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WHITE PAPER: Projected Savings from School Reform

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An Analysis of Estimated Financial Savings from De-Regulation, De-Politicization, and School District Consolidation in Delaware County, Indiana

Introduction and Purpose of Study

This study was conducted pursuant to the terms of a grant from the Ball Brothers Foundation with the cooperation of the Indiana Policy Review Foundation. The purpose of the study was to estimate financial savings, if any, from three combined changes in the structure of public school governance in Delaware County, Indiana. These changes envisioned are: (1) substantial de-regulation of Delaware County’s public schools; (2) substantial de-politicization of Delaware County’s public schools; and (3) school *district* consolidation in the county into one single school district with one central office and one school board.

This study appears to be a case of first impression. After a thorough search of the literature, the researcher was unable to find any studies that attempted to measure the financial impact of all three changes set forth above in a single county. The literature is sparse on studies measuring the impact on public schools of the incessant regulation and politicization of the nation’s public schools. The only previous study found was this author’s study in 2009 of twenty-nine Indiana school districts located in one congressional district in an eight county area. In that study the financial impact of the above set forth three changes in the entire congressional district was studied (Abbott, 2009).

What should be brought out immediately is that the purpose of this study was not to argue for or establish evidence for the reducing of Delaware County’s school districts’ central

office staffing
under the current system of public school governance.

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Based upon the researcher's experiences emanating from 14 years as a public school superintendent, 11 years of other experience in the central offices of two school districts, and 17 years as a school attorney and consultant representing over 60 Indiana public school districts, as well as the researcher's continued involvement in the state's public school system as a university faculty member and researcher – school districts'

central office staffing is

not

excessive

in the State of Indiana. In fact, many school districts' central offices are under-staffed for the responsibilities mandated by the Indiana General Assembly, U.S. Congress, and a legion of state and federal administrative agencies. If the current system of highly regulated, highly politicized, and district centralized governance is to continue, it should be expected that more and more school districts will

need to add central staff

to comply with each new years' laws and regulations that are passed to govern and control public school operations.

Of course, adding school administrators is not politically popular. Few education policy makers as well as the electorate fully understand the current system of governance of public education. This is a system that governs by law, rule, and mandate. It is a system which requires a multitude of central office positions to administrate and carry out these laws, rules, and mandates. Essentially, the more laws, rules, and mandates passed each year by educational policy makers require more and more central office administrators to serve as those policy maker's compliance officers.

This study is limited to only the seven K-12 public school districts in Delaware County, Indiana. An examination was undertaken of potential financial savings in central office administrator and support staff compensation and expenses that might be available in the event of consolidation of the seven school districts into one unified county unit, with a single central office and school board, *but only if there was substantial □ de-regulation and de-politicization of the new county-wide school district*

. It is important to note that this study purports to be no more than a rough estimate of the financial savings that might be available to school districts. It should also be emphasized that any such financial savings are dependent upon the reform of not only these individual school districts' governance structures (by consolidating into one single county-wide school district), but are also dependent upon the Indiana General Assembly and the U.S. Congress

substantially

de-regulating

the new public school district created herein and creating a new *depoliticized*

governance system of public schools in Indiana. This Depoliticization can start with changing from elected to appointed school boards.

Methodology

Upon the grantors employing the researcher to conduct this study, the researcher researched the Indiana public records law. It was decided that the kind of information needed for the study could be obtained from access to public records as required by Indiana's public records law. [\[1\]](#)

The researcher then developed spreadsheets of data needed and descriptions of that data. (See Appendixes A-E attached hereto.) The requested data included all compensation and expenses paid to or on behalf of all central office employees and all school board members. Fiscal year 2009-2010 data was requested as that was the most recent data available at the start of the study. On September 20, 2010 the researcher began to send out public records requests to the school districts which were to be studied. (See Appendix F attached hereto for the form letter used.)

After the mailings to the superintendents went out in September of 2010, the researcher answered questions from the participating school districts. The researcher offered to visit each school to collect the data. Only one of the seven school districts did not collect all the data requested and did not prepare the spreadsheet for the researcher. The researcher is deeply grateful for all those districts who did so prepare the spreadsheet. Although one district did not provide all of the documents requested, the researcher however was able to prepare the spreadsheets by using the data from the documents provided.

The researcher then reviewed the data and calculated the costs for fiscal year 2009-2010 of the particular employment positions studied in each central office. Not all central office positions were included in the study and the cost calculations. Positions such as school bus drivers, bus mechanics, skilled trades, custodians (other than central office), and computer technicians were eliminated from the study, as the researcher determined they would exist under either the current governance structure or the proposed new governance structure. Likewise, special education personnel who provide special services (e.g. psychologists, speech-therapy, and occupational or physical therapists) directly to students were not included in the cost

calculations for each district for the same reason.

The researcher was able to identify from the data examined which positions would be included in the study and for which the costs could be calculated. Those positions were all management or supervisory personnel and their certified and non-certified support staff positions. It also included, but was not limited to, staff positions in the human resource department, the academic or instruction department, the special education department, and some other miscellaneous positions.

