

**SCHOOL  
STRUCTURE**

**SCHOOL STRUCTURE**

**THEME** This workshop will assist parents in educating themselves about school structure and its importance to their involvement in their children's education.

**FACILITATOR PREPARATION** Prior to conducting this workshop, the facilitator should:

- ✓ Read:
  - Facilitator's Manual
  - Reading Materials provided for this workshop
- ✓ Gather:
  - Flipchart
  - Magic markers
  - Chairs
- ✓ Do:
  - Set chairs in a circle

**WORKSHOP TIMELINE**

- ACTIVITY A: Introductions 10 minutes
- ACTIVITY B: Icebreaker Exercise:  
Quiz questions on  
School Structure 10 minutes
- ACTIVITY C: Guided Discussion:  
School Structure  
and You 45 minutes
- ACTIVITY D: Case Study: Getting the Most From Public  
Schools  
*"How to Complain Effectively if Things Are Not  
Right at School"* 40 minutes
- ACTIVITY E: Wrap-up 15 minutes
- Total Time 120 minutes  
(2 hours)**

**ACTIVITY A      INTRODUCTIONS**

**TIME LIMIT**       10 minutes

- OBJECTIVES**
- To welcome the group back and introduce new members to the group
  - To provide an overview of the workshop and how it will be conducted


**FACILITATOR  
DIRECTIONS**


1. Welcome everyone back who attended the last workshop. Welcome new members to the group and have them say something about themselves if they feel comfortable doing so. Then, have group members briefly introduce themselves to the new parents.
2. Announce that new group members should get in touch with a person who attended the previous workshops in order to get copies of the reading materials provided.
3. Answer any questions which were not answered at the last workshop.
4. Provide an overview of the workshop and how it will be conducted. Your overview may contain the following:
 

*"The purpose of today's workshop is to identify the different levels of the school structure, examine their functions, and determine which are most appropriate for various concerns parents might have."*
5. Stress the importance of using documentation to support your concerns.
6. Parents should also be made aware of the following chain of command:
  - A. The Child's Teacher
  - B. The School Counselor
  - C. The School Principal
  - D. Local School Boards
  - E. Local School Councils
  - F. The District Administrator
  - G. The Superintendent of Schools
  - H. The State Department of Education
  - I. The U.S. Department of Education

**ACTIVITY B ICEBREAKER EXERCISE**

**TIME LIMIT**  10 minutes

**OBJECTIVES**  To ascertain how familiar the group is with the organization of the school structure.






**PREPARATION**  Before the workshop begins, write down on the flipchart some "true and false" statements about parents' rights in the school (see paragraph #2 below for some suggestions).

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**FACILITATOR DIRECTIONS**

1. Advise the group that this is an **icebreaker exercise**. Have a group member who attended the last workshop explain what an **icebreaker exercise** is meant to accomplish. Once the person is finished, you may want to fill in anything that was left out.
2. Display the list of "true and false" statements about school structure you wrote down on the flipchart. Some ideas are:

**ANSWER KEY FOR FACILITATORS**

- False*  *Education in the U.S. is not considered a federal function (as opposed to a state or local function)*
- True*  *The local school district is the avenue through which citizens act to make district wide policies in education*
- False*  *As a parent you may not attend all meetings of the school board and be present at voting on all school board decisions affecting the school district*
- True*  *You have a right as a parent to have your handicapped child placed in an appropriate public school program.*
- False*  *You have a right as a parent to look at your child's school records, but you may not challenge any record you believe is untrue or unfair.*


- True* . *You may request in writing to have any items removed from your child's records which have nothing to do with his/her education i.e., notes from one teacher to another or discipline referrals from one grade level to another.*
- False* . *You may not appeal any disciplinary action even though you may not agree with it or have supporting evidence.*

Ask the group to decide whether each statement is either true or false and encourage them to explain why. Encourage everyone to interact during this exercise!

