

Connecting Districts to the Policy Dialogue:

A Review of Literature on the Relationship of Districts with States, Schools, and Communities

A CTP Working Paper

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CONTENTS

Abstract	1
Introduction	2
Findings from State-District Relations Literature	2
Findings from School-District Relations Literature	8
Findings Regarding District-Community Relations	12
Summary and Implications for Future Research	15
Endnotes.....	17
Appendices: Descriptions of Research Studies	18
Table 1: School/Teacher-District Relations	18
Table 2: State-District Relations	20
Table 3: Other.....	22
References	23

ABSTRACT

The current wave of education reform pays little attention to school districts. State and federal policies have increasingly identified schools as the most important units of change—rendering local districts virtual non-actors in the process of educational improvement (Elmore, 1993, 1997a; Elmore and Burney, 1999; Fullan, forthcoming; Massell and Goertz, 1999; Spillane, 1996). The focus on state-level education standards, curriculum frameworks, assessment, and accountability systems, along with state and federal efforts to serve specific populations through categorical programs, restructure schools, increase site-based decision-making, and introduce greater parental choice exemplify this trend in education policy. To some reformers, school districts are the problem. Critics claim that they have no empirically significant role to play, are inconsistent with sound policy, and are inefficient bureaucratic institutions (Chubb and Moe, 1990; Elmore, 1993, citing Finn, 1991). To other observers, school districts have become overly politicized and unresponsive to public, teacher, and student needs (Hill, 1999). Other policymakers simply view districts as relatively insignificant go-betweens through which policies and funding must pass to reach the more important school-level actors. Finally, some reformers have invented new organizational forms and networks (e.g., New American Schools Development Corporation) that bypass districts in order to directly target resources and support to schools.

Despite this trend in policy, an increasing number of studies in the past decade or so have documented the key roles that districts play in supporting improvements in teaching and learning—building a strong case that school districts matter (Spillane, 1996). The following paper examines this emerging body of literature¹ and attempts to answer the following questions:

- What roles do school districts play in efforts to improve teaching and learning? How do they affect the implementation of state policies and the enactment of school-level changes?
- What are the key factors that enable districts to effectively support improvements in teaching and learning?
- How does community involvement or collaboration contribute to districts' improvement efforts?

In conclusion, this paper will examine several unanswered questions and suggest directions for future research to advance the state of knowledge on school districts.

INTRODUCTION

While in the past there was little evidence that districts played a constructive role in instructional improvement (Elmore, 1993), a growing body of research is building evidence that school districts are important agents of change. Given the diversity of the research questions and phenomenon of interest, studies on school districts are somewhat difficult to compare. Yet, overall, this literature tends to follow two separate lines of inquiry: studies of district-state relations (e.g., how districts respond to state policy and reasons for variation) and studies of district relations to schools and teachers (e.g., district strategies for system-wide improvement and how these strategies and contexts affect schools and teachers).²

Tables 1-3 (see Appendices) illustrate the primary research questions, samples selected, and methodologies employed in each of the studies. As these tables reveal, some of these studies are quite similar—focusing on the same question (e.g., how do districts respond to a certain state policy), drawing from a similar sample (e.g., a small number of districts that represent “best case” or most innovative), and using comparable methods (e.g., qualitative case studies with interviews of key stakeholders). These tables also demonstrate sharp differences among studies—some rely on only one data source while others collect data from multiple sources; some draw on cross-state samples while others are single-state or single-district focused; some ask more descriptive questions of “what” while others ask more analytic questions of “why.” It is important to note that aside from a few studies, much of this literature is not grounded in an explicit theoretical or conceptual framework. In addition, not all studies triangulate data, collect data over time, or provide adequate details on research procedures. These overall weaknesses are important to keep in mind when considering the substantive findings presented below.

The following two sections review both the state-district and district-school literature and their findings on (1) how school districts matter, and (2) factors that affect or enable districts to matter. A third section offers a summary of findings regarding community-district relations.

Findings from State-District Relations Literature

How Districts Matter

Several studies demonstrate a very basic conception of school districts as implementers of state policy. In his review of data on 24 school districts, Firestone (1989) found that many local school districts “actively used” state reforms, such as a pilot career ladder program, merit schools program, and curriculum policy. His analysis also revealed wide variation in the “magnitude” of district use. For example, 9 of the 24 anticipated or exceeded the minimum requirements of one or more state reforms. Similarly, Marsh and McCabe (1998) examined the response of 40 districts to a new state policy initiative that sought to provide policy coherence for standards-driven reform (California’s Challenge Initiative). They found nearly universal agreement with the components of this initiative. More importantly, Marsh and McCabe discovered that the majority of these components were already in place prior to their participation in this initiative (e.g., assessment systems to measure study performance, school-site

decision making processes, district and school safety committees). On average, districts were already implementing 8 out of the 10 main program components. This finding raises important questions about attribution of policy effects. For example, what level of the system rightly claims responsibility for certain impacts when they may have existed prior to the development of a new state policy or program? And isn't it also possible that certain local activities or impacts may not have been sustainable without the additional impetus from a new state policy providing validation or enhanced resources?

Finally, Swan (1998) examined district preferences for types of state policies (based on the instrument typology from McDonnell and Elmore, 1987). The 24 local districts surveyed indicated a priority for implementing *mandates* (e.g., textbook approval system, school report cards), *inducements* (e.g., new alternative school, pay for performance), and *capacity-building* policies (e.g., local option sales tax, expanding technology for instruction). Districts indicated that they had implemented, partially or completely, all five of the mandates and three of the four inducements listed on this survey. Swan found that *systems-changing* policy actions were the least likely to be implemented.

Many other studies have corroborated Firestone's (1989) findings on variation of district implementation. For example, Firestone and Fairman's study (1998) of district responses to state assessment policy found that districts developed three main approaches: *fragmented* (little leadership for change, little interest in the state test), *communicating* (efforts made to coordinate instruction and support higher-order thinking, but still little interest in the state test), and *coordinated* (deliberate effort to raise test scores, district-run instructional activities, formal use of data). James Spillane, in particular, found that responses to state policy not only vary across districts (1995, 1996, 1997), but also within districts (1998). In his study of two Michigan districts, Spillane (1996, 1997) found that one urban district paid little attention to the state's reading reforms, while the other suburban district substantially revised its policies to align with the new state vision. Later analysis of schools within the district and various central office administrators uncovered substantial within-district variation. For example, in the urban district, some policies remained in place despite their contradiction to state policy (e.g., traditional curriculum guide, standardized tests focused on discrete decoding and comprehension skills) and some policies were revised to align with state policy (e.g., a few workshops, Chapter 1 curriculum revision). Similarly, Spillane and Thompson (1997) determined that in six of the nine districts studied, local policies and programs failed to reflect several core themes of state/national math and science reforms.