After the researcher calculated the central office costs for the positions for each school district selected for the study, the researcher constructed a proposed central office staffing structure for the new county-wide consolidated school district in Delaware County. The *freedom school model* of public school governance was used as the guideline in constructing the staffing in the new central office (Abbott, 2008). The essential tenants of that model of public school governance are: (1) county-wide school districts with appointed school boards; (2) substantial de-regulation of public schools in the new county-wide unit; (3) significant de-politicization of public schools by moving to appointed school boards based upon expertise; (4) imposition of free market concepts by bidding out the academic operations of local schools to principals and senior teacher leaders as a part of a single unified leadership team; (5) empowerment of these leadership teams to the extent that they would have control over the academic operations of the school without political or bureaucratic constraints, while at the same time they would exercise that empowerment in a negotiated full accountability context that would include multiple measures of school quality; (6) parent choice of public schools anywhere within their county; and (7) weighted student funding formula with money following each child (Abbott, 2008).

The freedom school model is similar, but not the same, as Hill's (2006) portfolio approach to governing public schools.

[\[2\]](#)

Delaware County's new unified school district's staffing cost was then calculated using the compensation costs of the same or similar positions that existed in the various central office positions in the county. If no similar position existed, or if the data for the position was not fully provided, the researcher estimated the costs using the generally prevailing salary structure in the county, or the largest school district's salary structure, whichever was the highest, as the cost for the new position. Thus the estimated costs of the new county-wide unit are given in terms of 2009-2010 costs as opposed to current wages and salaries.

After calculating the cost of the new county-wide school district, the researcher determined which positions in each school district that existed under the old model of school governance would not be needed under the new model of school governance. The costs of such current positions that would be no longer needed were then calculated. The estimated 2009-2010

central office staffing costs of the new county-wide school district were then subtracted from the fiscal year 2009-2010

actual total costs of the seven school districts' central office positions under the current system of public school governance. The remainder was determined to be the estimated annual central office savings from moving to the new governance design.

School board expenses and school board member compensation were likewise calculated for each school district in Delaware County. Total school board expenses and compensation for fiscal year 2009-2010 for each of the school districts in the county was calculated and totaled. Then a new school board governing structure for the new county-wide unit was developed. After that, the estimated compensation and expenses for the new governing structure of the county-wide school board was calculated, again using 2009-2010 fiscal year dollars as the basis for the estimate. To determine particular kinds of school board expenses, either the highest actual expense incurred by a single school board was used, or an average individual expense item of all seven school boards was used. The estimated school board expenses and school board member compensation for the new county-wide school district operating under the proposed new governance structure was then subtracted from the fiscal year Delaware County total of actual school board expenses and compensation to determine the net school board savings estimated by moving to the new school governance structure.

Upon calculation of the estimated net central office staffing savings and estimated net school board savings for the county, these two items were then added together to determine an estimated total net savings for Delaware County by moving to the new governance model.

As the last phase of the study, each school superintendent of the seven school districts in Delaware County was given the proposed new structure and the estimated cost of the new freedom model of school governance for the new consolidated county-wide school district. Each superintendent was also given the potential staffing reductions in Delaware County to review. Superintendents were given the opportunity to comment on these costs and proposed staffing reductions. Their comments would have served as a check of the accuracy of the estimated projections of savings. The superintendents' comments also were to allow a comparison and an opportunity to contrast their views with the researcher's views of the proposed structure of the new unified school district. They were also given the option of having their comments included in the final draft of this report. Only one superintendent chose to comment He did not authorize

his comments to be included in this report.

Findings

Delaware County – Central Office Savings. The estimated central office staffing actual costs for the positions studied in the seven school districts in Delaware County for fiscal year 2009-2010 was found to be \$7,122,555.

(See Appendix G). The projected and estimated central office staffing costs for the new county-wide school district was determined to be \$2,639,834. (See Appendix H). Thus, subtracting the 2009-2010

estimated

central office staffing cost (\$2,639,834) of the new county-wide unit from the estimated 2009-2010

actual

cost (\$7,122,555) of the central office staffs of the seven individual Delaware County school districts produces an estimated net savings in dollars. Thus, the estimated net annual savings in central office staffing costs by consolidating, de-regulating, and de-politicizing public schools in Delaware County is \$4,482,721.

Delaware County – School Board Savings. The estimated school board actual costs for the seven school districts in Delaware County for fiscal year 2009-2010 is \$143,250. (See Appendix J). The projected school board costs for the new county-wide school district is \$32,437. (See Appendix J). Subtracting the 2009-2010 estimated

cost (\$32,437) of the new school board under the new county-wide unit from the estimated 2009-2010 annual actual

cost (\$143,250) of the individual school boards of the seven Delaware County school districts, produces an estimated net savings in dollars. Thus, the estimated net annual savings in school board costs by consolidating, de-regulating, and de-politicizing public school districts in Delaware County is \$110,813.

Delaware County – Total Savings. Adding the estimated annual savings of central office costs (\$4,482,721) to the estimated annual savings of school board costs (\$110,813) produces a total combined annual savings in central office staffing and school board expenses of \$4,593,534.

Limitations of Study

This study has a variety of limitations. One is the fact that not all central office or school board expenses are easily accounted for under Indiana's school accounting system. Most, if not all, of Indiana school districts pay some central office and school board expenses by claim. For example, one school district may have a director of employee relations on salary, while another may have legal counsel on retainer to do essentially the same thing, i.e. to bargain and administer labor contracts. The school district who has an in-house director of employee relations will show that as a central office cost, while the other one that has an outside labor attorney will pay by claim and will not show as an administrative central office salary expense. However, these outside vendor expenditures are directly attributable to the costs of operating a central office and a school board. The researcher did not want to burden the school districts with the inconvenience of reviewing each and every claim from each and every vendor to determine their applicability to the study.

As the researcher has personal knowledge, from his involvement with over 60 school districts in the State of Indiana, he is aware that school districts almost always have expenses paid by vendor claims for central office and school board activities. It is not unusual that these expenses paid by claim are substantial in amount. Thus, central office and school board expenses are likely understated in this study to the extent these actual expenses were paid by claim and not by salary.