**ACTIVITY C      GUIDED DISCUSSION: SCHOOL STRUCTURE AND YOU**

**TIME LIMIT**       45 minutes

- OBJECTIVES**
- To identify the different levels of the school structure
  - To examine the functions of each of the levels of the school structure
  - To determine which levels are most appropriate for specific parental concerns

**PREPARATION**       Make sufficient copies of the Reading Material for this workshop entitled "School Structure" to hand out to the group at the end of the workshop

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**FACILITATOR DIRECTIONS**

1. Advise the group that this exercise will be a **guided discussion/case study**. Have a group member explain what a **guided discussion exercise** is meant to do. This will reinforce what the group has already learned.
  
2. Advise the group that **case studies** are not necessarily just about "other people". Groups can create **case studies** from situations they have experienced themselves.
  
3. Ask one or two members of the group to describe an experience where they felt they made a change/needed to make a change in their child's education and knew/didn't know who to go to make the change
  - What happened?
  - Were they happy with the outcome?
  - If not, what would they do differently next time?

4. Discuss with the group some of the different levels of government and their roles in education.

**Federal -- Broad administrative power which passes federal laws and mandates for categorical programs.**

**State -- Education is considered a state function, therefore the state monitors federal mandates and regulations.**

**Local -- Implements federal and state mandates and regulations; at this level citizens work to make district wide policies**

5. Discuss with the group some concerns they might have about their children's education and what level of government they think would be most appropriate to deal with regarding those concerns. Encourage parents to think of many different concerns so that all of the levels will be covered in the discussion. Feel free to add your own suggestions if the group's concerns exclude one or more of the levels discussed.

ACTIVITY D

CASE STUDY:

TIME LIMIT



40 minutes

OBJECTIVES

- To review

PREPARATION



Make sufficient copies of the Reading Material for this workshop entitled *"How to complain effectively if things are not right at school"* to hand out to the group at the end of the workshop

FACILITATOR DIRECTIONS

1. Advise the group that this is another "case study." Make certain that the group understands what a case study is meant to accomplish--if not, have a group member explain. Once the group member is finished, you may want to fill in anything that was left out.
2. Explain to the participants that we will be discussing school structure. It is important to stress the fact that in dealing with school professionals, parents should interact first with the person at the lowest level, and then work up to the principal, and superintendent. The reading material includes information about the role of the schoolteacher, school principal, and school superintendent.
3. Read the excerpt from the book entitled Getting the Most from Public Schools; A Parents' Guide. Discuss the following topics.

**Facilitator: You may want to change the names in this case study.**

Why is knowledge of school structure important in this situation?

Give another example of how knowledge of school structure was helpful/imperative to gaining positive results.

4. Once the story has been completed, have the group answer "yes" or "no" to these questions:

*Did Don and Sylvia Sutterfield do the right thing by requesting a conference with the principal?*

*Did Mrs. Sloan have a right to call Danny Sutterfield "dumb and lazy" in front of his class?*

*Would Danny's relationship with his teacher have gotten any better if the Sutterfields had not spoken up?*

5. Discuss with the group

down what was said today, too? We don't want to make it sound worse than it is."

"Yeah. Having some notes will be a good reminder. If the principal has the same attitude Mrs. Sloan has, then we'll have to go to the superintendent and the board of education," Sylvia states as they pull into the driveway.

"What about the Supreme Court?" Don asks with a grin, thinking this could go on forever. "Well, if things don't go well with the principal, let's find out who to talk to next."

"There must be an appeal procedure," Sylvia says, looking more determined than ever.

## FINDING SOLUTIONS

Don and Sylvia have logically plotted a course to follow after their unsatisfactory conference with Mrs. Sloan. Documenting the conference and finding out who can review the matter are wise courses of action. Appeal procedures in schools usually move from teacher to principal to central office administration to superintendent to school board.

Sylvia picks up the telephone book and looks up the number of the Lincoln School principal.

"Hello, Mrs. Kravcik," Sylvia says into the phone. "This is Sylvia Sutterfield, Danny's mother. My husband and I are worried about Danny's social studies class with Mrs. Sloan."

"Worried?"