In addition to the findings on variation, Spillane and others have produced evidence of districts as more than simply recipients or implementers of state policy. For one, they found that districts did not simply adopt policies whole-heartedly. For example, in their study of nine districts in Michigan, Spillane et al. (1995) found that unlike the more in-depth reforms envisioned by state and national math and science reforms, districts generally focused on topic coverage at the expense of encouraging fundamental changes in teachers' ideas about the subjects and how to teach them. Similarly, Spillane's study of the two districts revealed repeated patterns of district administrators taking a "proactive policy-making stance"—for example, intentionally ignoring or buffering out certain state policies or ideas and

replacing them with their own (1996, 1997). Spillane's work (1997, 1998, 2000, forthcoming) also identifies important cognitive aspects of district practice (a topic discussed in greater detail in the next section under the heading "understanding"). Thus, districts not only intentionally ignore or knowingly rework state policy, but they also unconsciously deviate from the intent of state policy by interpreting and often misconstruing the policy message or content. Finally, Spillane (1996) concluded that districts matter in several ways: (1) their instructional policymaking has the potential to undermine state policymakers' efforts to streamline instructional guidance (e.g., they shape the opportunities practitioners have to learn about instruction and state policy), (2) their policies influence state policymakers' efforts to transmit messages for instructional change to practitioners, and (3) they influence state efforts to increase coherence of messages.

Several other studies revealed similar patterns of districts adapting state policy and actively constructing their own policy environments. Kirp and Driver's (1995) suburban district defied and bent some state policies (e.g., Title I, decentralization) when such policies were perceived as misguided, and embraced and adapted others (e.g., magnet schools) when they reinforced existing goals and ongoing efforts. Similarly, Goertz and Massell (1998) found considerable adaptation to state accountability systems across the 14 districts they studied. Some districts extended state policy beyond the initial expectations—raising standards higher, creating more performance incentives, and expanding testing. Many districts, particularly from "strong" accountability states, were "proactive" in their efforts to identify schools that were on the margins of failing to meet state criteria and to devise systems to build capacity in these and other low-performing schools. For example, some districts devised differential governance arrangements in which a school's level of autonomy was contingent on its performance. Chrispeels (1997) demonstrated ways in which districts within one California county created policies of their own in response to shifts in the direction of state curriculum and assessment policies. Moreover, even after the demise of the state's assessment policy, Chrispeels found that many districts continued to implement alternative assessments in the spirit of the failed state policy because such approaches to assessment "made sense to local educators" (1997, p.470).

These studies corroborate earlier findings by researchers at the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (Fuhrman and Elmore, 1990) that state policy often spurs additional policymaking at the district level. Rejecting the traditional conception of state-district relations as "zero-sum games" in which increases in state policymaking lead to corresponding decreases in local control, Fuhrman and Elmore (1990) argue that increased state policy can increase both state and local control. According to their research in 24 districts in six states, the ambiguity and contradictions of state policy, along with a lack of state capacity to enforce such policies, created opportunities for district discretion and enhanced "local activism" (e.g., districts enacting policies in anticipation of state action, orchestrating multiple state policies to meet needs, using state policies as a "catalyst" to achieve local goals). For example, 10 of 24 districts had a strong form of curriculum centralization in progress, in which administrators aligned and standardized curriculum frameworks, course syllabi, assessments, textbooks, and sometimes

teacher evaluation instruments. Like Spillane, Kirp and Driver, Goertz and Massell, and Chrispeels, Fuhrman and Elmore (1990) portray districts as active agents of change, noting that local actors are:

very sophisticated players, adept at anticipating new policy initiatives and using them to their advantage. Local leaders know how to use state and federal mandates as leverage to accomplish what they might wish to anyway—as opportunities to and as rationales for persuading reluctant educators or citizens. They also know when and how to ignore or circumvent regulations that trouble them, when the state will fail to notice or ‘blink’ in not noticing. They know how to shortcut tortuous state approval procedures (p.88).

Explanatory and Enabling Factors

Throughout these studies, several factors emerged that account for district responses to state policies—including capacity, size, understanding, leadership, organization and governance, political climate, and nature of state policy. These factors help explain why certain districts adopted policies and others ignored them, or why certain districts implemented policies with high fidelity to state policy intentions and others failed to do so.

Capacity. Building on past research (McLaughlin, 1987), a number of studies determined that a district’s capacity influences its response to state policy. Spillane and Thompson (1997) focused explicitly on this issue in their examination of why some districts made more progress toward realizing the state’s vision for more challenging math and science pedagogy while others made significantly less. They found that much of this variation is due to differences in a district’s *capacity to learn* new ideas at the core of the policy and a district’s *capacity to do* what the policy asks and to share reform ideas with others. Spillane and Thompson further specify three dimensions of capacity—human, social, and physical capital—and conclude that a district’s capacity for undertaking and achieving ambitious reform consists of the interaction of these three dimensions. Several studies touch on these categories of capacity:

1. **Human capital.** According to Spillane and Thompson (1997), human capital includes personal commitment, a disposition to learn about instruction and view learning as ongoing, and substantive knowledge about reform ideas. They also explained, “An important aspect of this individual dimension of capacity, then, was the extent to which the LEA used it to move from a few knowledgeable individuals to a knowledgeable collective—that is, mobilizing the human capital available within the district to develop the knowledge of a cadre of local educators” (1997, p.193). Based on his review of research, Firestone (1989) found that districts’ “active use” of state policy depended on the will and capacity of local actors. Firestone’s definition of capacity included the ability to mobilize personnel—including a mix of technical specialists, members of the dominant coalition, and representatives of key interest groups—and to perform various technical functions, such as selling a vision of what change entails, monitoring reform, and handling disturbances. Chrispeels (1997) identified local capacity building in the form of professional development for teachers and administrators as a critical factor encouraging districts to sustain state policy initiatives around curriculum and assessment. She too noted that districts that moved farthest in experimenting with and implementing alternative assessments and continuing this activism after the demise of the state test demonstrated the “will and capacity to proceed” (p.468).