The researcher relied on the good faith and expertise of the school districts that elected to collect the data and prepare the spreadsheets to record the data that was requested by the researcher. There was no way to double check the accuracy or completeness of the data provided by the school districts. In fact, the researcher believes there indeed may be some errors provided in the data. For example, the State's required teacher retirement contribution rate was 7.25% of salary for the fiscal year 2009-2010, yet some school districts showed in their data significantly less contribution that is required by the State. Also, the public employee retirement fund required a retirement contribution of 6.5% of salary for the calendar year 2009, yet several school districts showed significantly less contribution that is required by the State. Both retirement plans, in addition to these rates, require the teacher or other school employee to also pay 3.0% of salary into the respective retirement fund. Nearly all, if not all, school employers in Indiana paid the teacher's and administrator's 3.0% required share. Thus, for teachers and administrators the effective rate of contribution is likely to have been 10.25% of salary for fiscal year 2009-2010, and for other employees was likely to have been 9.0% of salary. Not all school districts in the study reported these expenses at these levels. Thus, retirement plan costs are likely understated.

Also, some school districts reported no travel, conference, or supply expenses, or reported fewer expenses as customarily expected. Some districts reported that they do not track these types of expenses back to the central office or school board, but lump them in with other expenses of the school district. Thus, central office and school board expenses are likely understated in this study to the extent that there were underreporting omissions or errors. However, there may be over-reporting errors that may partially, or wholly, negate the under-reporting errors. In a study with this much data, there can also be errors in inputting and manipulating the data.

Also, the accounting system of the participating school districts which was mandated by the State of Indiana is inadequate to fully track all the central office and school board expenses. The State does not require all the expenses to be separately identified and categorized in a single place for the central office and school board. Thus districts can lump these types of expenses into other account categories which do not fully disclose all the actual central office and school board expenses.

The researcher also relied on employment position titles to identify the main purpose and activity of the positions studied. It would have been better if full, accurate, and complete position descriptions were available for study. The researcher chose to not request these, as his experience is that they seldom exist, and if they do exist, they are often not fully accurate. Studying the actual job activities of all these positions for a sample of time would have produced a more accurate description of the purpose and main activities of the positions included in the study. This would have required considerably more resources and time. It would also be a greater intrusion into the affairs of the school districts studied. However, it was the researcher's experience and knowledge of public school central office operations, that job titles usually fairly describe the general nature of the position, at least to the extent as to whether its main function is to comply with the many responsibilities imposed by the multitude of state and federal laws and regulations.

Further, one of the districts declined to provide the data on group insurance enrollment of each central office employee. Rather than engage in further action under the Indiana public records law, the researcher decided to conduct the study without this data. Thus, the actual costs of the current structure of public school governance is understated to the extent that it does not include the costs of that district's group insurance plan for its central office employees and school board members. To the extent that the non-reporting district's salary and other compensation costs for specific positions were used to construct the new governance model, likewise the costs of the new governance model are under-estimated by the amount of the group insurance costs of those positions from the non-reporting district that were used to establish the central office staffing of the new governance structure. The net effect is that the net savings of moving to the new governance structure are under-estimated to the extent that

the insurance costs of those employee positions from the non-reporting district that were not used in the establishment of the central office staffing of the new governance model. This amount is unknown and therefore cannot be estimated. There were 73 full and part-time positions reported by the school district that did not report the individual cost of group insurance for central office employees. Of those positions, 32 were used in the development of the new central office staffing model under the new governance model. Thus, there are 41 full or part-time positions from the non-reporting district that were not used in the new central office staffing structure. To the extent that any of these 41 positions have group insurance costs, the actual estimated net savings is under-estimated in the amount of the total cost of the group insurance program for these 41 positions.

Finally, the development of the structure for the new consolidated county-wide school district is somewhat speculative, since no existing county-wide school district in the nation has been de-regulated and de-politicized to the extent that the freedom school model would require. It is not known for certain as to exactly what central office positions would actually be needed in the new governance structure. The researcher's personal biases might also affect the design of the structure of the newly formed county-wide school district, notwithstanding the researcher's extensive involvement in the operations of public school districts.

Discussion and Review of Literature

Consolidation of School Districts

This study is less about school district consolidation and more about the potential for cost savings that may result from the de-regulation and de-politicization of Delaware County's public school districts, coupled with school district consolidation. Any estimated savings from school district consolidation likely will disappear without the de-regulation and de-politicization of the local schools and school districts in Delaware County. There are many large school districts throughout the country, even some on a county-wide level, that are large bureaucratic organizations with hundreds of central office staff members, many of whom are busy working hard to fulfill the compliance activities mandated by their state legislature, their state board of education, Congress, the United States Department of Education, and a plethora of other state and federal administrative agencies who adopt rules that govern the nation's public schools.

This study is not an argument that individual small schools should be consolidated

into larger schools. [3] Under the freedom school model, no individual school is proposed to be closed or consolidated. The only consolidation that occurs is at the central office and school board level. Nor is this study an argument that under the present governance system smaller districts should be consolidated into larger districts. The consolidation of school districts is simply a function of the de-regulation and de-politicization of public schools under the freedom school model.

With far fewer laws and rules governing public schools, and with elected political influences substantially removed from the system, there is less need for a multitude of small school districts with elected politicians at the helm steering the school ship.

