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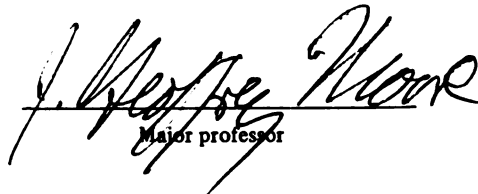
THE CONTROVERSIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE
MICHIGAN EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT
PROGRAM 1969-1977

presented by

Dean Richard McCormick

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1978

THE CONTROVERSIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE
MICHIGAN EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT
PROGRAM 1969-1977

By

Dean Richard McCormick

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
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ABSTRACT

THE CONTROVERSIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE
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The purpose in this dissertation was to analyze the differences over political power surrounding the three major controversies which arose since the Michigan Educational Assessment Program was created in 1969. These controversies were between the State Department of Education and: (1) the Michigan Association of School Administrators over the use of assessment test data, (2) the Michigan Association of Professors of Educational Administration over the design and content of the assessment test, and (3) the Michigan Education Association over the implementation of the assessment test. Following the documentation of each controversy three questions were answered. What initiated the controversy? Can the controversy be placed in a framework denoting either a political power struggle or different philosophical assumptions? What changes occurred in the assessment program as a result of the controversy? ✓

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The hypothesis was that had the State Board of Education accepted the Department of Education's program recommending three years of planning many facets of the controversies would have been avoided. The hypothesis rested on the assumption that teachers, administrators and others representing professional educational organizations would have had the opportunity for input during the three years of planning. Other assumptions were that education was a big business that should be responsible to taxpayers and parents in a cost-effectiveness manner, that the State Department of Education was legally correct in assuming responsibility for attempting to increase the cost-effectiveness of the schools and reporting such data to the taxpayers and that teachers, administrators and parents have a right to a large degree of input, control and accountability in designing, operating and assessing the Michigan Educational Assessment Program.

The first controversy between the Michigan Association of School Administrators and the State Department of Education was initiated after the public release of the results of the first assessment test (1969-1970). The press and public compared and interpreted the scores as measures of school quality. Administrators found themselves being held publicly accountable. After administering the tests the second year (1970-1971) 43 superintendents

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withheld the answer sheets for their districts pending negotiations with the State Department of Education.

The second controversy between the Michigan Association of Professors of Educational Administrators and the State Department of Education occurred in the spring of 1972 when the Michigan Association of Professors of Educational Administration's Task Force on Assessment and Accountability released five reports analyzing Michigan's assessment test. The Task Force was critical of the construction of the test and the contribution of the Educational Testing Service.

The third controversy between the Michigan Education Association and the State Department of Education began in March 1974 with the release of the report by Dr. Ernest House, Dr. Wendell Rivers and Dr. Daniel Stufflebeam. The Michigan Education Association and the National Education Association contracted the study of the Michigan assessment program and accountability model with these three gentlemen. During the last three years the Michigan Education Association has been trying to convince the legislators and State Board of Education to adopt the recommendations of the report. In 1977 an Accountability Task Force was created to chart a course of action on accountability.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to acknowledge my appreciation to the individuals who have contributed to the completion of this dissertation. Dr. J.G. Moore, chairman of my doctoral committee, receives special thanks for his advice and insight in the completion of this study.

The inspiration for this topic originated with Dr. David Donovan, Director of Research, Evaluation and Assessment, State Department of Education. His hours of review and counseling gave purpose and direction to the study. His support and encouragement will be long remembered.

Finally, I must share the honor of this degree with my loving wife, Dawn, who has put in many long hours typing over the last three years. Her unwavering faith in my ability made the completion of this dissertation possible.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

State departments of education, their powers and use of these powers have been topics of discussion among professional educators in recent years. The diverse opinions can be classified broadly as differences over political power or philosophical assumptions.

In education a political power struggle often focuses on local autonomy versus state control, which in turn affects who determines the curriculum, administers it and is accountable for it. The Michigan State Department of Education designed the Michigan Educational Assessment Program to provide data to use when making statewide decisions. One goal is to provide equality of educational opportunity for all children regardless of their race, socio-economic status or geographical location. Another purpose is to provide regular measurements of the schools' progress in achieving their objectives and make the data public. It is hoped the Program will become a catalyst to encourage the improvement of staff, building organizations, instructional materials and delivery systems (areas traditionally left to local control). Dr. John W. Porter,

Superintendent of Public Instruction, feels that if children do not learn to read and write, the fault lies with the schools; therefore, the state is responsible for guaranteeing a basic education for all children regardless of their race or economic status.

