved a desire for an improved school curriculum, the need for greater fiscal efficiency, a desire to eliminate parochialism and bias, increased teacher salaries, and better school support services. Proponents of consolidation argued that the creation of a single, unit school district would result in all of these.

The reasons for the opposition to consolidation were the focus of attention in this study. The major resistance theme throughout the interviews of stakeholders was the perception that the central district and its constituents simply did not want to associate with those in the western and river districts. This theme ran much deeper than merely opposition to school consolidation. Even though the demographic characteristics of the three elementary districts were similar and students from all three districts attend the same high school, stakeholders in the central district spoke of possible consolidation as if it would be a major moral and cultural disaster. Special hostility was demonstrated toward residents of the river district, who were often called "river rats." One interviewee said, "I hate to see my kids come home and talk about the river rats down there." A community member with no children in school said, " I do think we sometimes look at the river district as maybe the lower people." It is important to note that all three districts were predominantly white, middle class, with most adults employed.

Related to this disdain for the river district was a prevailing view in the central district that if the three elementary districts were joined, the central district's tax base would be used to educate children in the western district and river district. This theme was expressed as "our" taxes being used to educate "their" children.

The theme of loss throughout the consolidation resistance data does not focus so much on loss of local control as it does on loss of identity. A long time school board member in the central district said that he did not "believe in putting a whole bunch of children in one group." This notion was furthered by a central district school administrator who expressed the opinion that the school is often the center of the community and its identifying standard bearer. There was fear that consolidation would lead to a withering away of the community and a loss of community identity. Several residents even expressed a sense of loss of community in the demise of the one room schoolhouses in the 1930s and 1940s. Ironically, because the high school was in the central district, there was more danger of loss of identity in the western and river districts; but it was the central district that expressed this fear. Some respondents were concerned about loss of control over the local school and a fear that the school would be distanced from the parents.

Respondents indicated that the formation of a unit district would promote unfair competition for resources and provide fewer opportunities for children. The head custodian of the central district cited building maintenance problems and said that "if we haven't straightened that out by ourselves, and you have more people involved in the running of this school district here who aren't really tuned into these factors, I can't see that it's going to get any better." The central grade school student council president thought consolidation would result in students having to compete more to be involved in activities and that this would result in lack of motivation because students would fear being

defeated or cut from a team. A parent leader felt consolidation would only compound problems of agreeing on cooperative programs, calendars, and purchases. One respondent expressed a fear of fewer athletic competitions because the three districts often compete against one another and travel to games would be more difficult, more distant, and more costly.

Many respondents challenged the assertion that a larger district would be able to provide a better education. Despite low per pupil expenditure levels, the central district has produced high student test scores and the community seemed genuinely pleased with student performance. There was a fear this could be lost through consolidation. Several students cited that consolidation would result in larger class sizes and a loss of individual attention to students. One student said, "on an individual basis, people would have to compete with more people and you might have to have bigger classes." This concern was expressed primarily by students and not by adults. A related recurring theme was that "bigger is not always better" and the problems of the Chicago public schools were frequently cited. Respondents expressed fear of more problems with discipline, drugs, and student sex problems in a consolidated district. There was fear of an impersonal bureaucracy and of the loss of individual identity.

Even though the per pupil tax bases of each of the three elementary districts were not that different, there was fear expressed that consolidation would mean higher taxes and dollars flowing out of the central district community. Respondents were suspicious and cynical about state financial incentives for consolidation. One school board member said, "I think consolidation will cost us a lot more money in the long run. I don't think bigger is better financially and I think it would end up costing the taxpayers more, and they don't realize that yet." An administrator in the western district echoed this sentiment: "I don't know that we have enough accurate financial data that show consolidation will help us. I don't see the financial advantages right now." The taxation and financial aspects remained as volatile issues for many and often formed the basis for arguments both for and against consolidation. An almost universal argument, regardless of which side one stood on the issue, was that consolidation would cost some people their jobs. There was fear that consolidation would reduce school employment in the district although few people could cite any specifics.

Stories were told of long bus rides for children that would become necessary if consolidation took place, even though it was not clear where new buildings might be located. Some people argued that children from the same family would probably have to be bussed to different school facilities. One respondent observed that "you vote on a unit and you don't know where your kids are going to go to school....I built close here so my kids could go here, and I wouldn't have to be running all over." What is ironic about these distance arguments is that the territory already is comprised of one high school district and the distances between the various population centers is very small, generally not exceeding ten miles.