2. **Social capital.** Spillane and Thompson (1997) defined social capital as relations between individuals in an organization that results from a prevalence of norms such as trust and collaboration, as well as a sense of obligation among individuals. This type of capital includes networks and trust. Thus, Spillane and Thompson found that linkages to sources of knowledge outside of the district enabled some districts to gain substantive knowledge about state reforms. Similarly, districts in which educators had a history of collaboration and established norms of trust were better able to discuss instructional reform and work together to achieve it. Although Firestone's conception of capacity is overly technical and non-normative, he did identify the importance of districts providing encouragement and recognition to educators (1989). Another possible dimension of social capital that Firestone raises is the inclusion of educators in the decision-making process. He reports that teachers and principals are more supportive of policies if they have helped design them or have participated in their development in a substantive way. Thus, districts that provide educators with real influence over issues that are important to them enhance the potential buy-in and trust among key actors needed to enact change.
3. **Physical capital.** According to Spillane and Thompson (1997), physical capital includes the financial resources allocated to staffing, time, and materials. They found that adequate time enabled educators to understand substantive ideas. They also found that the way in which time was allocated and used was equally important (i.e., it needed to be consistent and steady over the long run). They also noted that curricular materials became an important opportunity for teachers to learn about the math and science reforms. Swan (1998) touched on the issue of physical capital as well, noting that perhaps limited resources—presumably financial, but also possibly human capital—prevented districts from implementing all of the various types of state policies. Thus, given these resource limitations, districts were only able to implement a couple of key policy actions that were mandated.

Size. Closely related to capacity, a number of studies identified the ways in which size affected district responses to state policy. In their research of five school districts in two states, Firestone and Fairman (1998) found that differences in district's institutional configuration—of which size is a dimension—contributed to the variation in approaches to influencing teachers' instructional practice and responding to state tests. Given that districts in Maryland were six times as large as the Maine districts, it was clear that Maine districts did not have the staff capacity to work with teachers (e.g., two of the three Maine districts did not have systemwide inservice days). Moreover, Maryland's size influenced its "network capital," enabling it to bring in outside experts and organize many more activities for teachers. Firestone and Fairman concluded,

Larger districts appear to have more human and social capital to respond to state testing mandates. Curriculum coordinators have access to knowledge outside the district and can make it available to teachers while promoting sharing of locally developed solutions to the problem created by the state test. Moreover, the larger districts are more insulated from local concerns—which rarely focus on test results unless scores are embarrassingly low (1998, p.42).

It is worth noting that Hannaway and Kimball's (1997) study of district responses to federal policy corroborated these findings regarding size. They found that smaller districts reported lower levels of understanding of the new standard-based reform legislation and much less progress on implementing them. The authors relate this size "disadvantage" to the districts' lack of connections to outside sources of information and technical assistance.

Understanding. Many studies also found that policymakers' understanding of state policy influenced their responses to it. Spillane (1997) determined that local policymakers constructed extremely different ideas of reforming reading—such as concepts of constructing meaning and literature—and that their attempts to implement the state's reading reforms involved them pressing these ideas through the policies. Thus, the variation in understanding contributed to the variation in support for the reforms. Spillane found that these understandings were shaped by the sources of information on which policymakers drew (e.g., conferences, state test), their local context (e.g., attitudes about state government), and their personal beliefs about and experiences with reading. In a later study, Spillane (1998) reported that professional associations helped to explain district variation. Spillane noted that ties to state and national reading associations, as well as to back-to-basics or effective schools movements, often mediated the ways in which administrators viewed state policy.

Leadership. A few studies identified the influence of district leadership on implementation of state policy. Firestone and Fairman (1998) concluded that “the beliefs, skills, and energy of people in specific positions made a difference” in district responses to state assessment policy (p.36). They found strong leadership from the superintendent and curriculum coordinator in districts that demonstrated the most support for instruction and interest in the state testing program, and less involvement from leaders in districts with lower levels of support for state policy. Kirp and Driver (1995) reported that stable leadership—from three superintendents over a quarter of a century—accounted for the consistency of policy within one suburban district.

Organization and governance. Some research also examined the relationship between organizational and governance structure and district responses to state policy. Building on past organizational research (Cohen and Spillane, 1993; Weick, 1976), Spillane (1998) argued that horizontal and vertical segmentation within districts contributed to within-district variation in enactment of state policy. For example, given that specialized subunits within a district often worked “in parallel not partnership,” it was possible for some subunits to make state policy a priority and for others to ignore it. Firestone and Fairman (1998) found that differences in governance structure helped account for differences in district responses to state testing programs. According to this study, governance structures that fostered tighter linkages to the community (e.g., more elected officials for smaller communities) tended to detract attention away from state tests.

Political culture and reform history. A number of studies pursued the influence of contextual factors such as the history of reform activity and general political climate. Firestone and Fairman (1998) noted that the difference in political culture between the two states accounted for many of the organizational differences and thus the states' responses to state assessment policy. These researchers explain that given Maryland's sophistication in dealing with the public and its history of policy activity—adopting two state tests, high school graduation requirements, and other curricular guidelines—it was understandable why educators in this state were more likely than educators in Maine to “take the state seriously if it said that high test scores were important” (p.32). Other studies pointed

to local contextual factors. Kirp and Driver (1995) found that its suburban district embraced certain state policies when they coincided with local goals and initiatives. For example, when hired, the superintendent had pushed for racial equity and demanded the board's commitment to this issue. When the state initiated a desegregation program, the superintendent and board were quick to participate because it reinforced existing local goals and efforts in this area. The same was true for the district's adoption of state curricular guidelines. Similarly, Spillane (1996) explained that part of the reason for the suburban district's limited attention to state policy was an overall climate that resented state "meddling" in local affairs.

Nature of state policy. Finally, several studies found that the characteristics of state policy itself influenced district responses to it. Goertz and Massell (1998) uncovered distinct patterns of district actions in states with "strong" versus "weak" accountability systems—defined by prescriptiveness, rigor of measures used, alignment of system with other federal and state policies, and stability of the system. For example, in strong accountability states, districts tended to go beyond the expectations of state policy in establishing accountability systems. On the other hand, in weak accountability states, there was considerable variation in the extent to which districts aligned their systems. Similarly, Firestone and Fairman found that state policies can affect district approaches to instructional reform by creating "stakes that [affect] local will to comply and . . . build local capacity" (1998, p.32). For example, formal sanctions (e.g., reconstitution) were found to be more effective in prompting districts to pay attention to state testing policy than the threat of "embarrassment" from public comparisons.

