

ASSESSING THE EFFECTS OF INDIVIDUAL
SCHOOL REPORT CARD DATA ON THE SHARED DECISION
MAKING PROCESSES IN THREE HIGH SCHOOLS

A Dissertation

by

Allen Douglas Eury

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Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership

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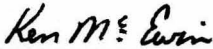
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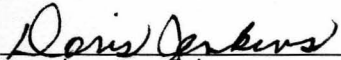
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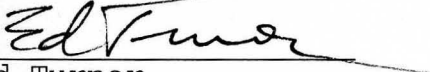
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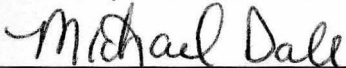
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ABSTRACT

ASSESSING THE EFFECTS OF DATA ON THE DECISION MAKING PROCESSES IN THREE HIGH SCHOOLS. (April 1996)

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The purpose of this study was to examine the decision making processes that occurred following the distribution of a site-based school report in the Rowan-Salisbury Schools, North Carolina. The study focused on three of the five high schools in the system.

The study was qualitative in nature and the data were collected from a variety of sources: written questionnaires; personal interviews with principals; a written survey; focus group discussions; review of pertinent documents; and interviews with key central office personnel. The researcher sought to determine if any critical decisions were made as a result of data being available from the report card. For the purpose of this study, the following key areas of school decisions were examined: curriculum; instruction; staffing; and staff development. In addition,

the study sought to determine if better decision making processes occurred as a result of utilizing the data in the report cards. Criteria for better decision making processes were established and used in examining the perceptions of individuals in the Rowan-Salisbury School System. For the purpose of this study, better decision making processes occurred when: (a) decisions were made by the individuals most influenced by the decisions; (b) appropriate information was available to those making the decisions; (c) decision makers were adequately prepared to make data-driven decisions; (d) decision makers held conversations about the data and decisions; (e) decision makers created action plans to implement decisions based on data; and (f) decision makers were expected to be accountable for the consequences of their decisions.

The literature review concentrated on the areas of school report cards, site-based decision making, and accountability associated with data and decisions. Considerable research exists on the issue of school report cards in terms of format, style, desired components, and likely audiences for the documents. Within the literature, there exists a strong opinion that school report cards are beneficial for school improvement and accountability. However, there is no prevailing evidence that school report cards affect either the decisions or the activities associated with school improvement.

The literature on site-based decision making supports the concept that the process of shared decision making is desired and believed to be a key component in school improvement. The research lacks studies that document or substantiate the effectiveness of incorporating shared decision making processes. The core of literature in this area reports the varying methods and evaluations of site-based programs.

It was revealed in the review that school report cards have become components of accountability models. Several states have initiated legislation that incorporate accountability with instruments of reporting school information. Studies have documented the impact that reporting documents have had on teaching behaviors and school effectiveness.

This study was a descriptive study that answered such questions as "how" or "what". The collected data concentrated on the areas associated with shared decision making, (i. e., selecting new teachers, teaching assignments, establishing school goals, designing and conducting in-service training, and improving the decision making process). The data were subjected to common theme analysis, either as a perception or an occurrence. In order to be considered a valid finding, evidence had to be present from at least two sources of data.

Results of the study showed that there was no indication or evidence that the report card data had any effect on shared decision making in the three high schools. There was little or no evidence that report card data were used in critical decisions in the school processes. Therefore, the document cannot be regarded as a central tool for decision making in the Rowan-Salisbury high schools.

Several explanations for the lack of report card use in making decisions surfaced in this study. First, a transfer of vision did not occur from one superintendent to his successor. For whatever reason, the successor did not share the same commitment or philosophy associated with using the document as a tool to guide school improvement.

Second, the Research Director's position was determined to be key figure in utilizing any form of data. There must be a person in this position that is willing and capable of assisting principals and faculties, not only in receiving the data, but also assisting faculties in the necessary skills of interpreting data, evaluating performance based on the data, and addressing accountability based on the data. Research assistance was not provided, at least in ways perceived as important by the school faculties.

Consistent from all data sources was a lack of training for administrators and teachers involving skills associated with data interpretation and utilization. The lack of training contributed to inconsistent and varying leadership

behaviors at each of the three sites.

If a school system is interested in using school report cards, there must be consistency in leadership positions at the central office level as well as the local school level. If shared decision making leads to better decisions and the process is related to instructional outcomes associated with student academic outcomes, then efforts must target adequate training and guidance that support data utilization.