"Yes, we had a conference with her about Danny being embarrassed and ridiculed in class. She was really defensive. We didn't mean to get her angry, but we feel deeply about what's happening in that class," Sylvia's voice is polite, but determined. "I would like to talk to you about the situation."

"What did Mrs. Sloan do?"

"She called Danny dumb and lazy in front of the class. She embarrassed him," Sylvia explains.

"I see," the principal says quietly. "What happened in your conference with Mrs. Sloan? Was anything

accomplished?" Mrs. Kravcik inquires as she picks up a pencil and starts scribbling on a tablet.

"Nothing but an exchange of viewpoints. She didn't agree with us."

"I see. Can we meet to discuss this matter? I certainly would like to speak to Mrs. Sloan about your conference. Or better yet, I would like her to sit in on our meeting, if that is okay with you."

"Well, I suppose. Our fear is that Danny will suffer in some way because we criticized his teacher," Sylvia emphasizes.

"Having valid concerns will not hurt your son's standing in school, with Mrs. Sloan or any of his other teachers. I can guarantee that. When are you available for a meeting?"

That night after supper, Sylvia tells Don about the upcoming conference with the principal and Mrs. Sloan.

"I wrote the letter to the principal, but we'll give it to her personally," Sylvia informs Don.

"What?" Don asks. He pauses and replies, "Maybe you're right. I hope we can get somewhere. At work today, I called Stu — you know — the assistant principal at the senior high. I play tennis with him on Wednesdays. He's . . ."

"Why call him?" Sylvia asks.

"To find out the procedure used in complaints. The next step after the principal is a meeting with the superintendent of schools." Don watches her intently, a worried look on his face. "At that level, our issues become problems because both Mrs. Sloan and the principal might be viewed as ineffective. In fact, Stu said the teacher probably will be represented by a member of the teachers' union, especially if they feel her job is at stake."

"We're not talking about getting her fired," Sylvia states. "I just don't want her putting Danny down."

"I know, I know — we're both concerned about that. But not everyone is willing to see the superintendent and the board of education. Maybe we should forget

the whole thing. Just how determined are you to see this thing through? If we have to go beyond the principal, it's going to take a lot of time."

"I'm willing to see it through," Sylvia says. "What about you?"

"Oh, I'm with you," Don says reluctantly. "We've got to push the matter."

Sylvia and Don review what they are going to present to the principal and Mrs. Sloan, vowing to remain calm, unemotional, and persistent in sticking to the issues. They are aware that different results can occur from the meeting. Both hope Mrs. Sloan will be more receptive and see the situation as a problem to be solved, not as a confrontation. But they know they could get a defensive reaction from her again, and no support from the principal. In that case, they will appeal to the superintendent.

"Good morning, Mr. and Mrs. Sutterfield." Mrs. Kravcik, an attractive woman, welcomed them with a comforting smile.

Mrs. Sloan greets Danny's parents with only a slight nod.

"Please sit down," Mrs. Kravcik says. "Would you like some coffee?"

"No, no thanks," Sylvia replies.

Don accepts the offer, takes a sip, and looks at Mrs. Sloan, whose eyes quickly deflect to the principal.

"Well now, Mr. and Mrs. Sutterfield, why don't you explain your concerns."

Don and Sylvia start with Mrs. Sloan's sarcasm toward Danny. During their explanation, the teacher appears anxious to respond to the Sutterfields' allegations.

"Is there anything else?" the principal asks. "Your major concern is the embarrassment your son felt because of the way he was treated. Correct?"

"Yes," Don agrees.

Mrs. Sloan looks at Don and states, "I'm sorry we had such an unsatisfactory conference earlier. I know you're upset and that concerns me."

Sylvia interrupts. "I wish we could have settled this thing earlier."

"I do too, Mrs. Sutterfield. But I don't ridicule children. I did not intend to embarrass Danny, just motivate him. I'm sorry he took it that way."

"You didn't mean to embarrass him?" Mrs. Kravcik interjects.

"Of course not. He has potential to do good work. But he's been inconsistent and not doing his best."

"Do you agree with that, Mr. and Mrs. Sutterfield?" the principal questions, as she jots some words on a yellow legal pad.

