

New Kid on the Block: The School Boards Program

by Susan Leigh Flinspach

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- e-mail: khunt@sog.unc.edu
 - phone: 919/966-4120
 - fax: 919/962-2707
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Ever since the first wave of state-initiated educational reforms began to be felt in the early 1980s, state responsibility for education has increasingly impinged on the local control of schools. State legislatures from across the country have been building upon their traditional roles of regulating and funding education by adopting policies that raise standards, promote accountability, and decentralize decision making to schools. The local school board, caught between implementing the state reforms and meeting community expectations, finds itself having to carry out an increasingly complex set of duties. In states such as North Carolina, where school boards are witnessing changes in their roles, the scope of the governance powers of local boards is gradually being redefined.

To assist school boards in adjusting to these changes, the North Carolina General Assembly has enabled the Institute of Government to establish the new School Boards Program, which will sponsor research and provide services that address the concerns of board members in three areas—schooling, boardmanship, and educational policy making. The Program's first workshop "Working for Results as a School Board," was held in September. Over the next few years, Program staff will draw on their own research and on the expertise of the Institute faculty to develop workshops as well as publications and on-line resources for North Carolina's school boards. Program staff also will be available for consultation by phone, by mail, or in person.

In 1999 the Program will offer three more courses in addition to the September workshop: performance-based budgeting (late January or early February), standards for teacher tenure (March and April), and student misconduct (spring). Program staff are preparing publications (see, for example, Ann McColl's article on the powers and duties of the State Board of Education in *School Law Bulletin*, Fall 1998, 1) and planning a Web page. To learn more about board needs and concerns, Program staff have begun to analyze agenda materials from school board meetings throughout the state, and a survey of board members will be conducted by mail in early 1999. Feedback from each of these activities will help to shape the long-term priorities of the School Boards Program.

I am an educational researcher from the University of Chicago and a new Institute of Government faculty member. My experience is in the fields of school improvement, program evaluation, and educational policy and governance, and my recent work focuses on making research useful to policy makers and practitioners. I will direct the School Boards Program. The search for a co-director, a second new faculty member who will be a scholar with expertise in organizations and their management, should be completed in the spring of 1999.

During the first year of Program operation, the Institute will be assisted by two consultants who have extensive experience with North Carolina school systems and local boards. Ann Clontz is a former teacher and principal who, as associate director of the Principals' Executive Program, has worked with school leaders throughout the state. Ann McColl is an attorney in private practice concentrating in education law and policy, including issues related to governance and reform. These specialists are playing an active role in the development of Program courses and publications, and they are helping to set the School Boards Program on a course toward providing the greatest assistance possible to North Carolina's boards of education.

If you have questions or suggestions about the Program, you may reach Susan Flinspach by phone at 919-966-4420 or by e-mail at flinspac@iogmail.iog.unc.edu.

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