Many opposed consolidation because they felt that there was not enough accurate information available about consolidation and that much of the information that was being used was biased. One administrator blamed the inaccurate, partial, and misleading information on the school district involved. Stakeholders expressed a fear of the unknown: "We are not certain that consolidation will go the way we want it to go." Information can play an important role in how people think about an issue, but it is evident in this study that information can be manipulated so that interests are promoted. Respondents were suspicious of any claims based on information.

Personal factors became involved. Some people interpreted the high school superintendent's support for consolidation as coming from a desire to be the superintendent of the consolidated unit district. One respondent blamed much of the delay in moving consolidation forward on a lack of strong leadership and rivalries among certain individuals involved. There seemed to be a sense that no one wanted to take the risks of exerting leadership toward consolidation, but no one wanted someone else to get the credit if consolidation took place and it happened to work.

A final theme was that some individuals argued against consolidation because other avenues for solution of local school problems had not been sufficiently explored. Expanded cooperation among the districts involved may have been genuine or it may have been a stalling device.

Analysis of the Findings

These data were analyzed using a number of different approaches. The purpose was to provide a number of separate analyses of several dimensions of the study and to use these to develop an analytic synthesis.

The major analysis strand involved the application of Weiss' (1983) framework of public policy resulting from the interplay of interest, ideology, and information. Self-interest emerged as a major factor in determining a person's view on school district consolidation. Financial interests were strong and much of the opposition to consolidation had its basis in the fear of financial loss either through lost employment or higher taxes. Consolidation was clearly a pocketbook question for many who opposed it. Position or prestige in the community was another important self-interest. Many opponents of consolidation wanted to remain as "big fishes in a small pond." This was true for school board members, school administrators, other community influentials, as well as for students who did not want to lose the advantages resulting from less competition for sports teams or individual attention in class. Convenience was another key self-interest. Most people liked the convenience of a school in their own local community and complained about the additional driving or bussing that would result from consolidation. Accessibility to local board members and administrators was another convenience that many stakeholders did not want to lose. Power was yet another self-interest. There were fears that centralization of authority in a consolidated, unit district would diminish the power many individuals felt they had.

Ideologies also played an important role in the opposition to consolidation. There was a strong ideology of localism expressed as "good walls make good neighbors." Stakeholders within the central district did not trust their neighbors in other districts and wanted to have as little to do with them as possible. Some of this localism was manifested in a disdain for the morals and values, lifestyles, and ideologies of those in the other communities. There were strong feelings of "ones own kind" and non-association with those who are different. There was also a strong ideological commitment to a Jeffersonian view of local, participatory democracy. People wanted to have a direct voice in school district governance and they felt that consolidation threatened this. Many central district residents held strong values regarding frugality, some of it stemming from the Mennonite and Apostolic Christian influence in the community. The central district community felt they husbanded their resources well, but feared that others would not exercise such care. Likewise, there was a strong ideological theme of tradition and fear of change. Localism, parochialism, frugality, and traditionalism were strong elements in the opposition to consolidation.

Stakeholders receive information from many sources. Our analysis seem to indicate that the most powerful information is self-derived. The stakeholders own experience and first-hand knowledge were the most influential. There was general satisfaction with the current school system and information which indicated anything to the contrary was suspect. Likewise, studies extolling the virtue of consolidated schools were treated with great suspicion. The one area where outside information was trusted more than other information was in regard to taxation and finances. Studies in these areas by outside groups were discussed and debated and used to bolster individual positions on consolidation.

This analysis generally supports the contention that public policy decisions result from the interplay of interest, ideology, and information, although we would argue that interests and ideology were much stronger than information in the opposition to consolidation. Information and research seemed to be used more as tools to support a position arrived at for self-interest or ideological purposes. However, information is not superfluous to the stance people take. People are respectful of information, even though they may be suspicious of why information is derived and how it is used. Information in which the stakeholders had the most confidence, that is, self-derived information, was a powerful element in the position taken by the stakeholder.

