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**The Challenge of School Autonomy:
Supporting Principals**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Worldwide, education policy over the past two decades has been marked by a heavy emphasis on decentralization in a variety of forms. The motives behind the trend towards decentralization vary. Financial pressures and the belief that local governments and/or schools may make more efficient resource decisions are a factor; greater accountability at the local level is also a frequently cited motive. Almost all decentralization efforts, however, either explicitly claim or implicitly assume that the changes introduced will make education more effective by producing better student outcomes. Whether these assumptions and beliefs hold true under what circumstances is a matter of ongoing debate. What is clear, however, is that the trend toward greater decentralization and school autonomy is still quite strong, and that it has important implications for the organization and management of schools.

This paper stems from work done under the auspices of a World Bank professional development grant 2001-02. The purpose of the grant was to study innovative support and training models for principals in public and/or private schools in systems where schools are increasingly autonomous, with the goal of identifying relevant lessons for World Bank client countries. Four programs were identified: (a) the English school reform model; (b) the Edmonton school district in Canada; (c) a public-private partnership in the district of Bogotá, Colombia; and (d) the Pitágoras Schools Network, in Brazil.

Why Principals?

Principals are important in that they are charged with seeing the school as a whole, and their leadership is often a key element behind the success or failure of school-level reforms. Principal leadership styles can be characterized in a variety of ways, and styles are likely to vary depending on the cultural setting, individual characteristics, and system and school environments. Research has established that principals' actions and attitudes have a strong influence on staff, and can help shape the overall climate and culture of a school, including teacher expectations and practices, school policies, and overall school organization. Through their influence on staff and overall school climate, principals can also have a strong indirect influence on student achievement and outcomes.

The Shifting Role of the Principal

In a centralized school system, principals typically exercise administrative duties with minimal control over basic school resources. For example, teachers are often state or federal employees, and the school may have little say with regard to the hiring and firing of staff. Salary levels are set by the state or federal authority, and the school usually has no discretion in the use of funds to supplement salaries to attract or retain good teachers. Books and other learning materials may be provided (in sufficient or insufficient

quantities) by the central authority, and school building maintenance is often consigned to a central office for civil works. Although schools may submit yearly “budgets,” in the most centralized systems money never actually reaches the school – instead, schools are provided with in-kind services and materials which may or may not be timely and meet the schools’ actual needs. Curriculum is typically set by a central authority, which also typically makes decisions regarding what supporting textbooks and materials will be used. Because schools in a centralized system do not generally receive funds and have little discretion over budgets, administrators at the school level are also not normally held accountable for spending choices. In a well functioning centralized system, principals may be freed up to concentrate their energies on instructional leadership within centrally defined mandates; in a poorly functioning centralized system, principals may spend large amounts of time trying to remedy bureaucratic failures with few resources to do so.

Systems where schools are more autonomous take a variety of forms. In England and Edmonton (Canada), for example, public schools and their leaders have complete responsibility for their spending choices, and are held accountable for the outcomes of their decisions. In the school concession network of Bogotá (Colombia), public schools are run by private management agencies, allowing for a proactive and agile approach to solving problems, delivering assistance, and making decisions that affect the school’s daily life. In the Pitágoras private school network in Brazil, schools benefit from a well-structured package of curricular inputs, teacher training, and educational support, allowing the principal to focus her efforts on supporting teachers in the best possible delivery and implementation of this particular curricular package.

Despite their differences, these and other autonomous systems share some traits in common. First is the issue of resources. In almost all autonomous systems, whether run by public or private entities, schools are their own budget units. Either based on tuition or a per-student funding formula, autonomous schools receive actual funds and are responsible for deciding how some amount of these funds will be spent (in some systems, teacher salaries are still an exception and are handled separately). Second, there is the issue of accountability. In most autonomous systems, the price of increased independence at the school level is a corresponding increase in accountability for both the use of funds and student outcomes. Often, this increased accountability involves multiple audiences. For example, for a school funded either through tuition or a per-student funding formula, keeping students enrolled (and their parents happy) becomes a budgetary priority. At the same time, a central authority devolving responsibility to the school may well retain an oversight function and require that the school regularly report to it regarding test scores and the like. Many reform models have created community or school-level councils which also weigh in on budgetary and academic matters.

What are the implications of increased budgetary freedoms combined with increased accountability for principals? Most obviously, the job becomes more complex and there can be a lot more work. True budgeting and accounting systems need to be put into place. Schools need to research and place orders with a range of educational materials vendors and contractors. Salary and staffing policies need to be designed in some cases. Reporting requirements have to be met. Regular meetings need to be scheduled with

local oversight bodies, and the politics of different issues carefully thought through. Last but not least, increased attention needs to be given to the instructional program and staff development to ensure that student outcomes are such that parents and overseers are satisfied. Principals in autonomous schools are called upon to constantly negotiate between top-down demands (achievement levels, legal agreements and regulations, constituency relationships) and internal, or bottom up demands (teacher's professional development and personal needs, student learning and behavior). To be successful, the principal of an autonomous school needs a support network that addresses both types of demands.

Support Systems for Principals: Lessons Learned from Case Studies

While increased autonomy of schools promises a number of possible benefits, the move toward autonomy also entails some risks, one of the most salient being the risk of school isolation and increased inequities between schools. While some schools may do very well with increased independence, some may founder, and it is often the children of the poorest and least informed parents who end up in failing schools. In all four of the case study examples studied, principals benefited from the existence of a strong school and principal support network, which helped to ensure that school autonomy is not understood as school isolation. Lessons learned from these systems are detailed below.

Getting a step ahead: the importance of principal preparation and background

In general, aside from the traditional educational management preparation, a strong school-leadership preparation program should also include elements of business administration and public policy. A good example of a system that tackles principal preparation issues up-front is the Edmonton Public Schools (EPS). EPS offers long-term courses (a few hours a week, over two years) for aspiring principals, and short-term development courses for principals on the job. In both, EPS mixes a wide range of content that includes the latest references on instructional leadership, management practices, and community involvement strategies. Emphasis is placed on tailoring course curricula to the specific realities of the EPS, that is, to the context of school-based management, outcome accountability, and parental choice. EPS understands that the typical university training for school-leaders is necessary but not sufficient to operate within an autonomous school environment.

Administrative support: why and how to provide it

Tasks such as budget preparation and negotiation, budget monitoring and safeguards, building maintenance, and personnel administration came up as difficult challenges that all principals in autonomous schools face. Principals frequently shy away from these tasks because they don't fall easily within the realm of their expertise. Continuous administrative support, as such, is essential. The English reform, for example, produced simple software that assisted principals in budgetary planning and monitoring. With brief training, principals and administrative staff in schools became familiar with the use of this user-friendly software that performs budgetary planning and monitoring. Technical assistance for the management of the software is available from the District offices, if needed.

Instructional support: helping principals perform

At the heart of all tasks performed by a principal will always be her job as an instructional leader within the school. While more equipped to do this task, quite frequently principals in autonomous schools were overwhelmed with other responsibilities and needed assistance to be effective on instructional leadership. Pedagogic support for teachers is usually coordinated by principals, but this job is made easier when such support is well-defined and adequately packaged. A good example of such a package is that provided by the Pitágoras network in Brazil (PNS). PNS offers a wide variety of hands-on courses for teachers and a very defined set of textbook and teacher guides. This approach has been successful in supporting principals not only because the textbooks provide a clear, well-defined, and vertically integrated curriculum, but also because the PNS approach guarantees a tightly coupled link between the curriculum and the training experiences that teachers go through. In choosing to participate in the PNS, principals (and teachers) have effectively unified a range of decisions regarding curriculum, materials and staff training, and are then freed up to focus more on the quality of the delivery of the curriculum and the measurement of its outcomes as well as other management and outreach tasks.

Professional development and networking: maintaining commitment and quality

Aside from professional and managerial support, principals also need opportunities for ongoing professional development and a well-structured opportunity to network amongst themselves. The concession scheme in Bogotá has facilitated networking by principals in concession schools through periodic meetings and attendance at relevant conferences and seminars. Moreover, principals in concession schools also participate in the meetings and professional events of the public school system of their respective regions, providing for a broader opportunity to exchange ideas, experiences, and challenges. Principals in England, in turn, are increasingly relying on a web-based network to share experiences and seek advice.

The principal as a manager in a larger enterprise: autonomy is not isolation

Principals that are successful leading autonomous schools believe in school-based management and have savored the benefits of making their own decisions and being accountable for them. These principals feel that they are part of a larger effort, and that they are critical managers of such effort. In all of the systems visited (Bogotá, Pitágoras, Edmonton and England), principals felt there is a strong political commitment to school-based management and that there is a strong alignment between their individual beliefs and those of the central bureaucracies. Interestingly, principals in autonomous school systems seem better suited to operate in environments where collaboration between schools is emphasized over competition. Establishing an openly competitive system among principals (for example, assessing them solely through student achievement), with the idea of fostering effectiveness based on results has created tensions both in Edmonton and in England. Principals seem to work better when collaborating between themselves, and when educational quality (and coverage) is considered a responsibility that exceeds that of a single school and catchment area. The Bogotá concession arrangement and the Pitágoras network are good examples of strong collaboration that is not mediated by

competition between the schools. Principals in Edmonton also collaborated among themselves and with district management in providing technical assistance to struggling schools. There was strong recognition in Edmonton that the failure of one school was likely to upset the balance in the rest, and that working to prevent failure was a system-wide responsibility.