Findings from School-District Relations Literature

How Districts Matter

This second body of literature examined the role districts play in the improvement of teaching and learning. Like the literature on state-district relations, all of these studies characterized districts as proactive agents of change. In their study of 22 districts, Massell and Goertz demonstrated that districts "do continue to play a large role in the life of public schools" and should not be treated "as ancillary to the change process" (1999, p.1). Similarly, Elmore argued that his case study of New York's District 2 "can be seen as an 'existence proof' that it is possible for local districts to be agents of serious instructional improvement" (1999, p.264). Founded on a theory that "changes in instruction occur only when teachers receive more or less continuous oversight and support focused on the practical details of what it means to teach effectively" (p.272), the district used professional development as a management strategy. Through extensive professional development opportunities and a strong culture of shared values around instructional improvement, District 2 managed to alter instructional practice and dramatically improve test scores among its diverse student population over time.

Murphy and Hallinger (1986, 1988) similarly linked district practices to student performance—generating a list of district factors that account for "instructionally effective districts," which they

defined by overall level of student achievement across subjects, growth in achievement over time, and consistency of achievement across sub-populations. Unlike Elmore and others, however, Murphy and Hallinger construct a more top-down conception of school districts, in which superintendents take primary responsibility for directing and enforcing change.³ [I will elaborate on this difference throughout the next section.]

Several studies also examined the specific ways in which districts influenced local schools and practitioners. David (1990) found that districts engaged in restructuring created new roles for teachers and administrators.⁴ McLaughlin (1992, 1993) revealed that the level of professional community within a district affected teachers' level of commitment to the profession and their sense of pride as teachers. Moreover, teachers' perceptions of district settings often dampened/enhanced aspects of their school or department culture. For example, a strong district community increased teachers' professional motivation when they belonged to a weak department. Similarly, Rosenholtz (1991) found that district organization and culture affected teacher attitudes and commitment. For example, "moving" districts—providing a clear focus on and coherence to instruction, keeping educators informed of current thinking on best practices, and encouraging educators to take risks and grow—tended to result in a greater number of "moving" schools with high levels of teacher commitment. On the other hand, "stuck" districts—adhering to fragmented instructional goals, policies, and practices—resulted in schools and teachers with little sense of progress or commitment.⁵

Finally, Goldring and Hallinger (1992) also identified school- and teacher-level effects of district organization. They found that teachers in *decentralized* and *centralized* district contexts reported more positive internal organizational processes (e.g., high amounts of instructional leadership, good teacher rapport, high sense of peer commitment, clear school missions, high sense of teacher competency) than *fragmented* districts (although it is important to note that effect sizes appear to be quite small—a matter the authors fail to discuss).⁶

Explanatory and Enabling Factors

Throughout these studies, several factors emerged that explain why districts were more or less able to enact improvements in teaching and learning—including capacity, district authority, understanding, and leadership. Unlike the state-district literature, there appear to be somewhat more mixed or conflicting findings in this set of studies.

Capacity. Similar to the literature on state-district relations, this body of literature repeatedly found that issues of human, social, and physical capital contributed to districts' ability to enact positive change.

1. **Human capital.** Several studies revealed the importance of practitioner knowledge and skills. David (1990) found that "pioneering" districts cultivated new teacher roles by providing access to professional development that enhanced knowledge and skills. Similarly, one of the five "major capacity-building strategies" for improvement identified

by Massell and Goertz (1999) included a district's ability to build teacher knowledge and skills. Districts embracing this strategy developed "learning communities" by providing teachers access to traditional and nontraditional forms of professional training (e.g., workshops, as well as on-site teacher leaders and staff developers) and by encouraging teachers to become "consumers of professional literature" (p.3). Like Massell and Goertz, Rosenholtz (1991) found that principal and teacher learning opportunities were empirically related to teacher commitment. Moving districts provided extensive district inservice on topics selected to match principal and teacher needs, whereas stuck districts were not proactive and failed to take responsibility for expanding learning opportunities. Similarly, the key to District 2's success, according to Elmore (1997b, 1999), was the way in which professional development permeated the work of the district—including not only discrete workshops and a professional development laboratory, but also institutionalized practices such as intervisitations and internal and external consulting.

- 2. Social capital.** McLaughlin and Elmore's research also pointed to the importance of district normative culture. McLaughlin's concluded, "The relationships between teacher and district that are powerful influences on teachers and teaching have little to do with hierarchical structure and controls and everything to do with the norms, expectations, and values that shape the district professional community" (1992, p.35). She also noted that professional development conveyed critical norms that built a sense of district professional community—which, as noted earlier, influenced teacher commitment and pride. Similarly, Elmore linked District 2's success to its ability to build a strong culture of shared values around instructional improvement. Fullan (1999) somewhat corroborates these findings, noting that the ability to foster a culture and collective identity was crucial to successful large-scale efforts. This emphasis on norms and culture was absent from Murphy and Hallinger's (1986, 1988) research on effective districts. As noted below, these authors emphasized the more technical and physical dimensions of capacity.

Several studies also found that practitioner involvement and collaboration served to build social capital within districts. David (1990) determined that school staff needed authority and autonomy in order to create new roles and environments appropriate to their needs. Similarly, Rosenholtz (1991) found that when teachers engaged actively in constructing their school reality, school goals became mutually shared and risk-taking more prevalent. On the other hand, in settings in which teachers and principals felt professionally isolated and were not involved in goal-setting, practitioners experienced tremendous uncertainty, self-defensive posturing, and resistance to change. Rosenholtz concluded that "to assure that schools will be healthy educative places, teachers must share responsibility for their professional destiny by engaging in decisions through which that destiny is forged" (p.203). Murphy and Hallinger's research, however, did not support this notion of joint goal-setting and decision-making. These researchers found that "instructionally effective" superintendents did not involve teachers or community in the process of goal-setting. Thus, superintendents controlled the development of goals and districtwide instructional and curricular foci, as well as the selection of professional development activities (1986, 1988).