Larger school districts may actually encourage and assist in reform efforts involving public schools. Hannaway (1998) conducted a study of whether school districts make a difference in advancing standards-based education reform. She found that the results of progress varied systematically with district size and to a lesser extent with district poverty, and that larger district size appeared to contribute to reform progress in significant ways. She further found that the results were evident at both the district level and the school level.

This new county-wide larger Delaware County school district does not prohibit the school district from empowering the individual schools in terms of the academic operations of the school. There is a growing consensus in favor of greater school-level responsibility for instructional decision-making and student academic performance (Hill, 1997). This is what the freedom school model does. It empowers schools while at the same time places real and stringent accountability for results at the school level. This is wholly unlike the ill-fated site based decision making “reforms” of the 1980’s and early 1990’s. Seldom did they go far enough in terms of empowerment of local school building staff. Typically they simply replaced the school board as a micro-managing body with a parent and staff council, who micro-managed as well. Further, superintendents and school boards typically did not achieve de-centralization that impacted teaching and learning positively because they did not give the power of the budget to the local school staff (Ouchi, 2004b). Site-based management often became just one more failed education reform.

De-regulation and its Impact

De-regulation is at the heart of this study. Without substantial de-regulation the lion’s share of any anticipated savings will quickly disappear into the darkness and mist of failed school reforms that clutter the nation’s educational landscape. Entire jobs and departments in the central office become redundant and unnecessary in a de-regulated environment. The

largest part of the savings appears to be from the elimination of central office positions in the seven Delaware County school districts that have regulatory compliance as their main purpose.

Some of the central office positions that are primarily focused on complying with the myriad of laws and government regulations include the special education administrators and their support staff. Special education is perhaps the most highly regulated of all of public education programs, with its IEP's, GEP's, RTI's, case conferences, mediation, due process procedures, and other rules and procedures that are required by law or bureaucratic mandate. If the free market can be trusted to assure that children with special education needs are adequately educated so that these children can reach their potential, then the massive amount of laws and rules become unnecessary. As a consequence, many of the central office administrative positions likewise become unnecessary. All that needs to be done to assure an adequate education of children with special needs is for the very same state and federal legislators who continue to pass more and more laws regulating and controlling special education, to pass a weighted student funding formula that includes considerably higher amounts for children with special needs. The free market will then take care of meeting the needs. There are also many teachers and principals who have a passion for special needs children. Their integrity will assure these children's special needs are met.

Human resources departments also contain specialists whose central office positions have typically been created in response to new laws or administrative regulations. Such laws and administrative regulations imposing and governing such matters as collective bargaining; hiring and firing of personnel; employee benefits; overtime; retirement plans and benefits; state licensing laws and regulations; and other human resource activities have served as the impetus in establishing costly human resource departments in school districts' central offices. In a de-centralized and de-regulated model of public education governance many of these human resource central office positions become redundant, as many activities either simply disappear or are moved to the building level and placed under the jurisdiction of the principal and school leadership team.

Finally, the instruction or academic department has spawned a multitude of central office positions in the past several decades to implement such laws, and their regulations, as the Leave No Child Behind Act (NCLBA); Title I; state accountability laws and regulations; state standardized testing laws and regulations; high school exit exams laws and regulations; staff development laws and regulations; laws and regulations governing what must be taught; the new national curriculum; and many other laws and regulations governing academic matters in public school districts.

Again, many of these academic or instructional central office positions become redundant under the new de-centralized and de-regulated structure. Many activities either simply disappear in the new de-regulated environment or are moved to the building level and placed under the jurisdiction of the principal and school leadership team.

School districts are sinking in an ocean of state and federal statutes, state and federal administrative regulations, and other bureaucratic mandates and requirements that increase in number and length each year. The local public schools at the building level are especially drowning in law, legality, and bureaucratic processes. Seldom are laws or regulations repealed, but the preference of legislators and bureaucrats is to load more and more laws and regulations onto the ship of public education. This has resulted in public schools' ballasts to become overweight which has destabilized the ships and caused them all to begin sinking into the vast ocean of educational mediocrity. Howard (1994) observed:

“Certainty, we seem to think, is important to law.... But look at what we've built: a legal Colossus unprecedented in the history of civilization, with legal dictates numbering in the millions of words and growing larger every day. Our regulatory system has become

an instruction manual. It tells us and bureaucrats exactly what to do and how to do it. Detailed rule after detailed rule addresses every eventuality, or at least every

situation lawmakers and bureaucrats can think of. Is it a coincidence that almost every encounter with government is an exercise in frustration?”

Unfortunately all of this regulation and control has an unintended consequence. It squelches creativity and innovation at the school level. Principals and teachers are so busy worrying about complying with all these laws and regulations that they have little time or energy for creativity and innovation. Many have essentially become robotic policy compliance machines. Because state and federal legislators don't trust the principals and teachers to do the right thing for students, they pass more and more laws to control them. This has resulted in the de-emphasis of the professionalism of those who work closest with children – the teachers and principals. It has largely deskilled teachers and principals at the very time educational policy makers are clamoring for more qualified teachers and principals. This deskilling has robbed teachers and principals of the opportunity to exercise one of the hallmarks of a profession, to wit: the exercise of independent judgment.

It is the purpose of this study to illustrate whether, and if so, how much, the current highly regulated and highly politicized structure of public school governance costs in financial terms. It is limited to school district central office and school board costs. The estimated net financial savings from moving away from the current structure of public school governance in Delaware County is \$4,593,534. Is it worth \$4,593,534 to the taxpayers and citizens of Delaware County to support the current governance system of public education, particularly given the fact that this estimated cost savings can be achieved *without closing a single school*? Is it worth the lost opportunity cost of \$4,593,534 that could otherwise be spent on teachers and students to improve academic performance of children?