Case Study Summary Table

Country/ Program	Key education system/reform characteristics	Principal responsibilities and challenges	Support Systems
England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly centralized (national) control of curriculum, standards, and student assessment • Transfer of authority over budgets, planning, physical plant and personnel to schools • Multi-level accountability systems, including the formation of individual school governing bodies • Distribution of funds and some technical assistance provided by Local Education Authorities • Parents can send children to public school of choice • Principals report to school governing body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructional leadership within tightly proscribed curricular context • Hiring and firing staff in conjunction with school governing body • Staff training and development • Selection and procurement of educational materials • Developing school achievement plan • Marketing school to community • Budgeting and budget monitoring • Working with school governing body on budgetary, staffing and other decisions • Maintaining physical plant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National development and distribution of user-friendly budgeting software to schools • National student assessment and provision of results to students and schools • Local Education Authorities provide some technical assistance • Local and/or national special assistance to failing schools • Collegial support among principals through in-person and web-based support network • Private sector (University of London) development of training packages for new principals and professional development for existing principals
Edmonton, Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System overseen by elected Board of Trustees, which in turn hires Superintendent • Principals report to Superintendent • Central office distributes funds to schools based on enrollment formula • Schools have complete discretion on use of funds • Parents can send children to school of choice – money tracks students • Parental participation in school governance through school-level advisory council • Province sets minimum curricular standards and district has centralized assessment system, but there is substantial room for “alternative” school programming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructional leadership • Budgeting and budget monitoring • Hiring and firing of staff (firing requiring district-level procedure) • Staff training and development • Selection and procurement of educational materials • Keeping school advisory committee informed and involved in school decision making • Maintaining physical plant • Marketing school to community 	<p>The EPS central office provides a wide range of services to schools, some free, others optional and provided at a charge. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centralized assessment testing and provision of results to parents and schools • Centralized administration of payroll and labor contracts • Provision of help to schools with budget preparation and monitoring • Development of high-quality textbooks • Provision of flexible consulting services on range of instructional and leadership issues • Extra help and monitoring for failing schools • “Maintenance insurance” program • Communication services

Country/ Program	Key education system/reform characteristics	Principal responsibilities and challenges	Support Systems
<p>Bogotá, Colombia Concessions Program</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private schools and/or education organizations bid for management contracts of newly built public schools in poor neighborhoods • Contractor may manage a single school, or a group of schools • Contracts are for 15 years, subject to satisfactory performance • Contractors evaluated annually through combination of student test scores and independent school assessment • Contractors must adhere to minimum standards regarding curriculum, length of school day, hours of instruction, and nutritional offerings, but otherwise have substantial discretion over instructional content and approach • Contractors receive a per-student allocation of funds comparable to that in regular public system and have complete discretion over spending • Parents do not have a choice regarding where to send children, but contractor must prepare and fund a “school education project” with community participation 	<p>Principal responsibilities vary somewhat depending on whether a school is managed as a single institution or as a network. When schools are managed as a network, some functions tend to be centralized. Principals (and all staff) are employees of private managing institutions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hiring and firing of staff; attracting and retaining staff in situation where there is little chance of long-term career and salary advancement • Staff training and development • Instructional leadership • Helping to develop and implement school education project with community support • Selection and procurement of educational materials • Budgeting and budget monitoring • Maintenance of physical plant 	<p>Most support to principals in the concession program comes from managing institutions; the role of the public Municipal Education Secretariat is more one of accountability, although teachers from concession schools are eligible for training provided to other public sector teachers.</p> <p>Benefits concession school principals receive from managing institutions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High status and excellent academic track record, which helps to attract good staff; • Easy and informal access to “as needed” advice from parent institution • Access to master teachers and trainers through parent institution • Usually a well-developed and tested curricular and academic program; • Use of existing models for school policies, budgeting systems, and the like.

Country/ Program	Key education system/reform characteristics	Principal responsibilities and challenges	Support Systems
Pitágoras Network, Brazil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network of primarily private schools which subscribe to program through agreement to purchase Pitágoras textbooks for all students in all grades 	<p>Principal responsibilities are usually those of any independent school principal, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reporting to and working with a board of directors • Instructional leadership • Staff hiring, firing, training and development • Selection and procurement of educational materials • Maintenance of physical plant • Budgeting, budget monitoring, and fundraising • Marketing school to the community 	<p>The Pitágoras Network provides member schools with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality, vertically integrated textbooks for every grade • Teacher training opportunities and materials that are aligned with educational materials; • Discounted internet access • Access to video-linked seminars and a web-based question and answer hotline • Management training for principals that takes into account pedagogic choices inherent in PNS package • Visits by and support from regional PNS supervisor • Optional participation in an assessment system modeled on the SAEB national assessment test

INTRODUCTION

Education policy over the past two decades has been marked by a heavy emphasis on decentralization in a variety of forms. In Chile, for example, responsibility for teachers and school buildings was transferred in the 1980s to the municipal level, while the central government retained control of school finance and curricular guidelines. Chile has also experimented with the use of vouchers for students to attend private schools. In Uganda, curriculum is still centrally controlled, but there has been a de-facto decentralization of management responsibilities to principals and school-level management committees. In the United States, the movement toward school-based or “site-based” management, whereby schools are accorded greater decision making authority over curriculum, scheduling, budgets, and other areas, has been an important theme in ongoing school reform efforts. In countries such as Britain and New Zealand, initiatives to move authority closer to the school have been far more dramatic, fueled by a market based vision of the provision of education.

The motives behind the trend towards decentralization also vary. Financial pressures and the belief that local governments and/or schools may make more efficient resource decisions are a factor; greater accountability at the local level is also a frequently cited motive. Almost all decentralization efforts, however, either explicitly claim or implicitly assume that the changes introduced will make education more effective by producing better student outcomes. Whether these assumptions and beliefs hold true under what circumstances is a matter of ongoing debate. What is clear, however, is that the trend toward greater decentralization and school autonomy is still quite strong, and that it has important implications for the organization and management of schools.

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The paper is divided into five sections. The first provides some background to the focus on principals by reviewing existing research on their role in school performance. Second, we examine some of the ways the principal’s role may change in a centralized versus increasingly autonomous system and what kinds of support a principal may need to be effective. Third, we describe the country case studies mentioned above; and fourth, we present an analytical framework for understanding the lessons learned. In conclusion, we discuss how our findings may be of relevance to education policy formation and suggest further directions for inquiry.

SECTION I: WHY ARE PRINCIPALS IMPORTANT?

The Principal as Leader

It is worth noting at the outset that most of the research on principals to date has been done in developed countries, and from a western perspective. Definitions of the nature of “leadership,” the principal’s role, and what behaviors exemplify an “effective” principal are all likely to shift between systems and cultures (Dimmock & Walker, 1998; Heck, 1998; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1998). In fact, lack of a common definition of what constitutes educator “effectiveness” was one of the findings of a World Bank-sponsored review of research done in developing countries (Georgiades & Jones, 1989). This apparent lack of common ground is not surprising given that expectations of educational systems and outcomes also vary from place to place.

This said, our interest in principals stems from their unique position in schools. While principals’ responsibilities, expectations, and influence vary across cultures, systems and schools, the daily decisions and actions of most can have profound effects. With increasing school autonomy, the range of responsibilities, types of decisions, leadership styles, and spheres of influence for many principals have also changed dramatically. As principals are by virtue of their position responsible for seeing the school as a whole, their support and leadership is often a critical element in policy change.

What is meant by “leadership,” and especially leadership in a school context? In one definition, Halpin and Croft (1966) refer to a principal’s “thrust” as evident efforts to move the organization in a particular direction. In an essay on school leadership, Vivian William defines leadership as resting “on power to influence the thinking and behavior of others to achieve mutually desired objectives.” (William, 1989 p.7) In a more nuanced definition, Linda Lambert defines leadership as “reciprocal learning processes that enable participants to construct and negotiate meanings leading to a shared purpose of schooling.” Leadership, in her definition, is not the same as leader, nor does it rest in a single individual’s domain (Lambert 1998 p. 9). For the purposes of this paper, our definition of leadership combines elements of the three definitions cited above. When we talk about principal leadership, we are referring to a combination of actions and personality traits that help shape school climate, culture and outcomes both by influencing others, and by working to establish or sustain ongoing organizational learning processes. We do not assume that the principal is the only leader within a school, but we do assume that he or she is an influential one.