Finally, in Florian et al. (2000), district administrators reported that "relationships" in and outside of the district contributed to their capacity to support local reform—helping to promote communication and align goals and actions of various constituencies. Administrators in 12 of the 16 districts reported that relationships with external organizations/agencies were important for promoting standards-based reform, while 11 districts mentioned teams of staff or administrators, 10 mentioned parents/community, 5 mentioned school board members (e.g., educating them, including them in activities), and 4 mentioned other districts. Some districts also identified as important their relationships with teacher unions and local businesses.

- 3. Physical capital.** Several studies identified the importance of several dimensions of physical capital. In terms of time, David (1990) found that one key way pioneering districts cultivated new roles among educators involved increasing time available for professional development—including the provision of planning time, release time, and paid time in the summers, as well as running meetings efficiently to save time. Elmore and Burney (1999) determined that time also played an important role in the success of District Two. For one, systemic change was possible because the district phased in the introduction of instructional change over time—providing adequate time for change to occur in each part of the system, instead of forcing change simultaneously all at once. Moreover, Elmore and Burney found that the consistency of focus over time contributed to the vitality of the district’s change effort.

Another aspect of physical capital related to materials. In his review of large-scale change efforts at the school, district, and national levels, Fullan (1999) found that investment in quality materials was an important aspect of all successful efforts. He noted, however, that the presence of quality materials was not sufficient to enact change and could easily be used superficially. Thus, how a district used materials was also a key variable.

Balance between central authority and school autonomy. As touched on above, several studies explicitly found that districts’ success in enacting improvement hinged on a delicate balance between centralized and decentralized control. Massell and Goertz (1999) found that school empowerment was a key strategy for supporting instructional reform and that most districts displayed a “mosaic of loose and tight control” (p.13). Similarly, Murphy and Hallinger (1986,1988) found that instructionally effective district leaders maintained a “dynamic tension” between district control and school autonomy. Superintendents reported that despite their efforts to maintain district-level direction and consistency, they also allowed principals and schools a certain degree of flexibility (as noted earlier, the lack of school-level data raises questions about the validity of these findings). David (1990) also determined that “pioneering” districts delegated to schools functions most directly related to teaching and learning while retaining control of districtwide functions such as transportation, food services, and maintaining lines of communication. Finally, one of the key organizing principles of District 2 was to set clear expectations, then decentralize responsibility. Elmore and Burney concluded that District 2 “walked a fine line” between central authority and school site autonomy.

Contrary to these studies, Goldring and Hallinger (1992) found that this mixture of centralized and decentralized control was potentially detrimental to district efforts to enact school improvement. They found that teachers in districts characterized by “fragmented centralization”—a mixture of centralized control on some indicators and autonomy on others—reported less positive internal organizational processes than teachers in either centralized or decentralized settings. They concluded that perhaps the mixture or confusion of messages conveyed by the fragmented district accounted for the more negative outcomes: “The important issue may be one of signaling to schools, not one of control” (p.17).

Understanding. Like Spillane (1997, 1998), Price and Ball (1995) found that district administrators’ knowledge about reforms contributed to variation in resource allocation patterns. Thus, the district’s allocation of minimal resources to math reforms resulted from a lack of understanding and commitments to these reforms on the part of administrators who shared responsibility for curriculum.

Leadership. Several studies found that leadership was another important variable in the process of enacting change. Rosenholtz (1991) found that “moving” districts were characterized by superintendents who were more experienced and availed themselves to ongoing learning opportunities, thereby “typifying organizational norms through their action” (p.182). McLaughlin echoed these findings, noting that district leadership styles signaled “the presence (or absence) of a vital, cohesive professional community” (1992, p.34). For example, by invoking “coercive authority” to implement district policies, one district perpetuated a feeling of paternalism among teachers and a divisive sense of “them/us” that led to fragmentation of work culture. Murphy and Hallinger (1986, 1988) also found that district leadership was an essential ingredient of effective districts. Unlike Rosenholtz and McLaughlin, however, their conception of leadership focused on active involvement in and control over goal-setting, supervising/evaluating staff, selecting professional development activities, and monitoring school activities. Once again, they did not emphasize the normative aspects of leadership.

Findings Regarding District-Community Relations

While older literature on the politics of education (Boyd, 1976; Kirst, 1970; Zeigler and Jennings, 1974) touched on issues of community, very few of the studies reviewed in this paper examined the role that community members and organizations play in school district efforts to implement state policy or enact educational improvement. One set of studies explicitly noted that community and teacher input was not characteristic of goal-setting in effective school districts (Murphy and Hallinger, 1986, 1988). Instead, effective school districts were described as more top-down organizations in which leaders set expectations and goals on their own and exclusively managed most district activities. These authors found a pattern of “internal focus” within the environment of effective school districts. Contrary to what the literature led them to expect, the authors noted, “Although superintendents did perform a number of activities designed to maintain the stability of their organizations in their larger environments, their attention was primarily devoted to internal district operations” (1988, p.177). Moreover, they found that superintendents did not establish informal networks “that could be used to scan the community for information” (ibid.). Thus, community was not found to be an asset or resource that supported superintendents in their management of district operations or efforts to support student achievement.

Other studies that touch on this subject emphasized community as a barrier to district improvement efforts. Firestone (1989) found that community was a potential inhibitor of districts’ efforts to build school-level capacity. He reported, “On other occasions it [support from the district] is distracted by ‘extraneous matters’ like conflicts among staff or between staff and the community or an effort to implement some other kinds of change” (1989, p.161). Similarly, in their 1998 study, Firestone and Fairman found that tighter linkages to community were an obstacle to district implementation of state assessment policy if the public was not supportive or interested in the reform or not applying pressure to pursue the new policy. Thus, they construed insulation from local concerns—a characteristic of most large districts—as an asset to districts in their attempts to respond to state policy.

In this same vein, Spillane et al. (1995) found that parental objections “scuttled” or “delayed” two districts’ efforts to de-track math classes at the middle and high school level. While parents generally involved themselves infrequently with the specifics of new policies around math education, their concerns about access to college—coupled with little change in college entrance requirements or practices—served to impede the districts’ efforts to change teaching in secondary schools. Finally, Rosenholtz (1991) examined the differential influence of community on appointed versus elected district superintendents. She argued that “elected superintendents’ sense of community pressure led them to persist in their authoritarian, bureaucratic behavior” (p.181). Unlike appointed superintendents, who were primarily accountable to schools within the district, she argued, elected superintendent’s must be accountable to a broader constituency. Citing interview data from superintendents, Rosenholtz described the ways in which the demands of this expanded constituency forced elected district leaders to seek positive political exposure and build “populist appeal” (ibid.).