It is important to understand that this estimated cost is a rough estimate. The researcher does not represent that this is the exact actual cost of the over-regulation and over-politicization of public schools. However, the surprising result of this study does suggest that the costs of such over-regulation and over-politicization are substantial.

The impact of de-regulation is to diminish the need for the bureaucracy that exists in public education at all levels: at the United States Department of Education; at other federal administrative agencies; at the various state boards of education; at state departments; school boards; and at school district central offices. Ouchi (2004b) reminds us of the dangers of bureaucracy in public education. He declares that decisions made at the top of a large bureaucracy will invariably suffer from the absence of detailed information about local conditions at each site, will be slow to cope with any unusual conditions, and will tend to enforce standardized procedures on every situation, no matter how poorly those procedures may fit the particular position.

The research has historically not been able to confirm the contribution of administrative expenditures to student achievement. Some research even suggests that the value of administrative expenditures may, indeed, be negative. The implicit view that school administration functions as a direct contributor to student achievement is limited. (Hannaway, 1992; Bidwell & Kasarda, 1975).

Honig argues that policy ought to be built out of practice which means that central office administrators learn about schools' practices, decisions, and experiences and then use that information to guide central office policy. She views that principals and others who work with students on a daily basis have valuable and immediate information about students' needs and strengths that is important to good and relevant decisions about school improvement. She cautions that central office administrators typically lack this local knowledge. She concludes that

traditional models of central office implementation, bureaucracy, and policy making do not provide appropriate guides for what building policy from practice involves, and actually focus on the opposite – how to mandate practice with policy. (Honig, 2003). Under the freedom school model of school governance, these decisions and policies are made by those closest to the children – the principal and the teacher leadership team.

De-politicization and its Impact

Public education throughout the nation, and even in many places throughout the globe, takes place within a highly charged political environment. Tooms, Kretovics & Smialek (2007) observed that there may be no more highly politicized work environment than public education. Educators throughout America complain about the daily controlling influence of politics throughout the nation's schools. Mijares (1994) even suggested school politics can be compared to "those repulsive little creatures we call parasites." He stated that both politics and parasites are destructive, and when threatened or disturbed, they merely tighten their grip and increase their damage. Struggles for power and other political tensions are fundamental dimensions of central office administration as learning and basic realities of central office life (Honig, 2008). These struggles for power are inevitable under public education's flawed systemic design which has been established by state legislatures, but more and more has been taken over by the U.S. Congress by their wide-sweeping laws such as NCLBA, Title I, Race to the Top, and special education laws.

Every state's constitution makes it clear that the responsibility to establish and maintain a system of public schools in each of those states lies squarely with the state legislature. Although state legislatures are given general authority to govern the public schools and thus may go beyond these minimal constitutional mandates, the constitutional prescription must be satisfied (Alexander & Alexander, 2009.) Courts have consistently ruled that the power over public education is an essential attribute of state sovereignty of the same order as the power to tax, to exercise police power, and to provide for the welfare of the citizenry (Alexander & Alexander, 2009).

But what state legislators and members of Congress apparently fail to recognize is that all this legislation and rule making is largely unnecessary. Educational outcomes can be better achieved by empowering teachers and principals as to all aspects of academic school operations, and then hold them accountable to specifically defined quality criteria. The marketplace of school choice will be a far better regulator of school quality than distant legislators could ever be.

This is not a call for a totally unregulated public school governance system. Neither is this an argument that there is not a proper role for government educational policymakers. However, this role ought to be a role of assuring parents, students, and taxpayers that the data local schools report to the State of Indiana is accurate and believable, and then to make that data available to the public. Monitoring this activity will take far fewer resources than the current governance system requires in its failed attempts to assure public school quality.

Another appropriate role for educational policy makers is to negotiate with the leadership group of each school and renew, or not renew, their school management contracts. Someone has to make a decision as to whether the school's academic and overall performance warrant continuation of the school leadership group's management contract.

The public school system's day-to-day operation in Indiana is largely controlled at the local level by local school boards. They are however subject to a multitude of state and federal laws and administrative regulations. Despite this, these local school boards do have some discretionary authority. An example is in the area of personnel. It is not infrequent that that school boards, hemmed in by these laws and regulations, seek to exercise their authority and power over school personnel in the day to day management of public schools. Indiana school boards have the ultimate control over every school employee whose employment, or termination of employment, is subject to school board approval under the state's statutes. How can a principal be held responsible for academic results in his or her school, when she or he has no ultimate control over the staff in his or her building? All but a handful of Indiana's school boards are elected by the local school district's voters, at least those few who choose to vote in the school board election. It is not uncommon for school boards to make personnel and other decisions based upon their impact on their electability in future elections.

The legislature has no real and meaningful control over these school boards except to the extent the legislature has the constitutional authority to pass a law to govern local school board and school district operations, a not uncommon event. The legislature could exercise more real control (not just apparent control) over the local school district's operations, and better fulfill its constitutional mandate to establish and maintain a uniform system of public schools, if it redesigned the system to include an appointed school board as opposed to an elected school board. If each legislator would be responsible for one or more appointments to the local school board in his or her legislative district, more ultimate long-term control over the legislator's local school district could be obtained. This newly appointed board would better allow the legislature to carry out its mandate to maintain and operate a public school system because at least it would be responsive to legislators elected by the county's voters. An appointed school board is

not likely to have school board members who are single issue members or who are controlled by special interest groups, as is not unusual in the current highly political set-up of many of the nation's school districts.