A good deal of theoretical work has gone into trying to characterize different types of principal leadership “styles,” and (less successfully) relate these to school environments and outcomes. In a 1998 article, Kenneth Leithwood and Daniel L. Duke map out a basic typology, as follows:

- Managerial, transactional, or organizational leadership. The focus of the managerial leader is on specific tasks and functions. It is also assumed that if these functions are performed well, the work of others in the organization will be facilitated;
- Transformational, or visionary leadership. The focus of the visionary or transformational leader is on the commitments and capacities of the members of an organization. The transformational leader achieves organizational goals through inspiring others; building a school vision, modeling high expectations, and fostering structures for participation in school decisions;
- Moral leadership. Moral leaders influence and inspire through modeling and transmission of core beliefs. Moral leadership focuses on the core values and ethics of the members of an organization, and how these shape school culture. At least one writer (Kam-cheung Wong, 1998) sees moral leadership as being of particular importance in understanding school dynamics in Asian societies;
- Instructional leadership. Unsurprisingly, the focus of instructional leadership is on what goes on in the classroom between teachers and students. The instructional leader is familiar with curricular and instructional goals and techniques, keeps close tabs on student outcomes, and is able to offer specific instructional advice and support to teachers.
- Participative, or group leadership. In this leadership model, leadership does not rest with a single individual (such as the principal) but is rather shared among members of the organization. Advantages put forth by advocates of this leadership model include enhanced organizational effectiveness, as well as on the incorporation of democratic principles and values (Leithwood and Duke 1998).

Despite ongoing debates among advocates of one or another of these leadership models, they are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and in reality principals often rely on a range of styles to address particular issues or situations. The typology can be helpful, however, in describing leadership approaches and styles in different situations, and we will come back to this issue in Section II of this paper.

Principal Effects on Staff

Research has shown a strong relationship between principals' actions and attitudes and teacher perceptions and satisfaction. Again, this research is largely western based, and the relationship may be weaker in school systems where the principal has a less prominent role. Principal supportiveness has been found to have a positive impact on teacher job satisfaction, teacher perception of staff intimacy, teachers' "zone of acceptance," perceptions of group versus individual decision making, and in teachers' use of interactive models for curriculum planning. Principals' evaluation, supervision, and support of staff development has been positively related to teachers' adoption and use of innovative practices (Leithwood, 1989). The success and continuity of staff development programs has correspondingly been related to consistent and strong leadership support (Conran and Chase, 1983 cited in Purcell, 1987). Finally, a number of studies "indicate that the single most important factor in determining the success of a

school is the ability of the principal to coordinate, organize and support the staff in planning, implementing, and evaluating improvements in the school's instructional program" (NEA, 1986, *The Role of the Principal in Effective Schools* – p. 5).

Principal Effects on Student Outcomes

Principals can and do have an important influence on student outcomes, though most of this influence is indirect. In trying to connect principals' actions with student outcomes, many studies (particularly in the U.S.) have focussed on student achievement. In their 1996 review of research on the principal's role in school effectiveness, Hallinger and Heck found that most studies that have attempted to demonstrate a direct relationship between principal characteristics and/or styles and student achievement have shown either weak or no effects. This finding is not entirely surprising, given the complexity of the principal's role in school and the mismatch between this complexity and some of the earlier analytical techniques.

More sophisticated study designs have attempted to explore principals' effects on school achievement as mediated by a range of in-school and environmental influences. The majority of these studies have found that: (a) there is a small but statistically significant indirect effect of school leadership on school achievement; (b) the effects of principal leadership are stronger on in-school processes than on outcomes; and (c) there are significant findings of contextual effects on the principal (Hallinger & Heck, 1996).

Hallinger and Heck go on to state that neither the finding that principals' effects on student achievement tend to be indirect, nor that the effects are relatively small, should cause great concern. As they note, "achieving results through others is the nature of leadership" (p.39). Moreover, small is relative. Only about 15 percent of the total variance in school achievement can be attributed to school differences; within that 15 percent, the principal appears to account for between two and eight percent of the variance in scores (Hallinger and Heck, 1996). Viewed from this perspective, principals can have a tremendous influence on student achievement.

Principal Effects on School Climate and Culture

If indirect, how do principals' actions affect student outcomes? A large part of the answer seems to lie in the principal's ability to broadly influence school climate and culture. "School climate" can be defined as the "feel" of a school, its organizational personality. "School culture" is often used to describe a deeper set pattern of values, core beliefs and traditions characterizing a school. A substantial body of research has associated a healthy and strong school climate and culture with increased student achievement and motivation as well as teacher productivity and satisfaction.

A good deal of research effort has been devoted to the question of how principals help shape the organizational culture and climate of schools. Student and staff attitudes and behavior toward instruction and learning are influenced by various aspects of school climate, including school mission, teacher and principal expectations, and opportunities

for students to learn (Bossert et al. (1982)). Several studies have found links between principal actions and higher student achievement through the mediating influence of school culture, although the importance of specific actions or activities has varied from study to study. Setting and communicating school goals appears as a consistently significant factor (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Other behaviors, such as raising teacher expectations of student achievement (Murphy & Hallinger, 1989), working to keep faculty morale high, establishing an orderly environment, evaluating curricular programs, and securing resources have also been identified as enhancing instructional climate and instructional organization (Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990; Heck & Marcoulides 1993). Extrapolating from a range of studies looking at principal leadership effects, Hallinger and Heck conclude:

At a more general level...the most theoretically and empirically robust models...tell us that principal leadership that makes a difference is aimed toward influencing internal school processes that are directly linked to student learning. These internal processes range from school policies and norms (e.g. academic expectations, school mission, student opportunity to learn, instructional organization, academic learning time) to the practices of teachers. p. 38

To summarize thus far, then, principals are important in that they are charged with seeing the school as a whole, and their leadership is often a key element behind the success or failure of school-level reforms. Principal leadership styles can be characterized in a variety of ways, and styles are likely to vary depending on the cultural setting, individual characteristics, and system and school environments. Research has established that principals' actions and attitudes have a strong influence on staff, and can help shape the overall climate and culture of a school, including teacher expectations and practices, school policies, and overall school organization. Through their influence on staff and overall school climate, principals can also have a strong indirect influence on student achievement.

SECTION II: HOW DOES THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE CHANGE IN AN AUTONOMOUS SCHOOL?

In this section, we explore some of the challenges facing principals in systems where schools are increasingly autonomous. Obviously, challenges will vary depending on the specific characteristics of each system or reform, and we will address some of these specifics in the case studies that follow. Here we treat the subject more generically, pulling together some common themes.

In a centralized school system, principals typically exercise administrative duties with minimal control over basic school resources. So, for example, teachers are often state or federal employees, and the school may have little say with regard to the hiring and firing of staff. Salary levels are set by the state or federal authority, and the school usually has no discretion in the use of funds to supplement salaries to attract or retain good teachers. Books and other learning materials may be provided (in sufficient or insufficient quantities) by the central authority, and school building maintenance is often consigned to a central office for civil works. Although schools may submit yearly "budgets," in the

most centralized systems money never actually reaches the school – instead, schools are provided with in-kind services and materials which may or may not be timely and meet the schools actual needs. Curriculum is typically set by a central authority, which also typically makes decisions regarding what supporting textbooks and materials will be used. Because schools in a centralized system do not generally receive funds and have little discretion over budgets, administrators at the school level are also not normally held accountable for spending choices.

In a centralized school system that is working well (and there are some), the principal's role may be simplified by the existence of central support and the fact that many decisions are beyond the school's and the principal's purview. In such a system, the central agency tends to be the principal's primary reference point and interlocutor. At least theoretically, the principal in an effective centralized system should be freed up to concentrate on developing staff and instruction within centrally dictated parameters. In a centralized system that is not working well, however, the picture shifts. Resource constraints at the central level may lead to inadequate provision of services and materials to schools; bureaucratic inefficiencies may lead to long delays in resolving the most basic staffing and maintenance issues. While the central agency continues to be a principal's primary reference point, a lack of responsiveness can consume a principal's time in protracted bureaucratic battles, while the inability to address staffing issues and resource constraints can have a damaging effect on staff morale. This situation can generate an accountability crisis: lacking adequate support from the central agency and lacking the authority and funds to make their own resource allocations, principals and teachers may (with some justification) feel that they are not responsible for student outcomes.

Systems where schools are more autonomous take a variety of forms, but all share some traits in common. First is the issue of resources. In almost all autonomous systems, whether run by public or private entities, schools are their own budget units. Either based on tuition or a per-student funding formula, autonomous schools receive actual funds and are responsible for deciding how some amount of these funds will be spent (in some systems, teacher salaries are still an exception and are handled separately). Second, there is the issue of accountability. In most autonomous systems, the price of increased independence at the school level is a corresponding increase in accountability for both the use of funds and student outcomes. Often, this increased accountability involves multiple audiences. For example, for a school funded either through tuition or a per-student funding formula, keeping students enrolled (and their parents happy) becomes a budgetary priority. At the same time, a central authority devolving responsibility to the school may well retain an oversight function and require that the school regularly report to it regarding test scores and the like. Many reform models have created community or school-level councils which also weigh in on budgetary and academic matters.