As a corollary to the conception of community as obstacle, other studies presented vague notions of the importance of community support—with little examination of why this was important and what this support might look like. For example, Florian et al. (2000) found that in 10 of 16 districts examined, district representatives identified the importance of building relationships with parents and other community members as a key ingredient for supporting local reform. According to researchers, district representatives in these 10 districts “advocated that long-term, meaningful changes cannot be made without the support of parents and other community members” (p.8). However, the researchers and respondents give no details on what that support might entail. Similarly, one of David’s (1990) cross-cutting themes was that restructuring schools and districts required building new alliances, which include community. She reported, “Because restructuring is comprehensive and long term, a superintendent needs the support of the school board, the teachers’ union or other organization, and the community” (p.237). Despite this declaration, David does not provide supporting evidence as to why this is true or how this played out in her three districts. Finally, according to Fullan’s review of Chicago’s decentralization efforts, researchers found that successful decentralization required new capacity-building “external to the school” to promote improvement (p.10, citing Bryk et al., 1998). Such extra-school functions included parent and community involvement to support norms of professional practice for educating all students well. Again, these ideas were not elaborated in any way to give meaning or depth to the notion of community involvement or support. How should the community be involved? Who is the community? How does the district make this happen?

In his examination of the non-monolithic nature of districts, Spillane offered some evidence on how differences in school responses to state policy were “accentuated by differences in the cues they received from their immediate community” (1998, p.50). Within one district, parents at a suburban school kept a careful eye on student performance on state tests and possessed the “clout” necessary to attract the attention of the school administrator. This community pressure helped explain why this one administrator paid attention to the state reading policy despite the fact that the central office was not

active in pushing such adherence to state reform. Contrasting circumstances at an inner city school, where parental attention to test scores was minimal, contributed to this school's virtual disregard for the state reading reforms. Similarly, Kirp and Driver (1995) described one district's efforts to fight white flight and gain parental support by converting two schools into K-8 campuses. This move enabled families to keep their children close to home until high school—as opposed to sending them to middle school campuses farther away in the less affluent East side.

Thus, in most of these studies, community served as a background or contextual variable as opposed to a main actor in the improvement process. Moreover, community and community involvement or collaboration was rarely conceived as a resource that contributed to a district's change efforts. David Cohen, however, offers potential insights into how research in this field might broaden to examine the contributions of community members and organizations. In his review of how systemic reform plays out at the local level, Cohen (1995) notes that much activity within districts occurs in a fragmented organization that in some respects is a “nonsystem”—“a congeries of more than 100,000 schools situated in 15,000 independent local governments, governed by fifty state governments and hundreds of intermediate and special district governments in between, as well as by several federal agencies and influenced by countless private organizations” (p.13). As implied, it is quite possible that community members and organizations qualify as nonsystem actors.

Moreover, Cohen identifies three elements or “systems” of practice—teachers' knowledge of academic subjects, teaching, and learning; professional values and commitments; and social resources of practice—that are crucial to the progress of systemic reform. It is within the third element, social resources, that community once again serves a critical role. Cohen argues that “teachers cannot be expected to dramatically improve instruction in the absence of the social resources that support it” (p.15). These resources include: (1) students who are willing to collaborate in efforts to improve education and families that will support these efforts; (2) students who are “decently prepared” to attend schools and engage in academic work (i.e., they are well-fed, clothed, supported at home with homework, and free of family/social problems); and (3) social and economic incentives for demanding academic work (e.g., institutions of higher education and businesses send signals about the importance of high academic performance). By expanding the definition of instruction to include the resources outside of school that influence students' motivation and preparation for engaging in school, Cohen renders parents, community members, businesses, and other organizations potentially critical actors in the process of districtwide instructional improvement.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The preceding review of literature provides evidence that districts can play a potentially critical role in improving teaching and learning. Across both sets of studies on district-state and district-school relations, districts were found to be more than passive recipients of policy. Instead, they often ignored, adapted, and interpreted higher-level policies, as well as developed their own sets of policies and programs to support school change and guide instructional practice. In study after study, we observe variation in the implementation of state policies both within and across districts, as well as intentional and unintentional district efforts to alter state policy to fit local contexts. We also learn from the research on district-school relations that districts acting strategically can create new roles for teachers, alter teaching practice, improve student achievement, and enhance teachers' pride, sense of competency, and commitment to the profession.

This research also offers insights into some of the factors that facilitate and constrain district improvement efforts. In particular, several key variables cut across both sets of studies as potential enablers of district change and renewal. First, human, social, and physical capital appear to be foundational. Districts that mobilize these key resources have a much better chance of enacting and sustaining state and local reform goals and policies. This research indicates that capacity extends beyond technical resources of money and personnel to include normative aspects of district culture and values, as well as the relationships, networks, and trust among individuals.

The second cross-cutting variable related to capacity is the cognitive understanding and knowledge of district administrators. This research indicates that district staff's knowledge of reform greatly influences the ways in which resources are allocated, how policies are interpreted and implemented, and the level of support or lack of support given to reform ideas, policies, and programs. Efforts to enhance the information accessible to local policymakers and administrators appears to play an important role in building a district's capacity to undertake change.

The final factor prevalent in many of these studies is that of leadership. Not only the knowledge, skills, and beliefs of top district administrators, but also the stability of leadership over time appear to shape the ways in which reform plays out throughout a system. Beyond the personal attributes of individuals, effective district leadership also includes the ability of these individuals to build a cohesive professional community and normative culture.

Despite this growing body of evidence on how districts matter and how they relate to states, schools, and teachers, there is a dearth of research on district-community relations. Focusing primarily on the formal policy system that treats the district as central office, the majority of the research reviewed treats community as context to consider, but not necessarily an actor in reform efforts. And more often than not, when community is addressed, the literature generally portrays community as a barrier, not a resource. David Cohen's (1995) work on "nonsystems," however, suggests a promising direction for future research that might address this research gap.