Politics has been variously defined. The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2009) defines *politics* in part as (1) the art or science of government; (2) the art or science concerned with guiding or influencing governmental policy; (3) the art or science concerned with winning and holding control over a government; (4) political actions, practices, or policies; (5) political affairs or business; *especially* : competition between competing interest groups or individuals for power and leadership (as in a government);... (7) political activities characterized by artful and often dishonest practices;....

This researcher, during his 35 plus years of involvement in public education as a public school teacher, central office staff employee, superintendent of schools, school attorney and consultant, and university teacher has seen frequent examples of all of these definitions in the course of conduct of elected school board members, central office staff, interest groups, and community activists.

The Oxford English Dictionary (2009) offers a variety of definitions of *politics*, including (1) the theory or practice of government or administration; and (2) actions concerned with the acquisition or exercise of power, status, or authority. The Oxford Dictionary of Social Sciences (2002) defines *politics* broadly as the ways in which people gain, use, and lose power. For Max Weber (Murvar, 1964) *power* was the ability to exert control over people, even against their will. He opined that power is basic to the organization of social action and the pursuit of interests. Weber argued that power when it is accepted as legitimate and requires no direct coercion, is better described as authority. The Oxford Dictionary of Social Sciences (2002) defines *authority* as power that is recognized as legitimate by both those who possess it and those who are subject to it.

Many political philosophers have historically accepted the definition of politics to be

something like the science and art of government that deals with the form, organization, and administration of a state or a part of a state (Mason, 1990). However, there is considerable disagreement regarding the definition of the term (Burns, 2000). There has been considerable support from writers for the proposition that politics has to do solely and uniquely with the activities of the state (see Crick, 1971; Laski, 1931; Pickles, 1964; Miller, 1962; Heywood, 1997). There are, however, writers who have challenged this view as too narrow. They seek a broader definition. For example, Crick (1971) and Miller (1962) argue that politics has to do with the resolution of conflict between individuals or groups, or at least its regulation and management. Crick (1971) also suggested that politics has to do with the preservation of order within a particular society or group. Hague, Harrop & Breslin (1992[1982]) viewed politics as involving processes of collective decision-making in societies and or groups.

Another alternative definition is that politics has to do with the exercise of power (Duverger, 1974; Leftwich, 1984; Lukes, 1981 [1974]). As such, the current literature generally expresses that politics is an integral aspect of all social life, something that occurs between two or more people. (Burns, 2000; Mouffe, 1993; Finlayson & Martin, 1997). However, Burns (2000) believes the view that politics is an integral part of social life is too narrow, as from a deep ecological standpoint politics can exist if just one person interacts with the environment. Burns argues that whether a situation is or is not a social one is irrelevant so far as its status as a political situation is concerned. He insists that the fundamental question of all politics, and what characterizes a situation as a political situation, is precisely this practical question of “what policy ought to be adopted?” Heywood (1997) claimed that this last view that politics is an integral aspect of all social life is the broadest and the most radical definition of politics available in the current literature. It thus is clear that these alternative accounts of the nature of politics are indeed much broader than the view that politics has to do simply with the activities of the state.

Even though the state conception of politics has at one time been dominant among many political philosophers, Mason (1990) explains that there are three other views of an appropriate definition of politics have later been expressed. One is a conception that politics is about *power*, and that politics should be defined in terms of power relations, and any phenomenon which is significantly structured by power is political. Mason also suggests that there is another conception of politics called the *conflict* conception. This conception maintains that the essence of politics is conflict between people, and regards a situation as political if it contains a conflict of policy preferences. Finally, he identifies a third conception of politics, to wit: *resource allocation*. Here politics is concerned with the distribution of resources, and any method by which persons allocate them is political.

In regards to this third concept of politics, Mason, Leavitt, and Chaffee (2002) offer

the idea that politics is a neutral term and add that influencing resource allocation implies opportunities exist to alter the outcome of a process. They further state that allocation means decisions are being made about how scarce resources are divided. Resources mean not only money, but also time, staff, or other inputs in a process (Counts, 2003).

Anyone who has worked in a public school knows that politics is much more than just the earlier view that politics is the science and art of government that deals with the form, organization, and administration of a state or a part of a state. Politics is an expansive concept in public schools that goes far beyond this thought. Power, conflict, and resource allocation are frequent occurrences in the day-to-day governance of public schools. The *resolution of conflict* between individuals or groups, which helps preserve order in the schoolhouse, is also a common occurrence in public schools and fits in with Crick's and Miller's views.

The exercise of power is a common occurrence as well. Anytime a legislature passes a new law controlling schools, any time a school board passes a new school board policy, and any time a superintendent or central office staff member issues a new directive, it is the *exercise of power*. When the legislature sets the current years' school finance and revenue distribution formula, when a school board adopts its budget, and when a superintendent or central office member approves or disapproves of a school building level expense, a *resource allocation* has occurred. Thus, all these activities support the argument that *politics* in the school setting can appropriately be defined as (1) the exercise of power; (2) conflict resolution; and (3) resource allocation.

Politics exist in public education both within the organization and without the organization. Power brokers and influencers outside of the organization include employee unions; special interest groups; community activists; foundation executives; business firms, associations, and organizations; state and federal legislators; state and federal administrative agency bureaucrats; and not the least - consultants, book authors, and book publishers who are constantly pushing schools to adopt their fixes to what ails public education.