What are the implications of increased budgetary freedoms combined with increased accountability for principals? Most obviously, the job becomes more complex and there can be a lot more work. True budgeting and accounting systems need to be put into place. Schools need to research and place orders with a range of educational materials vendors and contractors. Salary and staffing policies need to be designed in some cases.

Reporting requirements have to be met. Regular meetings need to be scheduled with local oversight bodies, and the politics of different issues carefully thought through. Last but not least, increased attention needs to be given to the instructional program and staff development to ensure that student outcomes are such that parents and overseers are satisfied. Principals in autonomous schools are called upon to constantly negotiate between top-down demands (achievement levels, legal agreements and regulations, constituency relationships) and internal, or bottom up demands (teacher's professional development and personal needs, student learning and behavior).

A hot debate has raged in the research literature as to what leadership style is most effective and appropriate for principals generally and for principals of increasingly autonomous schools in particular (often in the course of research on the school based management movement in the U.S. and Canada). "Effectiveness" is generally defined as a mix between good school outcomes and a positive school climate. The most common juxtaposition is between a managerial, or "transactional" focus (a focus on getting things done, making sure things work, meeting performance targets), and a more "transformational" or visionary focus (inspiring staff, building up staff esteem, setting a moral example, emphasis on communication). There has also been a strong push from school based management advocates for a participatory leadership model. Whereas the managerial style is usually associated with the more traditional school, the transformational and participatory styles are often associated with changing school structures and responsibilities in line with increased autonomy at the school level.

While it is not our intent to weigh in on this debate in the context of this paper, as hinted earlier, it is our opinion that in practice effective principals rely on a range of skills and styles depending upon context. It is not that good principals can afford to ignore managerial issues, but it may well be true that to run a more independent school requires greater reliance on the ability to communicate a vision to staff and other constituents and to enlist their active help. Recent research on effective principals in England found that principals were informed by and could communicate "clear sets of personal and educational values which represent their moral purposes for the school (Day, Harris and Hadfield, 2001, p.53). They were also pragmatic, used a variety of problem solving approaches, emphasized teamwork and trusted staff to work as autonomous accountable professionals, focussed on care and achievement simultaneously, and helped create a climate where everyone had high expectations of themselves and others (Day, Harris and Hadfield, 2001).

Research on the implementation of school-based management (SBM) models in the U.S., Canada and Australia found that SBM was likely to fail where principals were perceived as autocratic and unable to develop a shared vision or agenda (Wohlstetter, 1995). Other research on the implementation of SBM in the U.S. found that that principals were finding the need to move toward a more inclusive leadership style, delegating some leadership responsibilities, developing staff to undertake new responsibilities, promoting the school, and working with governing boards and parents (Murphy,1994). Research in New Zealand found that principals in the first wave of reforms found themselves

overwhelmed by new administrative and marketing duties and that much professional and instructional leadership had to be delegated or neglected (Cusack, 1992).

Clearly, some of the characteristics of the effective principal are rooted in personality: some of us are born communicators and good at delegation, whereas others are not. Most of us, however, can improve, provided with the right training and support. Given the demands placed on the principal of an autonomous school, what kinds of support and training could one predict he or she would need to be successful?

To be successful, we maintain that the principal of an autonomous school needs a support network that interacts between top-down and bottom-up demands. Some of this support can be bought, while other types must be built. Examples of external support include: clear legal assistance, administrative support, pedagogical guidance, curricular guidelines, and resource availability. Examples of internal support include: committed teachers, participatory parents, collegial teams, strong department directors and/or deputies, and qualified secretarial help. Training programs also need to address a wider and more non-traditional range of skills, including communication, political, and facilitation skills. In the next section we explore our four case studies, with the goal of showing how each system model generates specific challenges for principals and also attempts to take into account principals' needs.

SECTION III: CASE STUDIES

The following four case studies, on the educational reform in England, the Edmonton school district in Canada, a public school concession model in Bogotá, Colombia, and the Pitágoras network of schools in Brazil, were developed in the course of visits to each of the countries and systems mentioned. Each visit consisted of approximately four days to one week in the field, during which interviews were conducted with principals, teachers, parents, students, and system administrators at various levels. The versions of the case studies presented here are quite condensed; suggestions of where to go for additional information are noted for each study.

A. Educational Reform in England

Background

With the passage of the Education Reform Act in 1988, England initiated a decade of dramatic changes in the management and financing of its public school system. The thrust of these reforms was to move the system in two directions: on the one hand, central control of standards, curriculum, policy development and student assessment was greatly enhanced; on the other, authority over budgets, planning, physical plant, and personnel was devolved from Local Education Authorities, or LEAs, directly to schools. *For a more comprehensive review of the English school reform, please see "Education Reform in England: A Web-Based Overview" Patrick Supanc, World Bank, HDNED, 1999.*

Governance and Accountability

England has established accountability relationships at all levels of the system, which are driven by the extensive use of evaluation, transparency, and enforcement (both formal and informal). Under the reform, schools are increasingly answerable to parents, who both have the right to choose a specific public school for their child and are involved in school decisions by participating in the school's governing body. This body has considerable influence over the budget, the school's future direction, and school accountability. Each school is expected to engage in strategic planning, and to define quantifiable annual targets for student achievement. Student achievement is assessed at the end of each key academic stage through national summative assessments. In addition, schools and teachers are expected to conduct formative testing throughout the school year. All school-level assessments are made public, allowing parents, administrators, and teachers to compare their school's performance to other schools. The government is also encouraging parents to form home-school agreements with their children, outlining an annual set of goals.

In addition to parental oversight, Local Education Authorities (LEAs) have a limited oversight role. LEAs are instrumental in distributing funds to schools, and also provide technical support on an on-demand basis. Their role has become somewhat murky, however, as schools have jurisdiction over their own quality improvement and can contract services wherever they see fit. At the national level, the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) is responsible for coordinating periodic inspections of the following educational institutions: all schools receiving public funds; LEAs, teacher education programs; in-service training providers; and inspection providers. Inspection results are made public, and failing schools are required to develop an action plan to address problems identified. When a school is found to be consistently failing, significant support is provided in the form of visits, training, and consulting services that can be offered by the LEA or by other national government agencies. In extreme circumstances, if a school does not perform, its management can be taken over by the national government for a temporary period before allowing the local authorities to regain control over decision-making. Under normal circumstances, the national government provides little direct support to schools other than data and analysis; however, a government initiative, Education Action Zones, seeks to increase the involvement of the private sector and communities in school improvement in specific areas.

Curriculum and Standards

At the core of the English school reform is the establishment of standards across organizational level and functional responsibilities. A national curriculum sets learning objectives for core subjects, for each year and at each key stage. This curriculum is benchmarked against international standards and defines national literacy and numeracy strategies at the primary level. The content of the curriculum is highly specified, leaving educators with little flexibility. By law, schools must devote one hour to literacy and one hour to numeracy each day. In addition to the curriculum, specific national standards

exist for teacher education, subject leaders, special needs educators and head teachers; standards for management practice at the school and the Local Education Authority have been established, and standards also exist for in-service teacher training.

Staffing and Professional Development

Although a minimum pay scale and minimum qualifications for educators of various types have been set at the national level, each public school is responsible for hiring and paying for its own teachers. The principal (head teacher) and school governing body are responsible for monitoring and assessing teacher performance. The school governing body has the right to dismiss a teacher, but dismissals are rare. The head teacher is responsible for identifying staff training needs and contracting professional development services; often, these services are contracted with the LEA, but schools are free to contract them with universities or other outside providers, so long as the services adhere to the national standards for in-service training. Head teachers and individual schools are also responsible for contracting substitutes for absent teachers.

Finance

Individual schools receive funding according to a formula developed by each Local Education Authority (LEA). Of the national block grant to the LEAs, 80% is distributed on the basis of student population and age, and a further 16% is based upon socio-economic factors. Poor communities receive some additional funding; it is up to the LEAs to target these schools in the funding formula. While parents do not pay school fees, they are frequently asked to make voluntary contributions to fund extra curricular activities and non-core capital investments. Head teachers and school governing bodies have considerable discretion over spending, although the LEAs also exercise influence through their oversight role and the establishment of the funding formula. To assist schools in budgetary planning and monitoring, the English reform invested in the development of user-friendly accounting and administrative software appropriate to the school level. Technical assistance for training and management of the software is available from the LEAs, if needed.

Summary: Challenges and Support for Principals

The English reform model has placed a plethora of new demands on head teachers (principals). Head teachers are currently responsible for a host of administrative and instructional functions, as well as maintaining a close working relationship with the school's governing body. The latter is often hugely time consuming, as most members of such a body are not professional educators and may have to be educated as to the rationale behind school decisions and budgetary choices which require their approval. School staff complain that quality assurance compliance and national initiatives can leave little time and space for innovation and creativity, also damaging teacher morale. In the words of an elementary school principal: "Sometimes I feel that the central government regulates even the smallest details of curriculum and pedagogy, precisely those things

teachers know how to do; as a result there is a lot of cynicism among teachers about the whole thing.”