"Yes, but now I'm afraid he's turned off to social studies completely. The comment about repeating fourth grade was devastating because he's new here, and insecure as it is," Sylvia explains.

Don nods his head in agreement and takes another sip from the plastic coffee cup.

"Mrs. Sutterfield, I really didn't say Danny should be retained. What I said was that I expect fourth graders to do better work than that. Danny misinterpreted my comment to mean he might fail. I did hold up his paper, but I do that with all students' work at one time or another. I intended to motivate him and others by letting the students know that I expect the best from them."

"But these kids are in fourth grade. They don't always know how to interpret adults. We feel that your comments were harsh. Maybe Danny did misinterpret you. But he was still embarrassed because he knows we want him to do his best, too," he states, looking directly at Mrs. Sloan.

"What can we do now to make Danny comfortable and interested again? We can't go back and reconstruct that incident. We have to deal with his impressions. We know Danny needs to be reassured and motivated," Mrs. Kravcik summarizes. "Mrs. Sloan, what do you think?"

"I'll be glad to have a talk with Danny. We're going to be doing some very interesting projects in class

that I'm sure he'll enjoy. Maybe that will make him feel better."

"What do you think about that?" the principal asks Don and Sylvia. "Will that alleviate your concerns?"

"Well, . . . we just want Dan to feel better about this class and like school," Sylvia says, her voice flat and unemotional. "His attitude is really important to us now. A talk might do some good. I don't know."

The principal concludes the conference and sets up a plan to get feedback from the Sutterfields.

On the way home, Don says, "Do you think that conference did any good? I'm not sure I'd want to have to meet with Mrs. Sloan if I were Danny."

"I know what you mean. But the principal was concerned. She knows how we feel and she seems to understand how Danny was treated in class. She might check on Mrs. Sloan more now — keep her on her toes. She sure sounded different in the principal's office."

"But if things don't get better and if he doesn't start learning in that class, then, I'm going to let that principal know and demand stronger action," Don emphasizes.

A few weeks later Mrs. Kravcik follows up on the plan to check with Don and Sylvia about how Danny is getting along with Mrs. Sloan. In the phone conversation, Sylvia tells her that Danny isn't excited about social studies, but no other incidents have occurred.

"I think Mrs. Sloan has been more careful with Danny. We're still not thrilled with his social studies class, but he can make it through the last two months of the year," Sylvia says.

"I checked with Mrs. Sloan and she thinks things are going okay, too."

"We appreciate your following through on this problem," Sylvia responds. "If anything, Danny will learn from this that he has to deal with lots of different people in life."

Realistically, not all negative situations can be turned into positives. Sometimes neutralizing a problem is the best you can expect. If your child's progress is impaired or his or her treatment is poor, then you must continue to press the issue. In Danny's case, the issue of sarcasm and embarrassment has been resolved, even though the Sutterfields are not pleased with Mrs. Sloan's general approach to her classes.

### SUMMARY

When things are not right at school, follow these suggestions:

1. Get involved. Don't sit back and avoid issues.
2. Identify the problem. Don't just complain in generalities; be specific.
3. Do your homework:
  - know the facts;
  - identify the proper place to start;
  - follow channels.
4. Use good interpersonal skills:
  - be precise and logical;
  - don't be emotional;
  - don't use profanity;
  - listen.
5. Problem-solve:
  - remember you're trying to solve a problem — get at solutions;
  - don't play power games (unless necessary).
6. Go to the next level if the problem isn't resolved. At the central office, the superintendent will review the situation with you, the teacher, and principal and make a decision to resolve the matter. There could be a meeting with you alone or another joint conference with the teacher. On the other hand, the superintendent may require you to write a formal complaint about the teacher, the issues of concern, and your suggested remedy. At this point, complaints about staff members can result in their being disciplined formally. If the issue is serious enough, the teacher may have

representation from the union. You may, in these extreme cases, want to seek legal assistance.

The extent to which you pursue issues depends on their severity and impact on your child: Whether your problem is large or small, don't hesitate to raise the issue and complain effectively.