Within the organization politics exist among any two or more people engaged in any work or social event. This includes school board members; the superintendent of schools; other central office staff members; principals; teachers and other building level employees; teacher union and other employee union building and district union representatives; and even students [\[4\]](#) and

their parents.

Organizational politics is defined in many different ways. A synthesis of research that summarizes some of these definitions was provided by Zhou and Ferris (1995). According to these authors, organizational politics include: ingratiation exhibited by individuals (Wortman & Linsenmeier, 1977); behavior of interest groups to use power to influence organizational decision making (Pettigrew, 1973); a social influence process with both functional and dysfunctional consequences (Ferris & Mitchell, 1987); and behavior strategically designed to maximize short-term or long-term self-interest.

Evidence of the widespread presence of organizational politics is provided in the literature (Tooms, Kretovics & Smialek, 2007). Ferris and Kacmar (1992) explained that, "Politics in organizations is simply a fact of life". Gandz and Murray (1980) in their study of organizational politics reported that 60% of their survey respondents agreed with the statement: "most casual conversation appears to be about things I would consider workplace politics." Parker, Dipboye, and Jackson (1995) expanded these concepts by concluding in their descriptive study that "the perception of organization politics is truly a significant dimension of individuals' perception of their work environment."

Both within and without the organization, certainly the exercise of power, the resolution of conflict, and the allocation of resources are contemporary issues in public education. The conflict of resource allocation continually exists. Many school districts frequently engage in a multi-sided constant tug-of-war, with school boards, central office staff, principals, teachers, union representatives, interest groups, and community activists all frequent players in this real life-game of tug-of-war. Much time and energy is spent by these players who participate in the game.

But it doesn't have to be that way. All the players know school boards are elected and thus subject to the whims and vicissitudes of politics. The current system is designed for this political conflict and thus actually encourages conflict under the guise of employee and public "input." Why not trust the parents to give their "input" by allowing them to choose their children's schools? Why not trust teachers and principals to provide a school that parents as consumers will elect to send their children to after they consider other alternative choices of schools? Why not trust the free market to assist in the allocation of resources? By changing to a market driven public school structure much of the external conflict that finds its way into the schoolhouse can be avoided.

Political influence in and upon schools and school districts is particularly important to principals and school superintendents. In a study of 500 Midwestern United States school principals, Tooms, Kretovics & Smialek (2007) found that the respondents believed politics are operative in their schools and that is not necessarily for the good. Most respondents (over 90%) agreed with the statement that “the existence of workplace politics is common to most public schools” and 95% agreed with the statement “the higher you go in an organization the more political the climate becomes.” Mijares (1994) even commented that superintendents live and die by school politics, and that tumultuous political activity has the capacity to destroy schools, careers, and lives, as well as shatter public confidence.

Tooms, Kretovics & Smialek (2007) also commented that it was important to note that the respondents generally believed schools would be better off without all of the politics, as indicated by the following statements: “organizations free of politics are happier and healthier than those where there are a lot of politics” (75% of respondents in agreement), and “politics helps public schools function effectively” (65% of respondents disagreeing). Is it not important that policy makers listen to those who lead individual schools? Why do policy makers continue to present to the American public a system of school governance filled with internal and external school politics? Do they not trust the market to provide accountability?

This is not to suggest that either the freedom school model or portfolio models of school governance will eliminate all politics in public education. There would be considerable politics and lobbying efforts when the state legislature sets the dollar amounts and distribution of the various classes of the weighted student funding formula. There will continue to be internal politics inside the organization as long as there are two or more people involved, or according to Burns (2000), even a single person.

Conclusions and Recommendations

An estimated potential annual savings of \$4,593,534, or over 45 million dollars during the next decade, is obviously a significant amount, particularly when one considers that this savings is for a single county. Indiana has 92 counties. If the Delaware County savings is typical of the average county’s savings, then Indiana *each year* might be able to devote over 400 million more dollars to teachers and students. This could result in over 4 billion dollars during the next decade being redirected to teachers and students. All of this can be accomplished without any tax increase. All of this can be accomplished without reducing the compensation of a single teacher.

Instead, this money is spent on bureaucrats and politicians. This is money that is currently being spent in the system of public education largely as a result of the over-regulation and over-politicization of education. The current governance system of public education allows a vast number of elected offices for those who aspire to become a politician and control the public schools through the exercise of their own power. However, there is absolutely no evidence that this system of governance directed by politicians results in high student academic achievement. The question is – Is this system that politicians control and dominate good for children and their education? Can far more be done by empowering those who work with children on a daily basis?

Although it may be fair to argue the exact amount of estimated savings, it is surely widely accepted that the sheer amount of laws and regulations that have been placed upon the backbone of public education have resulted in at least *some* jobs in public education having been created in response to all these myriad state and federal laws and regulations. The primary purpose of many of these central office jobs is to administer and comply with all these laws and regulations.

The estimated amount of savings, \$4,593,534 is money that could be redirected to the local schools, and placed under the jurisdiction of principals and the school leadership teams consisting of some of the school building's teachers. There are 36 public schools in Delaware County. The estimated savings divided by this number of schools results in the amount of \$127,598 that could be spent *in every single school in Delaware County every year.*

This is money that can be spent in classrooms for teachers and students to improve student learning. This amount of \$127,598 that could be directed to the classrooms is consistent with the amount found in the study of all public school districts in the 3rd

Congressional District in Indiana. (Abbott 2009). That study found that an estimated \$121,310 could be redirected to the classrooms of each individual school in the study group.