While we have learned a lot over the past 15 years, there remain many unanswered questions about school districts and their role in educational improvement. To address these issues, I would like to suggest a few lines of inquiry that future research might pursue to further enhance our knowledge base on this topic. The first is simply a plea for continued attention to and improvements in research methods. As noted earlier, much of the current literature on districts is atheoretical. Spillane's (1997, 1998, 2000, forthcoming) cognitive frame certainly moves in the right direction. Another promising strain of theoretical research includes applications of Etienne Wenger's (1998) communities of practice framework to school districts (see Wechsler, forthcoming). In terms of data collection methods, the field could benefit from more longitudinal studies, as well as a move beyond exclusive reliance on self-reported information from district administrators. Research that captures the "bottom up" perspectives of school-level educators clearly strengthens our understanding of district practice and how such actions play out at the local level (see Rosenholtz, 1991; Firestone and Fairman, 1998; Spillane, 1996 for exemplary work in this area).

In terms of unanswered questions, the field is ripe for a more nuanced understanding of how districts manage their policy environments to enact change. The extensive research on District 2 provides a good example of the kind of research needed to deepen our understanding of the structures and strategies districts utilize to improve teaching and learning. Further research is needed on the tools district leaders employ to create a culture of shared norms and to build opportunities for continuous learning of school and district staff. Building on the work of Spillane and Thompson, it would also be helpful to examine the relations and interactions between the various resources of human, social, and physical capital. Moreover, descriptive work on how districts mobilize and activate these resources would certainly advance the field of policy and practice. Some of the work currently being conducted by the Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy (CTP), along with the ongoing research by Spillane and his colleagues, is beginning to address some of these critical questions.

Cohen's work on "nonsystems" raises several important questions for future research on district-community relations. For example, to what extent is community a resource to districts as they try to enact educational improvement? To what extent does community involvement and collaboration affect districts' capacity—human, social, and physical? Are Firestone, Murphy and Hallinger right, that internal focus and insulation from community are assets? And if Cohen is right, and community is a critical instructional resource, then how do districts engage community to enhance the social resources of their students and teachers?

Finally, another set of unanswered questions pertains to the degree to which school districts matter. While we now know that districts are key actors in educational improvement efforts, we do not know how significant their contributions are relative to other actors. In other words, do districts matter as much as states? As schools? Again, several lines of inquiry within CTP target these questions, but more research is certainly warranted.

ENDNOTES

- 1 It is important to acknowledge that there is an earlier body of research that is relevant to school districts but that is not reviewed in this paper. Such literature includes work on policy implementation (Berman and McLaughlin, 1978; McLaughlin, 1987; Pressman and Wildavsky, 1984) and the politics of education (Boyd, 1976; Kirst, 1970; Zeigler and Jennings, 1974) that address intergovernmental connections regarding particular policies. This paper, however, focuses primarily on research conducted in the past 10-15 years and studies that directly examine districts as primary units of analyses.
- 2 Some of these studies touch on issues that fit in both categories, but their primary research questions belong in one of the two. I will discuss these crossover points when appropriate.
- 3 It is important to note that Murphy and Hallinger relied primarily on self-reported data from superintendents. Moreover, given the changes in educational context (e.g., states are currently more active and push more centralized messages about curriculum and instruction than they did at the time of this research), Murphy and Hallinger's districts might represent more of an historical sample than one applicable to current districts.
- 4 Keep in mind that David's findings stem from data collected from a limited number of interviews with central office and schools staff during a two to three day period.
- 5 Rosenholtz acknowledged that her focus on low-income and rural districts in the state of Tennessee limits the generalizability of her findings.
- 6 Goldring and Hallinger collected data from school-level educators and did not triangulate with data from central office administrators. Moreover, the sample of districts was from the rural state of Tennessee and represented districts that volunteered to participate in a particular state reform initiative—two factors that limit the generalizability of these findings.

Table 1: Description of Research Studies: School/Teacher-District Relations

Author(s)	Primary Research Questions	Sample	Methodology
David (1990)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What can be learned about the extent to which districts can transform themselves and what it takes to do so? 	<p>3 systems (Dade County, FL; Jefferson County, KY; Poway, CA); selected to represent districts “whose actions have lead to new roles, relationships, org. arrangements”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Case studies: 2-3 days visits to each district - Interviews with central office and school staff - Visits to schools that “best exemplified new roles and arrangements”
Elmore (1997) Elmore & Burney (1999)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How does one district use professional development to mobilize knowledge in the service of system-wide instructional improvement? 	<p>District 2, New York (exemplary, revelatory case)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Case study (no other information provided, but it is clear that researchers conducted interviews, observations, and document analysis)
Florian, Hange, & Copeland (2000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Which state and district policies and practices support local capacity for reform? 	<p>16 districts in 13 states; districts nominated and selected to represent geographic diversity, progressive reform activity, and high performance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interviews with district “representatives” (no further details given)
Fullan (forthcoming)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why did the 1st large-scale reform effort fail? - Why did current large-scale reform initiatives arise and what are lessons being learned from them (including school district reforms)? 	<p>Reviews literature: not an empirical study</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - N/A
Goldring & Hallinger (1992)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do differences in organization of districts (“control contexts”) influence the orientation and improvement process of schools? - Is level of district support a mediating factor? 	<p>87 schools in 19 school systems in Tennessee</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Secondary data analysis - Interviews with principals - Surveys of principals and teachers
McLaughlin (1992) McLaughlin & Talbert (1993)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What contexts matter for teaching and learning? - What accounts for differences in teachers’ perceptions, attitudes, and commitments across districts? 	<p>2 states (CA and MI), 4 metropolitan areas, 7 districts, 16 high schools, 900 teachers (embedded sample)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Survey of all teachers in each school (quant.) ratings of attitudes, etc. - Fieldwork (qual.): interviews with teachers, school and district administrators/ staff; student interviews/ case studies, classroom observations, and record data analysis

Description of Research Studies: School/Teacher-District Relations (continued)