**ACTIVITY E WRAP-UP**

**TIME LIMIT**  15 minutes

- OBJECTIVES**
- To summarize lessons learned
  - To invite group members to attend the next workshop
  - To announce/schedule the next workshop
  - To obtain feedback

**FACILITATOR DIRECTIONS**

1. Have a group member explain what a "wrap-up" is meant to accomplish. Once the group member is finished, you may want to fill in anything that was left out.
2. Summarize accomplishments of the workshop. Ask the group what they learned. Be sure to include:
  - *The importance of having a knowledge of school structure*
  - *Examples of success stories involving school structure*
3. Invite the group to participate in all workshops. Announce that the next workshop will focus on.
4. Announce (or collectively schedule) the next workshop date, time and place. Be sure to advise group members of the method by which everyone will be contacted to confirm their attendance.
5. Provide members with copies of the Reading Materials for this workshop.
6. Provide members with copies of the School District's Mission Statement and/or District Organizational Chart which shows Administrative Positions, the Role of a School Board Member, the Role of the School Superintendent, the Role of the School Principal, and the Role of the Teacher.

**READING MATERIAL FOR WORKSHOP**

**School Structure**

It is probably safe to say that almost every parent has concerns or even complaints about their child's education. Parents may not be satisfied with a range of things, from the amount of individual attention their child receives in school to the way money is spent within the local school district. Some of the problems that concern parents about their children's education may seem like they can't be solved especially if parents don't know where or who to go to for answers to their questions.

Understanding school structure is a very important part of getting answers to your questions and making changes in your child's education. Once you know where to go and who to ask, you already have part of the job done!

We will begin with a very generalized discussion of school structure as an introduction and follow it with more detailed information regarding the different government agencies and their functions as they are related to education.

In the United States, education is considered a **state and/or local function** as opposed to a federal function as it is in some countries. This means that there are fifty different **state school systems** as well as multiple **local school systems** within each state.

Even though education is not considered a federal function in this country, the federal government is still involved in education. **In fact, federal, state, and local governments** all have certain responsibilities regarding education.

Below is an outline showing the different levels of government and the agencies/administrators that deal with education:

**FEDERAL**

**President**  
**U.S. Department of Education**  
**Secretary of Education**  
**Congress**

STATE

**Governor  
State Legislature  
State Board of Education  
Chief State School Officer  
State Department of Education**

LOCAL

**Superintendent  
Local School Board  
Schools**

Now the question is, what level of government is it most appropriate to deal with regarding my particular concern? We will use an example. What if there was a proposal to divide your local school district and include it in two others causing overcrowded classrooms in the two new districts. You might consider taking action to stop this from happening, but who would you go to start the process? Would the principal of your child's school be the most appropriate person to talk to? The principal might be able to help you by organizing parents or other principals to protest the elimination of the local school district. However, a school principal does not have the power to make a decision regarding such an issue. In this case, knowing school structure could be very helpful.

The responsibility for forming local school districts lies at the state level with the **state legislature**. Moreover, the state legislature must make any major changes concerning the local school district in accordance with the state constitution. Another valuable fact you would need to know in this case is that the state legislature is advised on educational issues by the **state board of education**. Can you think of some reasons why this last fact might be so valuable to parents protesting the elimination of their local school district?

Now that we have seen how important it is to know the different levels of government and their roles in education, let's examine what those roles are.

We will start at the federal level and work our way down to the local level.

**FEDERAL**

The federal role in education is broad and somewhat indirect. The President and the Secretary of Education propose a budget to Congress regarding federal monies for the states. Congress votes on the amount of federal money to be given to the states. The President has veto power concerning new laws affecting education. The Supreme Court makes rulings regarding broad educational issues.

Two Supreme Court rulings involving education are of particular importance. On January 21, 1974, a unanimous Supreme Court in *Lau v. Nichols* (414 U.S. 563, 1974) ruled that a public school system must make some effort to ensure that non-English speaking students are equipped with the language skills necessary to profit from their required attendance at school. Non-English speaking Chinese students in San Francisco charged that the city school board's failure to provide them with bilingual lessons or remedial English resulted in unequal educational opportunities and therefore violated the Fourteenth Amendment.