A secondary analysis posited the question of how much influence the consolidation battles of the 1960s had on the opposition to consolidation discussions in the 1980s. While no causal link can be established, little had changed in the discourse and positions in the twenty year period between these two times of intense activity. The battle lines remained substantially the same and few people changed sides. Many stakeholders made references to the events of the 1960s in explaining their position in the 1980s. This might be expected in a community where forces of localism and traditionalism are so strong.

An analysis of stakeholder's responses and related data established that interests are relatively easy to describe and explain, and all stakeholders agreed that their stance on consolidation was influenced by their perceived self-interests. Ideologies were more difficult to ascertain and describe, although they clearly emerged from the data. Information was the most difficult of the three elements to isolate and discuss, because of its clear relationship to both interest and ideology. Old information was often used to validate

prior interests. Manipulation of information was clearly identified with self-interest. History, which is a direct result of prior interests, ideology, and information, was a powerful force in this case to explain the present position of the stakeholder on consolidation.

Conclusions and Lessons for Public Policy

We conclude that Weiss' framework of interest, ideology, and information in the determination of public policy is useful for deriving understanding in specific cases. This approach provides an analytic approach to allow the researcher to uncover the meaning of various actions and outcomes and to attach meaning to them within a cultural context. It also allows such analysis to present a coherent explanation of a complex set of events. We feel we have presented a coherent view of the reasons why local stakeholders oppose school consolidation and that we have uncovered some deeper meanings than has resulted from other inquiry on the issue. To this extent, we have provided results which can be tested and validated in other settings.

One of the purposes of this study was to derive lessons for policy makers who might want to influence local stakeholders on issues of local interest, like school district consolidation. What can be learned from this study that would be useful to policy makers? We suggest a number of lessons.

1. Policy makers and policy analysts who expect information to have immediate and independent power in the local policy making process, especially where clear self-interest and ideology are involved, have a distorted view of the local policy making process. Where information is useful, it needs to be viewed as (a) accurate, (b) reliable, (c) balanced, and (d) not blatantly self-serving. Financial information seems to have a greater acceptance and influence than other kinds of information.

2. It is extremely difficult to alter people's ideologies and fundamental beliefs about how the world works. Therefore, the values and ideologies invoked in advancing a policy are important. Policies which are compatible with predominant ideologies are more likely to be accepted.

3. The history of a policy issue is important. The community's background with a particular policy issue can exert a great deal of influence in how a community deals with the issue in the future. History is not destiny, but it does have an influential impact. Therefore, to know well the history of a policy issue is critical.

4. Reform strategies which attempt to circumvent local traditions, values, and beliefs rather than building on them are less likely to succeed. Policy making does not occur in a cultural vacuum and knowledge of local culture is also as critical as knowledge of the local history.

5. Local community bonds are important. Local community culture is based on common interests and common ideologies. The need to belong to a community is important and may involve strong forces to exclude others. What often appear to be local biases may be expressions of a common set of cultural bonds. Change may be more possible by finding common bonds rather than by opposing or denigrating local cultural norms.

6. Equality of educational opportunity may be best served by recognizing differences that inevitably exist and by seeking ways of responding to them rather than by endeavoring to impose a common educational experience on all children. However, our conclusions agree with Alexander's findings that local differences cannot be used as a mechanism for circumventing equal opportunities for schooling (Alexander, 1990).

The Complexity of Local Control

A final note on the issues involved in this study is noteworthy. Most studies on school district consolidation and local school politics have found the doctrine of local control to be a powerful predictor of policy outcomes. Concern over loss of local control seems to have been a major force in the opposition to consolidation. While we found strong elements of local control in this study, we also found the concept to be far more complex than other studies have shown. Complex interactions exist among self-interest, values, and research information which, in the past, have been lumped too simply together under the term "local control." Within the concept are not only elements of localism but also fears of others and their values and lifestyles. Local control also means a commitment to participatory democracy and a Jeffersonian view of governance, although it is not clear whether community politics are pluralist or elitist. A campaign to maintain local control can also signal an opposition to loss of prestige and power on the part of certain individuals. Local control can also be a euphemistic stalling device to maintain and prolong exclusionary policies and discrimination against certain groups. Some of these

elements of local control can be accommodated through other policy mechanisms, some need to be preserved, and some need to be vigorously opposed. However, our study indicates that local control is not a simple principle and an understanding of its complex elements will aid in the understanding of local school policy making.

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