During the past few years various politicians have campaigned on the platform of pushing more funding into the classroom and away from non-classroom activities. We have seen the introduction of bills in legislatures throughout the country calling for 65% (or other such percentages) of total school expenditures to be spent in the classroom. The new proposed de-centralized, de-regulated, and de-politicized school governance structure would give Indiana an opportunity to fulfill this goal. Perhaps this goal may only be achieved through de-regulating, de-politicking, and consolidating governing bodies and central office staffs.

Ouchi (2004a) observed that the typical urban school district's personnel and budgeting systems leave principals without much say in hiring or allocating resources. But this is true for many rural and suburban school districts as well. Authority and power is concentrated at the central office level. It is not unusual to see that principals may only control five percent or so of a school's budget, with the remainder controlled by the central office. (Ouchi, 2004a). Little discretion in budgeting and personnel decisions exists at the building level. But it is the principal and teachers who are expected to produce perfect learning for all students (i.e. that all students will pass the required standardized testing by the school year 2013-2014 as mandated by the NCLBA).

Policy makers need to decide – do they want to spend the public's money on a failed system of laws-regulations-rules-mandates that has created innumerable central office jobs and school board member jobs far removed from children and whose main purpose is compliance with these laws, regulations, rules, and mandates. Or do they want to spend that money in the classrooms helping teachers teach and students learn? Do the Indiana General Assembly and the U.S. Congress have the desire and courage to stop micro-managing public schools, give teachers and principals the decision-making power that is necessary for them to conduct themselves as professionals as they educate students, and then hold them accountable for reasonable results? Do they have the desire to stop using public education as a political football? Can they really abandon their innate proclivity to use the Fredrick Taylor style of top-down management (that was in style over a century ago in America) to govern Indiana public schools? Is it not time for policy makers to use a new leadership style that has not been so discredited or criticized by numerous scholars?

Recommendation No. 1. One needed recommendation became clear very early in the study. Indiana did not have an accounting system that allowed and *required* school districts to separate and track expenditures attributable to the central offices and school boards. The current accounting system allows school districts to bury the real operating costs of central offices and school boards in various accounts under various identifiers.

They can also bury central office costs and school board costs through the claims procedure. Thus, the recommendation is that the State of Indiana should develop an amendment to the current accounting system that separately tracks central office and school board operating costs.

Recommendation No. 2. A second recommendation is for the Indiana General Assembly and the U.S. Congress, as well as all state and federal administrative agencies who

adopt rules to govern public education, to develop their own accounting systems and impact statements as to how each new law or regulation they impose on public schools will increase financial costs at the local school district and building level. Such costs should be fully and timely disclosed to the electorate prior to passing into law. Paraphrasing Howard (1994), state legislatures and the U.S. Congress have created a legal schoolhouse Colossus unprecedented in the history of civilization, with legal dictates numbering in the millions of words and growing larger every day, which suffocates those who toil in the public schools. This Colossus has a significant dollar cost of which the citizenry is largely unaware.

Recommendation No. 3. A third recommendation is to conduct further research on the financial, organizational, and human impact of the over-regulation and over-politicizing of public education. Teachers, principals, central office staff, and superintendents could be surveyed to obtain the perceptions they may hold concerning the regulation and politicization of public education. Further research could include focus groups, in-person interviews, and personal observations of teachers, principals, central office staff, and superintendents to collect data on what they actually do in terms of compliance activities that arise due to the over-regulation and over-politicization of public education. The personal and professional impact on these school employees can also be assessed using the same methods and data collecting instruments. Also, using these methods and instruments, the impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of the workers, as well as the organization as a whole, can be measured.

Recommendation 4. The fourth recommendation is for Congress and the Indiana General Assembly to develop pilot programs of school districts that voluntarily choose to adopt the freedom model or the portfolio model of school governance. After periods of five and ten years measurements can be undertaken to measure the impact on organizational effectiveness and efficiency, as well as the personal and professional impact upon school staff. The impact, if any, such a model of governance might have on student achievement and school quality can also be measured.

There is a powerful and growing consensus, at least at the level of rhetoric, that it is up to district leaders to provide sound, productive teaching and learning geared to high standards for students drawn from a rapidly changing population that increasingly is becoming heterogeneous. But when the rhetoric has to evolve into action, the emphasis on productive teaching and learning flounders and is difficult to sustain (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2001).

If Indiana education policy makers are to reform the 150 plus year old horse and buggy system of Indiana public school governance, change must be from the top-down (Congress and the

Indiana state legislature) while at the same time change must be from the bottom-up (teachers and school principals). Ouchi (2004a) reminds us that “school reform isn’t partly politics – it’s all politics!” The workers at the bottom of the education feeding system – the principals and teachers – will not reach their potential until they have the freedom to act as professionals in their schools and classrooms. A new governance structure that fully empowers principals and their school leadership teams may just be the answer to entice meaningful change in the nation’s public schools.

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[1] See I.C. 5-14-3.

[2] One of the fundamental differences between the freedom school model of public school governance and the portfolio model is that the freedom school model is limited to contracting out the academic operations of local schools only to *not-for profit* groups of principals and teachers, while the portfolio model also would allow contracting out to *for-profit* groups. Both models, however, include free market concepts, competition for schools, weighted student funding formulas, and empowerment of building level staff.

[3] The freedom school model and the portfolio model do *not* call for the consolidation of individual schools. In fact, both models encourage the establishment or continuation of small individual schools.

[4] Cizek (2000) argues that students are not the consumers of education, but that their parents are the real consumers. However, students can exert political influence through their parents' status, prestige, and power in the community.