While the national government provides data on student performance to parents and schools, it is up to the individual schools to design their own quality improvement goals and strategies. Head teachers normally play a pivotal role in developing these strategies, including identifying staff development needs and procuring training. Local Education Authorities (LEAs) do offer technical support to schools with regard to pedagogic, curricular, and managerial training; however, principals in England reported that the LEAs offerings were not always responsive to their needs, forcing them to look for outside consulting help. A secondary school principal stated, “I tend to use mostly outside consultants for my needs because I find that I can work with them easily; this option seems to be harder in smaller schools because of the high costs and the difficulty in pooling resources together.” Principals in England also sought help from one another, either in person through informal visits with colleagues, or through a web-based principal support initiative sponsored by the Leadership Centre at the Institute of Education (University of London).

B. The Edmonton School District in Canada

Background

The Edmonton Public School (EPS) system is a site-based management model that allocates funds to schools based on transparent, enrollment-guided formulas in the form of a block grant, which principals spend with absolute discretion. Edmonton has had site-based management for the past 25 years, and has made it part of its educational culture. The largest education provider in the city, EPS serves about 70% (over 81,500) of the city’s student population in 206 schools (134 elementary, 18 elementary-junior high, 28 junior high, 14 senior high, and 8 elementary-senior high schools) with 7,107 staff (5,700 of whom are teachers or teaching support staff). *For a more comprehensive profile of the Edmonton school system, please see “Edmonton Public School System: schools at the heart of education” by Alberto Rodriguez, February, 2002. Also see the May 2001 edition (Number 5, Volume 58) of The School Administrator magazine, which focused on the Edmonton Reform. Also, visit <http://www.epsb.edmonton.ab.ca>.*

Governance and Accountability

The Edmonton Public School system is overseen by a superintendent and Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees is elected by the public and represents geographic wards. Trustees are responsible for establishing the strategic direction of the EPS, which is then implemented by the superintendent. The superintendent runs a Central Office, which offers an extensive menu of services to schools; he or she is responsible for coordination between the Central Office and schools, as well as between EPS and all stakeholders. Principals report directly to the superintendent, and are evaluated on school performance. An Assessment Office within the Central Office coordinates both the provincial achievement test and the EPS assessment in language and reading. This office

also analyzes results and produces school progress reports free of charge. In 1995, the EPS system put in place a supply-driven program called “blueprints” to establish school-level achievement goals. The percentage of students achieving at the expected level has increased in every subject since.

The Central Office maintains a close watch on student outcomes at individual schools, especially because parents have choice in terms of which school their children attend. In this market, schools that under-perform, or that are perceived as poor by the public, rapidly lose clientele and enrollments start to slip. When this happens, the system becomes unbalanced because other principals face the situation of having more applicants than spaces, and thus rejecting students. Administrators in Edmonton clearly understand that when the system is unbalanced, children of poorer (or fragmented) families may be the losers, as they can “get stuck” in poor performing schools with falling enrollment and, thus, decreasing funding. Interestingly, principals of all affected schools (the under-performer(s) and those that see increased applicants) are encouraged to team up and work together to rescue the under-performing school. During our visit, a principal of a large secondary school cut an interview short because she had to attend a meeting with four other principals to discuss ways to assist a school whose enrollment and reputation was rapidly slipping. This collaborative approach has been successful in several cases, and when it isn’t, the Central Office has taken other measures such as replacing the principal or monitoring the school’s decision-making more closely. Increased support is available, including the temporary assignment of a co-principal by the Central Office.

In addition to system oversight by the Central Office, each school has a school level council formed by the principal, a teacher, a community member, and at least the same number of parents. The council has an advisory role with regard to educational policy matters and participates in fundraising, but does not have veto power over the school budget. Besides participation on school councils, parents can earmark their taxes to a particular school system (supporting religious schools if they prefer), vote in the trustees elections, and choose which public school they would like their child to attend. The impact of parental choice is substantial: for example, 47% of all elementary school students attend a school other than their “designated” neighborhood school. Because funds follow students in the EPS system, there is a strong fiscal incentive for schools to work at keeping parents informed and happy. Information about laws, procedures and rights is also available to parents and schools through a “hotline” maintained by the Leadership Services Office within the Central Office.

Curriculum and Standards

The province of Alberta (to which Edmonton belongs) has minimum curricular standards to which schools must adhere. Schools are free to adopt any educational materials that they wish, but in practice most use textbooks and other materials developed by the Edmonton Central Office’s Curriculum and Educational Materials Office. This unit’s textbooks are of high quality and are widely sold in Canada and abroad. Principals and schools do have substantial instructional freedom, however. If a principal wants to make significant changes in instruction or organization (such as expand the school day, try

year-around schooling, or teach block classes instead of 60 minute lessons), he/she can present a plan to the Superintendent, who will likely approve it if there is community support for the idea. A number of schools have “marketed” themselves to the community through the development of alternative programs focussed on children with special needs, art, science and technology, sports, and other areas. Currently there are 29 alternative programs in operation.

Staffing and Professional Development

Principals are responsible for school staffing and the professional development of teachers in the EPS system. Principals are free to hire the number and types of teachers that they see fit, as well as to establish salary levels; however, there is a tradeoff between increasing teacher salaries and having sufficient funds to purchase services. Firing of teachers is a lengthy and complex process (requiring the intervention of the superintendent and a due process hearing) and in practice happens rarely. More often, teachers are encouraged to take up another posting within the system in search of a better fit. Much of the administrative hassle of managing labor contracts (payroll, etc.) is centralized in a Human Resources Office within the Central Office, and is provided as a service to schools free of charge. The Human Resource Office also serves as a clearinghouse for contracting substitutes.

Aside from the consultation that principals carry out with teachers regarding school budget allocations, teachers are generally well-shielded from the administrative tasks of site-based management and are free to focus on teaching and learning. Principals are free to procure training and other professional development opportunities for their teachers wherever they wish; however, a Consulting Services Office under the Central Office also offers both in-service training opportunities and specialized consulting services. To be competitive, this office maintains a flexible group of consultants and is very demand sensitive.

In addition to training and consulting services for teachers, the EPS (through its Leadership Services Office) also offers long-term courses for perspective principals as well as short term development courses, coaching for active principals and on site principal consultation (purchased yearly by the school for US\$246+US\$4.20 per student, or at an hourly rate of US\$61).

Finance

The EPS receives 88% of its funds (US\$298M) in a block grant from property taxes collected by the Province of Alberta, which is redistributed on enrollment based formulas with equity adjustments. The EPS, in turn, allocates 92% of its budget directly to schools, based on a formula that considers the number and characteristics of students. The formula is also adjusted for school-level characteristics, such as any special programs offered, new initiatives, and socio-economic status. Of the remaining 8% of the budget, the Central Office consumes only 6.8% by maintaining a lean organizational structure. The remainder is used as support for capital projects. As mentioned earlier,

the funding formula ensures that the money follows the students, so that a school that is losing students is also losing funds.

Although the principal has complete discretion over the school budget, administrative procedures are such that once a school receives a block grant, the Budget Office within the Central Office immediately completes a charge back (about 75% of the block grant on average) that accounts for the salaries of those working at the school, leaving the principal to allocate among other activities. The Human Resources Office then administers payroll for the school without charge. The Budget Office has three main responsibilities: (a) to determine the allocation of resources to all cost centers; (b) to monitor the use of the budget; and (c) to provide free technical assistance to schools in preparing and managing budgets.

Summary: Challenges and Support for Principals

Principals within the EPS system are both the instructional leaders and CEOs of schools. Principals are responsible for school budgeting, staffing, staff development, building maintenance, school scheduling and instructional approaches, the choice and procurement of educational materials, reporting to the superintendent, convening and chairing school councils and marketing the school to the community, among other responsibilities. Despite the extent of their responsibilities, most principals interviewed in Edmonton felt that although the system represented some additional work, the benefits far outweighed the demands. Said one primary school principal: “Having grown and developed professionally in a site-based management approach to education here in Edmonton, I would find it very hard and frustrating to work in a school district where principals and teachers are not decision makers. I like the way we do things because I make my decisions and I am held accountable for them.”

Principals’ relative degree of satisfaction with the system in large measure reflects the extensive amount of support available to them through the Central Office. In addition to a number of services provided to schools free of charge (such as administration of payroll and labor contracts and the provision of technical assistance on budget preparation and monitoring), the EPS has been quite successful in developing a number of high-quality, demand driven services that are available to schools for a charge. These include the provision of educational materials, teacher training and instructional consulting services, leadership training consulting services for principals, and communication services including graphic design, the organization of special events, and newsletter assistance. Complaints from principals about the amount of time they were spending on building maintenance recently led to the Central Office developing a “maintenance insurance” program. Although principals and schools are not obliged to purchase any of these optional services, the fact that they are offered centrally, seemingly at a reasonable price and quality, has meant a huge time savings for many principals, allowing them to focus more time on instruction and community outreach.