The second Supreme Court case, *Plyler v. Doe* (457 U.S. 202) was decided by a 5-4 vote on June 15, 1982. The decision stated that the state of Texas may not deny illegal alien children a free public education. On the contrary, illegal aliens in the United States are guaranteed the equal protection of the law by the Fourteenth Amendment.

## **STATE**

At the state level, the **governor** proposes an education budget to the state legislature and has veto power over laws regarding education. The **state legislature** makes laws regarding general administrative matters such as how state board of education members and the superintendent of schools are selected, what their duties will be, level of funding for schools, what may or may not be taught, the length of the school day and year, etc.

The **state board of education** is a very important state education agency. It is dependent on the state legislature for appropriations and authority. As mentioned before, the state board of education advises the state legislature on educational issues. Listed here are the functions that state boards of education generally fulfill:

1. **Setting standards for teacher and administrative certificates.**
2. **Managing state funds earmarked for education.**
3. **Adopting long-range plans for the development and improvement of schools.**
4. **Adopting a curriculum framework for Kindergarten through 12th grades.**
5. **Acting as a judicial body in hearing disputes arising from state policy.**
6. **Adopting and enforcing policies, rules, and regulations necessary to implement legislative acts related to education.**
7. **Establishing qualifications and appointing personnel to the state department of education.**
8. **Establishing standards for accrediting schools.**

- 9. Keeping records and collecting data needed for reporting and evaluating.**
- 10. Creating advisory bodies (i.e. Bilingual Committees/Chapter I Committees) as required by law.**
- 11. Representing the state in determining policies on all matters pertaining to education that involve relationships with other agencies (including the federal government).**
- 12. Advising the governor or legislature on educational matters.**
- 13. In some states, appointing the chief state school officer, setting the minimum salary schedules for teachers and administrators, and adopting policies for the operation of institutions of higher learning.**

Women and minorities now comprise larger percentages of state board membership than in the past. This is a positive change because it allows for more accurate representation of the population.

The state department of education operates under the direction of the state school board and is administered by the state school officer, commissioner, or superintendent. As we have seen, the state board of education has broad administrative duties. The state department of education is responsible for acting on the criteria decided upon by the board. For example, while the board sets the standards for teacher certification, it is the job of the state department of education to carry out that certification.

Some other duties of the state department of education are:

- 1. Accrediting schools**
- 2. Monitoring student performance on standardized tests.**
- 3. Overseeing student transportation and safety**
- 4. Establishing policies for student discipline and due process.**
- 5. Identifying and improving programs to meet the needs of special students (in particular, disadvantaged students, bilingual students, and students with disabilities who were targeted for these programs)**
- 6. Certifying teachers**
- 7. Apportioning funds**
- 8. Monitoring state regulations**

## 9. Conducting research, evaluating programs, and issuing reports

## 10. Monitoring compliance with federal regulations

The **chief state school officer** (sometimes known as the **state superintendent** or **commissioner of education**) serves as the head of the state department of education and is the chief executive of the state school board. Depending on the state, chief state school officers are appointed by the governor, appointed by the state board of education, or voted in through popular education.

### LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Every public school in the U.S. is part of a **local school district**. Local school districts are created by the state and cover a specific geographic area. **In addition, the local school district is the avenue through which local citizens act in establishing district-wide policies in education.**

The **local school boards** have been delegated powers and duties by the state for the purpose of assuring that their schools are operated properly. The power that local school boards have varies from state to state. Local school boards have the responsibility to oversee the following areas: policy, staffing, employee relations, fiscal matters, students, curriculum, community relations, and intergovernmental requirements. They also have the responsibility to establish student discipline policies and policies for community participation.



#### Facts concerning you: Members of the board

The two most common methods of selecting board members are election and appointment. Appointment is less common than election. However, when it does occur it is more likely to be found in large urban districts than in suburban or small-town districts. The largest school systems (those enrolling 50,000 or more students) tend to have more heterogeneous boards, i.e., boards with higher numbers of minorities and women. Board members represent the public at large, and they must be willing to work with businesses, government, and community organizations to promote the community's, schools, and the students' welfare.