Author(s)	Primary Research Questions	Sample	Methodology
Massell & Goertz (1999)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are districts' strategies for building capacity of students, teachers, and schools? 	<p>22 districts in 8 states; states selected for involvement in standards-based reform; districts selected for reputation for innovative reform efforts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Part of larger study of 8 states, 24 districts - Year 1 visits to map state policy systems - Year 2 visits to districts (no other information provided)
Murphy & Hallinger (1986)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What practices differentiate more and less successful forms of organization and administration at the district level? - What are the instructional leadership patterns of superintendents in effective districts and what do they reveal about the strength of coupling in effective organizations? 	<p>12 districts in CA; selected for their high levels of student achievement, growth over time, and consistency of achievement across sub-population</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interviews with superintendents: open-ended, 2 hours each - Document analysis
Murphy & Hallinger (1988)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the factors and processes that characterize instructionally effective school districts? 	<p>[same as Murphy & Hallinger, 1986, above]</p>	<p>[same as Murphy & Hallinger, 1986, above]</p>
Price et al. (1995)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How does a district allocate resources to various subject areas? - What accounts for differences in resource allocation patterns within a district? 	<p>1 mid-sized urban district (assumed to be in MI: opportunity sample)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interviews with district and school staff - Classroom observations (no other information provided)
Rosenholtz (1991)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How does the social organization of schools/structure of teachers' daily experiences shape teachers' beliefs, cognitions, and behaviors? - What is the reciprocal effect of those beliefs, cognitions, and behaviors on their schools' social organization? - How do district-level practices affect teacher commitment and schools' capacity for continuous renewal? [Chapter on districts] 	<p>78 elementary schools in 8 districts in Tennessee; districts selected at random (5 rural, 3 urban / suburban); schools include entire population within each district</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Survey of teachers (quant.): 164 items on perceptions of workplace, background, etc. - Record data on school demographics, scores - Interviews with teachers at schools identified as "disparate outliers" from district means on organizational variables: average 3 per school; open-ended; 74 total teachers from 23 schools - Interviews with super. and at least 1 high-level administrator in each district: follow-up phone interviews with some at the end of the year

Table 2: Description of Research Studies: State-District Relations

Author(s)	Primary Research Questions	Sample	Methodology
Chrispeels (1997)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do local districts respond to a shift in state policy direction? 	<p>25 districts in San Diego County, California – with particular attention to one district, Chula Vista</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Surveys of teachers, administrators participating in county “academies” on new state assessment - Interviews with a purposeful sample of 39 participants - Document analysis
Firestone (1989)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do districts use state reforms? - What are local factors that contribute to use? 	<p>24 districts in 6 states; districts selected to vary in capacity to respond to state reform</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Analysis of secondary data: - CPRE field studies included 4 days of interviews with board member, super., district admin., principals, and teachers - Other studies
Firestone & Fairman (1998)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How and to what extent do districts’ approach to instruction take into account state assessment policy? - What factors influence how districts interpret and implement state assessment policy? - How do districts’ approaches affect teachers’ propensity to respond to such policies? 	<p>5 districts in 2 states (MD, ME) that adopted performance-based assessments; districts selected to vary in wealth and performance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Part of larger embedded case study of effects of state assessment policy on middle school math teaching - 3 visits: interviews with central staff, board, principals, teachers (1st); observations and interviews of teachers (2nd and 3rd); semi-structured and forced-choice interview protocols
Fuhrman & Elmore (1990)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is the nature of state-local relations? - How do districts respond to increased state role in educational reform? 	<p>24 districts in 6 states, approximately 4 districts per state, including 1 large urban district; districts selected to represent range of degree of change required to conform with new state policies and capacity to make these changes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Part of a large study by Center for Policy Research in Education (other reports of this work detail the research methods: this article does not)

Description of Research Studies: State-District Relations (continued)

Author(s)	Primary Research Questions	Sample	Methodology
Goertz, Massell, et al. (1998) Goertz (2000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What affects are external accountability systems having on school districts? - How are districts aligning their systems with state policy? - To what extent and how are districts interpreting state accountability systems or designing them on their own 	<p>14 districts in 5 states; states selected for involvement in standards-based reform; districts selected for reputation for pursuing innovative reforms</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Part of larger, 3-year study of 8 states - Year 1 visits to map state policy systems - Year 2 visits to districts (no other information provided)
Kirp & Driver (1995)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How has this district responded to a succession of federal and state mandates? 	<p>1 California suburban school district</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Case study (no other information provided) - Part of larger study on federal/ state mandates and local practice
Marsh & McCabe (1998)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do districts respond to a state policy initiative that seeks to provide policy coherence for standards-driven reform? 	<p>40 districts participating in the program (population sample)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Survey to 40 district superintendents regarding importance, feasibility, effectiveness of reform elements - Interviews with administrators, principals, lead teachers in 3 districts (small, medium, large)
Spillane et al. (1995)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What role do LEAs play in supporting the realization of state's new vision for math and science education? 	<p>9 districts in Michigan; selected to vary in location, size/urbanicity, student population, and reform reputation (oversample 5 with strong positive reputation)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Case studies - Interviews with district administrators, principals, board member, parent, curriculum specialist (13-32 interviews per district); 165 total interviews between 1994 and 1995. - Document analysis
Spillane (1996)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do school districts respond to expanding state role in instructional policymaking (elementary reading)? 	<p>2 districts in Michigan; selected to vary in level of implementation of state reading policy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Case studies - Interviews with state policymakers (25); district administrators and school personnel (40) - Documents analysis - Observations of workshops/mtgs. in 3 schools
Spillane & Thompson (1997)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What kinds of "local capacity" of LEAs are required to realize current state reforms? - What are the components of local capacity? 	<p>[same as Spillane et al., 1995, above]</p>	<p>[same as Spillane et al., 1995, above]</p>

Description of Research Studies: State-District Relations (continued)

Author(s)	Primary Research Questions	Sample	Methodology
Spillane (1997)	- Why do some LEAs support state reform initiatives while others do not?	[same as Spillane 1996, above]	[same as Spillane 1996, above]
Spillane (1998)	- What are the differences between and within districts in their response to state policy?	[same as Spillane 1996, above]	[same as Spillane 1996, above]
Swan (1998)	- What actions did local school system leaders take to implement state level policy actions?	24 educational leaders in Georgia (school and district level); selected to represent state variation in district size, level of schooling, and position of leader (?); 1 district (opportunity case)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Document analysis - Interviews with state leaders - Survey of district administrators (ratings of implementation of state policy) - Survey of leaders/grad students on actions taken to impact student learning - Case study of one district: document review, existing data on teacher perceptions, observations, interviews, analysis of test data

Table 3: Description of Research Studies: Other

Author(s)	Primary Research Questions	Sample	Methodology
Hannaway & Kimball (1997)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are state and district administrators' levels of understanding of new federal, standards-driven legislation? - What progress are they making in implementing the reforms? - How helpful are various forms of assistance that are available to states and districts? 	Administrators in 50 states; nationally representative sample of administrators in 2,700 district offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Surveys of administrators at both levels

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