C. Public School Concessions in Bogotá, Colombia

Background

The public school concession program in Bogotá, Colombia, is an experimental program that began in 2000. As Colombia's capital city, Bogotá has a large concentration of private schools (28% of national private school enrollment), and many of these are among the best-performing in the country (46 out of the 96 best performing schools in a recent national achievement exam). Hoping to capitalize on the concentration of successful private institutions locally, the Secretariat of Education for the Bogotá District (SED) launched a concession program, through which a private school, organization, or group takes over the management of one or more public schools. Thus far, schools eligible for the program have been newly constructed by the SED, largely in low-income neighborhoods in need of additional school space. The opportunity to manage the schools was then offered in a public procurement process, where bidders (private educational institutions) were evaluated on their proposed management plans. As of 2001, a total of 22 schools had been opened, with 17 more foreseen for 2002. In full operation, the program is expected to reach approximately 45,000 students in 51 schools. *For more information on the Public School Concession model in Bogotá, Colombia, please see "Case Study: Public School Concession Model of Bogotá Colombia" by Alberto Rodriguez, February 2002. Also, see Educación Privada y Política Pública, a recent Inter-American Development Bank book, especially pp. 371-413.*

Governance and Accountability

There are two models for the concessionary management relationship: the one-to-one experience (in which one private school takes over the management of one public school); and the multiple school experience (in which an organization or private group takes over the management of several schools). Both these models address the lack of accountability structures in the public school system by giving principals a key role in the overall management of teachers. While the one-to-one model places the burden of instructional and administrative leadership on the principal, the multiple school experience tends to encourage a more institutional approach, with managing institutions setting up their own pedagogic and administrative support networks coordinated by central units.

Regardless of the type of management (single or multiple schools), all managing institutions have a contract with the SED and are obligated to provide educational services for poor children in return for remuneration on a per-student basis (averaging US\$506 per child per year). While the contract establishes clear standards that must be upheld, such as the number of hours of instruction, quality of nutritional provisions, and the establishment of a single shift (*jornada única*), the managing institution has full autonomy over school management and is evaluated solely on results: if the school does not reach pre-established targets on standardized tests and drop out rates for two consecutive years, the SED has the right to end the contract. Concession contracts are for

15 years, thereby ensuring continuation in management and encouraging long term projects, providing the school is meeting its established targets. The SED monitors and evaluates the managing institutions in three ways: (a) an inspection is carried out by a private firm to monitor the maintenance of the school facilities and property; (b) the SED carries out supervision visits to guarantee adherence to pedagogical norms and standards; and (c) the SED finances an independent evaluation to determine whether academic objectives have been met.

Although parents do not have a choice in the Bogotá system regarding which school they wish to send their children to, parents and community members do have a vehicle through which they have a say in each school's particular academic program, and emphasis. Legally, each managing institution must develop a "School Education Project" (Proyecto Educativo Institucional) along with community members and parents, submit it for approval, finance it in its entirety, and be evaluated on the results.

Curriculum and Standards

As mentioned above, contracts between the SED and managing institutions specify a range of standards to which the concessionary institutions must adhere. These include: (a) the number of hours of instruction; (b) the establishment of a single shift of students during the day; (c) the quality of nutritional provisions; (d) a minimum profile for teachers and administrators; (e) facility maintenance standards; (f) criteria for the availability of instructional materials; (g) a profile of the students to be served; and (h) the evaluation of achievement by outcomes.

Beyond adherence to the basic operational and curricular standards specified in their contracts, however, managing institutions and their principals have considerable curricular and pedagogic freedom. As each managing institution has its own particular traditions and track record in education, it is expected that curricular and pedagogic approaches will vary among concession schools. Schools appear to use the fact of their substantial pedagogic freedom as a means of attracting high quality and motivated teachers. Given that performance (and contract continuance) is based in large part on the results of achievement testing, however, it is possible that schools may encounter increasing pressure to "teach to the test." In fact, when commenting about some of the shortcomings of the achievement tests that are used to measure outcomes, some principals indicated that teaching to the test would be a possible result of a system that values test scores over and above other outcome measures.

Staffing and Professional Development

Responsibility for staffing and professional development of teachers rests squarely with the managing institutions. The principals of concession schools are hired by the "parent" school or institution; whether principals are then expected to hire their own staff or whether they are assigned staff and/or receive assistance from the parent institution in staffing varies from school to school. A challenge facing all principals as well as their parent institutions is how to attract high quality and motivated teachers to the concession

schools when the long term career prospects are uncertain (the concession contracts are for 15 years, and may be rescinded if performance is unsatisfactory). In addition, the per-pupil expenditure provided by the SED is relatively modest, restricting the concession school's ability to offer much of a financial incentive structure. Principals and managing institutions must strive to maintain and promote a nucleus of capable teachers that drive academic achievement, replacing them over time in a way that avoids the systematic increase of personnel costs. To do so, many institutions appear to count on their reputations and their relative pedagogic freedom: in a number of interviews, teachers confirmed that their motivation to participate was based on the seriousness and credibility of the managing institution, as well as the opportunity to be part of an interesting pedagogical project.

With regard to staff development, many "parent" institutions appear to rely on their own high-performing faculty to serve as mentors to teachers in concession schools. Because of the partnership relationship, both teachers and principals in concession schools also have an instant "network" of colleagues they can call on for help and suggestions. Aside from these informal networks for teacher professional development, all teachers working in concession schools have access to the regular training events that are offered by the SED to all public school teachers in the District. Some concession school teachers, however, indicated that they found their one-to-one interactions with colleagues from the private system much more rewarding and useful. Nevertheless, participation in the district-wide training opportunities was also seen by teachers in the concession schools as an opportunity to network and impress recruiters of teachers for the public system (where many concession teachers ultimately aspire to be).

Finance

SED payments to managing institutions are based on a per-pupil expenditure of about Col\$1,114,500 (US\$506) per year, an amount similar to the per-student costs of the regular public system. This sum is adjusted annually for inflation, and varies based on the economic proposal presented by each managing institution in its bid. Deviations from the average, however, are small. The educational basket used to calculate the cost per student includes: cost of personnel; educational materials; public services; maintenance of the facilities; cleaning; and a daily snack for each child. Payments are made in three phases, consistent with the beginning of the school year in January: 25% in December, 40% in March, and 35% in June.

Managing institutions have complete discretion on how to spend these resources, although they are responsible for the full financing of the School Educational Project, developed in conjunction with parents and the community. Significantly, early program results have shown that managing institutions are allocating about 55% percent of the per-capita payment to salaries (as compared to 90% in the public system), freeing up 27% for nutritional support and 5% for textbooks and educational materials. Here again, the degree to which individual principals of concession schools are responsible for budget preparation and monitoring varies according to the management structure established by each managing entity.

Challenges and Support for Principals

In many ways it is hard to generalize about the kinds of challenges facing principals of concession schools in Bogotá because managerial tasks and support vary considerably depending on the “parent” institution’s organizational setup and characteristics. Principals of schools who are partnered with a single private school tend to have a higher burden of administrative tasks. On the other hand, the support relationship with the partner school tends to be both a strong and flexible one: when an issue arises, principals and teachers in the public school simply call their counterparts in the private school by phone. Where multiple schools are managed together by a single educational entity, principals are generally relieved of some administrative burdens by a central coordinating unit, leaving them more time to concentrate on instruction. The support offered to these schools, however, may be less individualized and flexible.

It is important to note that all concession school principals were pleased with the specific situation they were in, particularly with respect to levels of autonomy. Said one principal: “I’ve been a principal for more than 20 years; I was a public school principal all my life and I would never change the opportunity that I am getting to be autonomous in my decision-making... I just wish that our performance would be assessed in a more comprehensive manner and not only through test scores.” Principals generally expressed discomfort at being evaluated solely on “limited achievement outcomes” when they identify their challenges more in the realm of “social construction” of poor communities.

Despite the differences in the single school and multiple school models, principals in concession schools all share a number of challenges and benefits. In both models, the fact that the parent institution already had an academic track record and deep familiarity with available pedagogic approaches and educational materials has meant that principals have had good access to pedagogic knowledge and resources. Similarly, the parent institution’s “know-how” regarding school management procedures, resources, and service vendors has also been made available to the principals of concession schools. All schools and principals appear to be struggling with the issue of how to attract and retain good teachers when they are unable to offer them long-term contracts or significantly higher pay. All principals have also had to be involved in community outreach in the course of preparing the School Education Projects; these are also communities that the parent schools may have had little experience with. Concession schools were reputedly initially received with some skepticism by the poor communities they were designated to serve; to the credit of the managing institutions, there has been a noticeable positive change in attitudes and the demand for school places in the concession schools is high. It is too early, however, to assess any impact on test results.