#### Facts concerning you: Board meetings

There are three general types of board meetings: regular, special, and executive. The first two are generally open meetings and the public is invited. The third type is usually closed to the public and deals with managerial issues or serious problems. Open board meetings obviously enhance school-community relations and allow parents to understand the problems of education as well as air their concerns.

### The school superintendent and central office staff

The school superintendent is the **chief executive officer** of the school system as opposed to the school board, which is the legislative policy-making body. It is important that these two branches work together in order to have an efficient and successful school system; one of the major functions of the school superintendent is to gather and present data so that school board members can make intelligent policy decisions. Other major responsibilities of the superintendent are preparing the **budget** for board review, developing and evaluating **curriculum and instructional planning**, supervising **professional and non-teaching personnel**, and making recommendations regarding **school building needs and maintenance**.



#### **Facts concerning you: The school superintendent and the community**

Superintendents are often under strong pressure from various segments of the community, and **much of the superintendent's effectiveness will depend on his or her ability to deal with such pressure groups**. In large urban school districts, for example, demands may be made for better facilities for students with handicaps or learning disabilities, more bilingual programs, or more vocational education.

### The Principal and the School

Usually, each school has a single administrative officer, a principal, who is responsible for the operation of the school. In large schools, in addition to the principal, there may be one or more assistant or vice principals. Although functions vary by locality and size, the principal is primarily responsible for administering all aspects of a school's operations, especially providing instructional leadership (improving teacher techniques, implementing a curriculum framework and developing appropriate curricula, and providing optimal learning situations for students).



#### **Facts concerning you: The principal and the community**

It is common practice for the principal to work with some type of community group for the improvement of the school; this group is often a parent-teacher association or an advisory-school committee. The principal is at his or best in the role of instructional leader when:

- (1) parents can openly share concerns with the principal,
- (2) there is open communication among parents and between parents and the principal,
- (3) parents feel they can count on the support of the principal, and
- (4) the principal values and encourages the input of parents and their desire to be involved in their children's education.

## The Teacher and the School

Teachers are the people in the educational system who mean the most to your child, and, therefore, will mean the most to the parents as well. They are the people who should be consulted first when any major educational decisions are pending, and again when any such major decisions are made and implemented.

### Facts concerning you: The teacher and the community

A teacher can provide a parent with exceptional insight about a student's work habits, behavior, social interaction, and any problems that the child may have with a subject. For this reason, it is important for parents to get to know their children's teachers. Whether the child is having problems in school or not, it is good practice for parents to be involved in their child's education. Knowing the teacher is often the first step in understanding how your child is performing and in what areas they need improvement.

When scheduling a parent/teacher conference, it is imperative for parents to have a list of questions or comments to discuss with the teacher. The parent may wish to bring examples of their child's work, or talk to the teacher about problems that the child is having in school. The teacher's role is to provide the parent with information about the student's achievement and to give suggestions for future improvement. If the parent feels that they are not receiving answers from the teacher, the next person that they should speak to is the principal, and finally, if necessary, the school superintendent.

## Decentralization

**Decentralization** divides the school system into smaller units, but the focus of power and authority remains in a single central administration and board of education. School critics and minority spokespersons believe that decentralization will give the people greater access to the schools.

### Facts concerning you: Decentralization --Does it work?

Changes in the urban population after 1950 gave rise to changes in the composition of urban schools. As middle-class and white populations fled to the suburbs...the percentages of low-income and minority residents increased in the cities. As a result, city schools became multiethnic...By the 1960's, many inner-city ethnic groups, especially blacks, began to feel that the schools did not serve their needs. They began to call for decentralization as a means to greater community involvement in schools. Oddly enough, there is little hard evidence that school decentralization improves education. In addition, recent data suggest that despite apparent decentralization, the large urban school districts in fact remain highly centralized.