D. The Pitágoras Network of Schools in Brazil

Background

The Pitágoras Network of Schools (PNS) is an innovative effort by the private sector to support independent schools, both private and public, through an integrated school improvement package offering administrative and technical support to affiliated schools. There are currently 250 schools throughout Brazil that belong to the network, of which only two so far are public. The integration of both managerial and pedagogic support is a cornerstone of the PNS philosophy and approach to school improvement. *For more information on the Pitágoras network model, please see “the Pitágoras Network of Schools in Brazil” by Alberto Rodriguez, November, 2001. Also, see <http://www.pitagoras.com.br>*

Governance and Accountability

The PNS works with a wide range of independent schools, all of which have their own individual governance structures. The vast majority, however, are private institutions that charge tuition, and are dependent on establishing and maintaining a good reputation in their communities in order to attract both students and funds. Because the decision to join the PNS entails both the commitment to a particular set of educational materials and a substantial outlay of funds for their purchase, it is probably safe to assume that an individual school’s decision to join tends to be a broad-based one, involving discussions among teachers, parents and governing boards.

To join the network, schools enter into a yearly contract with the PNS, committing to the use of Pitágoras textbooks for all grades and students. In return, schools have access to all available services, and are expected to actively participate in network training and other activities. While consulting services in school management and marketing are free of charge, others, such as an educational internet service for students, are available at a discount. Currently, schools are encouraged, but not obliged, to participate in a pilot student assessment program based on the SAEB national assessment test. The PNS envisions expansion of this program as a key component of the PNS network.

PNS supervision and support to schools is facilitated by five regional directors, who serve as a contact point and coach for network schools. Each regional director visits a school one to five times per year, meeting with the principal, teachers, parents, and students.

Curriculum and Standards

The PNS has its own curriculum and provides textbooks for each grade and subject that are updated yearly and sold to the parents of children attending the network schools. These materials are very high quality products and provide vertical integration of the curriculum. The PNS curriculum guarantees that a student in 4th grade has learned all the necessary pre-requisites to succeed in that grade. Too often, an uncoordinated curriculum (one guided by isolated teachers or independent textbooks) leads to knowledge gaps that

make learning more difficult as a student advances to higher grades. The PNS textbook policy addresses this issue.

The PNS package also stands out in terms of educational alignment. Educational alignment is defined as the coordination of curriculum, pedagogic techniques, teacher training and teacher support. In most systems, it is extremely difficult to achieve. Many times, teachers attend training courses that are intellectually interesting, but unrelated to the techniques and content they are expected to teach. Similarly, textbooks sometimes are not in close relation with the curricular content defined for a given subject and their use is therefore of limited help to students. The excellent educational alignment of the PNS package is one of its strongest features.

Staffing and Professional Development

Besides providing schools with an integrated curriculum and textbooks, the PNS package offers principals and schools a wide range of professional development opportunities and management support. Administrators receive management support by means of administrative tools and training, marketing tools and training, workshops, seminars, and web-based support. Teachers have access to training courses, video-linked seminars, workshops, videos complementing classroom instruction, and a web-based information and question hotline, staffed by PNS consultants. Although staffing and school organizational issues continue to be the responsibility of each individual principal, the PNS professional development training explicitly aligns management strategies with pedagogic choices on such issues as the length of a class period, daily class schedules, deployment of teachers around the building and class sizes. The link of management and pedagogic approaches is another unique feature of the PNS model.

Finance

The yearly cost of joining the PNS is equal to the cost of purchasing PNS textbooks for each student in a school. Schools must come up with this money from their own funds or pass the cost on to parents.

The PNS collection of textbooks, which parents in member schools are required to purchase, had the following costs for 2001:

- *Primary School Student* (1-4 series): R\$160 (US\$68). Includes Portuguese, Math, History/Geography, and Science.
- *Lower Secondary Student* (5-8 series): R\$190 (US\$81). Includes Portuguese, Math, History/Geography, and Science.
- *Upper Secondary Student* (9-10 series): R\$290 (US\$123). Includes Portuguese/Literature, Geography, History, Math, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, English, and Laboratory practices for Chemistry, Biology, and Physics.
- *Last grade of Upper Secondary* (11): R\$370 (US\$157). Includes Portuguese/Literature, Geography, History, Math, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, English, and Laboratory practices for Chemistry, Biology, and Physics.

Challenges and Support for Principals

The vast majority of schools in the PNS are independent private schools, and it can be assumed that their principals face a fairly typical and long list of responsibilities, including staffing, staff development, marketing of the school to the community, budget development and monitoring, building maintenance, and so forth. Because the responsibilities of managing a completely independent school are so large, often faculty, volunteer parents and community members, as well as other administrative staff besides the principal play important roles. The PNS focuses its support on school faculty and administrators; even though student performance is an indicator by which schools are measured, students are not the target audience of PNS. The PNS provides management support and training to principals, while at the same time simplifying their instructional role by providing a coordinated curriculum, materials, and training package to teachers. As noted earlier, the PNS package also explicitly relates managerial choices to pedagogic ones, facilitating the principal's role in aligning school resources towards improving instruction. In the words of one principal: "Pitágoras has helped me provide my teachers with high quality materials and curriculum that is aligned with the National Standards. In doing that, I have more time to devote to school management, fund raising activities, and marketing of my school. For all these activities, Pitágoras is now developing help for principals, and I know that will be very useful for me!"

SECTION IV: LESSONS LEARNED

In the first section of this paper, we reviewed existing research on the role of principals in school performance; in the second section we examined ways in which a principal's role may change in an increasingly autonomous setting and how to best support this "new" principal to be most effective; and in the third section we presented the country case studies that were visited as part of this study. In this section we present some of the lessons learned from the visits, as they relate to principals of increasingly autonomous schools, their need for support, and their quest for effectiveness.

Getting a step ahead: the importance of principal preparation and background

Principals that undertake leadership in autonomous school systems will encounter that, all too frequently, the tasks that they are expected to perform include many non-educational ones. Aside from instructional considerations and traditional educational management issues (use of resources such as space, time, and teacher assignments), principals increasingly face responsibilities for transportation, building maintenance, personnel management - including recruitment and dismissal - community involvement strategies, and even marketing. Obviously, the principal's background and preparation as well as the principal's on-the-job training become critical to her success in meeting these challenges without becoming overwhelmed.

In general, aside from the traditional educational management preparation, a strong school-leadership preparation program should also include elements of business administration and public policy. Strategic decisions at the school-level will require sensitivity to the political economy of the local community and an explicit understanding of the interests and incentives of those affected by such decisions. Like a CEO, a principal also needs to know how to get things done through others. While a principal does not need to be an engineer or a sociologist to respond to some of the demands of the job, he or she must learn to identify technically sound support, delegate tasks, and monitor their progress.

A good example of a system that tackles principal preparation issues up-front is the Edmonton Public Schools (EPS). EPS offers long-term courses (a few hours a week, over two years) for aspiring principals, and short-term development courses for principals on the job. In both, EPS mixes a wide range of content that includes the latest references on instructional leadership, management practices, and community involvement strategies. Emphasis is placed on tailoring course curricula to the specific realities of the EPS, that is, to the context of school-based management, outcome accountability, and parental choice. Edmonton understands that the typical university training for school-leaders is necessary but not sufficient to operate within an autonomous school environment.

Administrative support: why and how to provide it

Although strong principal preparation is important, is not enough. Support becomes very critical, especially with regard to administrative and managerial tasks that can occupy enormous amounts of a principal's time, and distract him from his central instructional role. Tasks such as budget preparation and negotiation, budget monitoring and safeguards, building maintenance, and personnel administration came up as difficult challenges that all principals in autonomous schools face. Central bureaucracy's role is nested precisely in offering effective support for principals performing these duties, over and above the instructional and pedagogical management of the school. Most systems that we looked at had found ways of providing some types of administrative and managerial support to schools.

The English reform produced simple software that assisted principals in budgetary planning and monitoring. With brief training, principals and administrative staff in schools became familiar with the use of this user-friendly software that performs budgetary planning and monitoring. Technical assistance for the management of the software is available from the District offices, if needed.

In Edmonton, some administrative functions were kept centralized, such as contract preparation and signing and legal services. Central units that perform these tasks respond to specific requests from principals who have the decision-making authority, but not the administrative capacity to actually do them. The cost of these "centralized activities" is paid by the overhead that is topped-off from school budgets before they are assigned to each school.

An interesting example of how central offices have adjusted their operations is in regards to the maintenance of school buildings. In Edmonton, for example, principals can buy a “maintenance insurance” program, whereby after a yearly charge-back, principals have an on-call team that deals with all maintenance issues in the school. Principals may elect not to use the “maintenance insurance” plan and instead purchase maintenance services through independent contractors. In England, a similar maintenance insurance plan is being tested, but most schools still handle maintenance through their in-house custodial staff.