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Many large school systems have adopted decentralization plans as a means of increasing community involvement but continued pressure from minority groups, accompanied by growing pressure for reform from educators, has forced school authorities to seek additional solutions. What has emerged are three alternative forms of community involvement in the governance of schools and school districts: community participation, community control, and community education. Effective school research shows that when parents are involved in the educational process, their students perform better in school, and are often eager to pursue further education.

### Community participation

**Community participation** refers to the formation of advisory committee or groups beyond the usual parent-teacher associations. These committees may operate at the local or the central level. The main function of these groups is to make suggestions and recommendations (not policy) for the monitoring and improvement of categorical programs. They may also serve as a liaison between the schools and community. These committees are usually appointed by school officials; in only a few cases are the advisory groups elected by the community.

### Community control

**Community control** denotes a legal provision for an elected community school board functioning under specific guidelines and in conjunction with the central school board. It means a sharing of decision-making authority between the local and central school boards; it also means that the powers of the professionals and central school board members are abridged.

### Community Education

**Community education** operates according to the belief that the school is just one of the educational agencies within the community in addition to museums, libraries, parks, businesses, religious institutions, health care centers, etc. The school serves as a partner--or possibly a coordinating institution--in developing various community, educational, social, recreational, and cultural activities. The notion of lifelong education, and the education of diverse learners of various age groups is an integral part of community education.

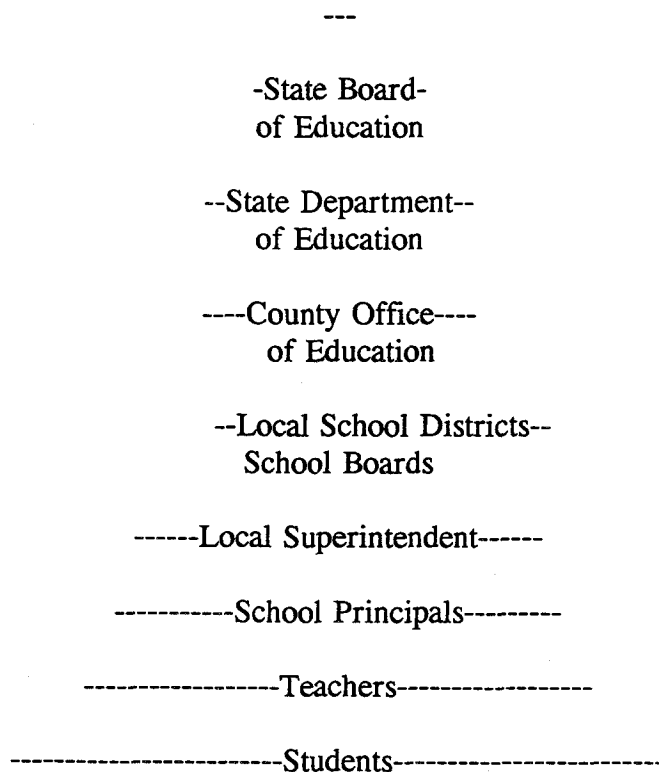
**Intermediate Units**

The term **intermediate unit** or **educational service agency (ESA)** refers to an office or agency in a middle position between the state department of education and local school districts. The intermediate unit is usually a legal and political extension of the state department of education, generally created by the state legislature. The intermediate unit or ESA provides coordination and supplementary services to local school districts and serves as a link between local and state educational authorities in most states.

**☞ Facts concerning you: Intermediate units and special services**

Intermediate units have also provided services in more specialized areas, such as education of the gifted and talented as well as children with handicaps; bilingual education; pre-kindergarten education; vocational education; and data processing and computer education.

**TYPICAL SCHOOL SYSTEM**



**ATTACHMENT TO CASE STUDY**

Goens, George A. and Clover, Sharon I.R., Getting the Most from Public Schools; A Parents' Guide, Englewood: Pineapple Press, Inc., 1987.

Characters

Danny Sutterfield - Fourth grade student

Don and Sylvia Sutterfield - Parents of Danny Sutterfield

Mrs. Sloan - Danny's Fourth grade teacher

Mrs. Kravcik - School Principal