Instructional support: helping principals perform

At the heart of all tasks performed by a principal will always be her job as an instructional leader within the school. While more equipped to do this task, quite frequently principals in autonomous schools were overwhelmed with other responsibilities and needed assistance to be effective on instructional leadership. Pedagogic support for teachers is usually coordinated by principals, but this job is made easier when such support is well-defined and adequately packaged. There were several excellent examples of successful practices in the case studies.

A good example is the Consulting Services in Edmonton. This is an office located in the Central Office of EPS which gathers experts on numerous curricular and pedagogic areas, including psychological and specialized services. These experts serve as consultants to the system’s schools on a demand-basis, charging a set fee per hour for their services. The principal and the consultant agree on a program to address a specific concern, and the consultant delivers the program under the supervision of both the contractor (the principal) and the Consulting Services Office Director. Surveys, evaluation reports, and school outcomes are all used to monitor the quality of the services provided.

Another good example is the pooling of resources in the Bogotá Concession Program. Some of the private entities that manage concession schools have pooled resources and use, for example, a math teacher in a successful school as a trainer and mentor of teachers in other schools of the network. Aside from being successful, this arrangement has also proven to be progressive, given that a single management institution will tend to have some schools serving wealthy populations and other schools serving economically disadvantaged children.

The Pitágoras network in Brazil (PNS) offers a wide variety of hands-on courses for teachers and a very defined set of textbook and teacher guides. This approach has been successful in supporting principals not only because the textbooks provide a clear, well-defined, and vertically integrated curriculum, but also because the PNS approach guarantees a tightly coupled link between the curriculum and the training experiences that teachers go through. In choosing to participate in the PNS, principals (and teachers) have effectively unified a range of decisions regarding curriculum, materials and staff training, and are then freed up to focus more on the quality of the delivery of the curriculum and the measurement of its outcomes as well as other management and outreach tasks.

Interestingly, the English experience seems to rely more on traditional supervisors at the District level to provide instructional support. Principals do report, however, that District-level supervisors were not always flexible or responsive to school needs, and that they were therefore forced to hire independent consultants. Coordinating such consultants and guaranteeing that their product is relevant to the school's needs requires effort and time from principals, adding a layer of complexity to the challenge of instructional leadership.

Professional development and networking: maintaining commitment and quality

Aside from professional and managerial support, principals also need opportunities for ongoing professional development and a well-structured opportunity to network amongst themselves. For example, both the Edmonton Public Schools and Pitágoras network in Brazil offer short-term courses for principals focused on enhancing their skills both as administrators and as instructional leaders. In Edmonton, personalized coaching is also offered as part of Leadership Services central office, a program that is quite popular and in high demand by principals.

The concession scheme in Bogotá has facilitated networking by principals in concession schools through periodic meetings and attendance at relevant conferences and seminars. In England, we observed principals taking days off their school work to visit other schools and to exchange ideas, mostly on a one-to-one basis with other colleagues. More interestingly, the Leadership Centre at The Institute of Education (University of London) in England has set up a sophisticated web-based program that allows principals to exchange ideas, troubles, and get training. This web-based initiative is not necessarily that innovative in and of itself, but it stands out in that it has been received enthusiastically by principals and is becoming an integral part of principal networking in the country. The Centre is also playing a key role in the delivery of training for new principals, and in the professional development of existing principals through short courses and opportunities to network.

Unless structured in a very clear way, the suggestion that principals visit other schools seemed to be ineffective. Whether because principals are too busy to do it or because the cultural norms of principals are more geared to independence, visits to other schools were only effective when structured and accompanied by some time for discussion and reflection. Principals we spoke to in England and Edmonton did not feel that unstructured visits to other schools were very useful.

The principal as a manager in a larger enterprise: autonomy is not isolation

Principals that are successful leading autonomous schools believe in school-based management and have savored the benefits of making their own decisions and being accountable for them. These principals feel that they are part of a larger effort, and that they are critical managers of such effort. In all of the systems visited (Bogotá, Pitágoras, Edmonton and England), principals felt there is a strong political commitment to school-

based management and that there is a strong alignment between their individual beliefs and those of the central bureaucracies. The culture in the systems values and respects school autonomy.

For some (such as Bogotá and Edmonton) the central office (or managing institutions) successfully act as a facilitator which many times “protects” the schools from excessive bureaucratic demands. In other cases (England, Edmonton, Bogotá), the central office serves as a unit that retro-feeds the school with student achievement results and provides assistance to improve them. These test results allow autonomous schools to benchmark their outcomes and focus on improving, thus ameliorating the risk of isolation that autonomy can bring. In the Pitágoras network, the center acts as an academic guide that enriches the school’s work with materials, training, and networking opportunities.

In this regard, it is critical that autonomous schools that are not performing be assisted with recuperation programs. Both Edmonton and England have these programs in place which include academic and administrative support, but ultimately (in the case of England) may result in the temporary lost of decision-making authority at the school level.

Other functions that are important to autonomous schools and principals include an effective substitute teacher mechanism that relieves schools from this difficult-to-arrange practice. Edmonton is very agile on this front; England continues to struggle, and Bogotá and Pitágoras do not offer this service to their schools. In Bogotá, however, some managing institutions have clear procedures to replace teachers and avoid class cancellations due to teacher absenteeism. Emergency assistance for schools offered by the EPS has proven to be used rarely, but when used it has been very effective. This emergency assistance deals with critical issues such as difficult meetings with parents, legal troubles, or violent behavior in schools; it is offered via telephone, internet or in person when the situation calls for it.

Interestingly, principals in autonomous school systems seem better suited to operate in environments where collaboration between schools is emphasized over competition. Establishing an openly competitive system among principals (for example, assessing them solely through student achievement), with the idea of fostering effectiveness based on results has created tensions both in Edmonton and in England. Principals seem to work better when collaborating between themselves, and when educational quality (and coverage) is considered a responsibility that exceeds that of a single school and catchment area. The Bogotá concession arrangement and the Pitágoras network are good examples of strong collaboration that is not mediated by competition between the schools.

SECTION V: CONCLUSION – IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION POLICY

As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, the current trend in education policy toward decentralization and greater autonomy of schools is still quite strong. Increased autonomy of schools promises a number of possible benefits: among them, greater accountability to parents, more cost effective use of funds, and perhaps improvements in student outcomes. Greater school autonomy also, however, entails some risks. The most salient of these is the risk of school isolation and increased inequities between schools. While some schools may do very well with increased independence, some may founder, and it is often the children of the poorest and least informed parents who end up in failing schools.

It is important for policy makers to recognize up front that while increased autonomy may create opportunities for schools to innovate and excel, autonomy also places a significant burden on schools and particularly on school principals. Research clearly indicates that principals play a critical role in determining the job satisfaction, commitment, and professional development of teachers, as well on shaping the overall school climate. Research also supports the claim that principals can have a significant effect on student outcomes, and that they do so in part by helping to focus the entire school organization on the core school functions of instruction and student learning. While increased school autonomy may offer additional opportunities for principals to align school resources with instruction, the plethora of additional administrative, managerial and marketing tasks often associated with school autonomy can also simply overwhelm the principal, crowding out the central role of instructional guide. To be effective, all principals need support.

Some principals, of course, through a particular amalgam of personality traits, leadership styles, experience, and training do better than others at finding and building their own support networks. As Richard Elmore points out in a recent article on school leadership, however, there is a great temptation among both educational policy makers and administrators to personalize performance (Elmore, 2002). Approached from this perspective, to improve principals' performance in an autonomous system would entail hiring "better" principals, with the right personality and leadership style to get the job done. The problem with this perspective is that it assumes that most of what "effective" principals do cannot be learned, and it absolves the education system from the responsibility of providing ongoing support.

We maintain that much of what principals' need to know and do to be effective in an autonomous school setting can be learned (although it seldom is covered in traditional training programs), and that it is critical to build in institutional support. Effective support can come in a variety of forms (depending in part on system characteristics), but should include: (a) solid principal preparation in non-traditional as well as traditional areas; (b) administrative support; (c) curricular and instructional support; (d) ongoing professional development and networking possibilities; and (e) additional help and systemic responsibility for foundering schools. While centralized provision of support

can greatly facilitate the lives of principals, it is important that the support be agile as well as provided at a reasonable cost. If support systems are thought through at the outset, educational reforms aimed at creating more autonomous schools may be less traumatic, more accepted at the school level, and ultimately, more successful in terms of student outcomes.

Finally, there are still large gaps in the research base on both the overall effectiveness of various autonomous school models, as well as the role of principals and support mechanisms in the relative success or failure to improve student outcomes. This is particularly true in developing country settings. Of the case studies we looked at, the Bogotá experience is still too new to have much hard data; the Pitágoras network in Brazil, although it has been in existence for a while, has only recently begun encouraging schools to participate in achievement testing. The English reform has seen only a modest increase in test scores over a decade of implementation. The Edmonton School District only began a concentrated focus on raising achievement a few years ago (1995), although results appear to be positive thus far. Given that the principal's influence within a school will also vary depending on the cultural, as well as the systemic environment, more research on the principal's role and influence in a range of cultural settings would be a welcome addition to the knowledge base.

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