The impression has been given to taxpayers, although not through overt action or design, that the assessment program will measure the productivity and effectiveness of teachers and administrators. In some cases this has alienated those whose cooperation is necessary if the Michigan Educational Assessment Program is going to improve the schools. Some surveys have shown that teachers and principals support the concept of accountability. However, the fear of the loss of local autonomy will encourage professional educational associations to lobby, turning assessment and accountability into political bargaining chips.

Historically, the states were given control of education through the Tenth Amendment of the United States Constitution which gave all powers not specifically reserved to the federal government in the Constitution to the states. However, the federal government can still become involved in education through the "general welfare" clause of the Preamble to the Constitution. Since education had already evolved as a local enterprise, the states were slow to assume and exercise control over education.

This means that local school boards operate only with the permission of the state government. Legally, if the state government wished, it could consolidate the state into one district with one curriculum. Obviously, it is not realistic politically, but it is legal. The Michigan Educational Assessment Program has produced unprecedented visible evidence of the state's legal control of education.

Differences over philosophical assumptions means that people have different views of the purposes of school and thus of the curriculum. Some people feel that schools should teach the great ideas of Western Civilization found in the classical literature passed on from age to age. Social, vocational and physical education would not be of prime importance. Some individuals believe that schools should teach the fundamental ideas of America, promoting the status quo as found in existing institutions, resisting progressive schools, the questioning of America's values and the encouragement of social reform. Others would insist that the curriculum be presented in the schools through investigative problem solving. Under this system every idea would undergo the reflective-thought process to determine the idea's utility. Some feel that the purpose of schools is to give each individual a multitude of experiences and the opportunity to choose subjectively his own value system without having the schools forceably attempt to pass on society's values. Others

feel the schools should be developing builders of a new social order. The values and ideas of the present competitive society would be rejected. Although most educators are eclectic, these groupings illustrate the diversity a state department can face when it attempts to determine what the schools should be teaching.

While either political or philosophical frameworks could serve as the basis for the controversies surrounding the Michigan Educational Assessment Program the writer perceived that underlying each controversy was the question: Who is going to control education? Many of the objections, while valid as they related to the assessment test, the writer interpreted as masquerading the fear that the state would upset the balance of power. As the author documents each controversy an analysis will be made of the differences over political power as it relates to local control versus state control. Thus the writer of this dissertation will emphasize the differences over political power and any references to philosophical assumptions will be incidental.

The climate in the late sixties was affected by the United States Office of Education and the courts applying pressure on the states. As a consequence of the 1958 National Defense Education Act and the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act the federal government was pouring more and more money into education. There

was a growing reluctance to continue providing funds, largely free of limitations, without evidence to show that they were increasing student learning. Few states had data to show how effective its schools were and therefore, had enough trouble justifying the formula it used to allocate its own resources without trying to convince the federal government its dollars made a difference.

Pressure was also being applied by the courts. The Constitution was interpreted as guaranteeing United States' citizens equality of educational opportunity. Segregated and "separate but equal" schools were declared illegal and the states were pushed to assume a larger role in the control and operation of its schools in order to assure these civil rights.

Many states came to realize that they must attempt to control the process of change in education to a greater extent than before if they were to fulfill their Constitutional duties. This posed a threat to the historically sacred principle of local control but there now existed a need for more centralized thinking and planning at the state level. In addition, the states needed accurate information on which to base changes. Resources could not be allocated to assure equality of educational opportunity unless needs were known.

In the late sixties in Michigan the climate was charged with competitiveness. The Michigan Constitution

of 1963 reversed the traditional roles of the formerly elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction and formerly appointed State Board of Education. In 1965 the first elected State Board of Education came into being. Early in 1966 the Board appointed a new Superintendent. For the next several years the Board sought to establish its identity. It attempted to define its strengths and weaknesses as compared with the other politicians in the House and Senate. Simultaneously it tried to define its role under the new Constitution as it was being asked to make decisions formerly made by the Superintendent. It also needed to formulate a "modus operandi" that would provide channels for input from the field on important issues.

The Board soon found itself surrounded by conflicts. At least two of the Board members were considering running for higher office and conflicts soon developed within the Board. The Superintendent and his staff found themselves at odds with the Board due to differences of opinion and methods of operation. Before Dr. John Porter became Superintendent in 1969 the Board had worked with three previous superintendents. The Board discovered some of its limitations when it came into conflict with individuals on the appropriations committee.

Even with these conflicts, the Board wrestled with the ideas of formulating a new method for accrediting

Michigan's public schools, decentralizing Detroit public schools into eight smaller administrative units, and formulating an assessment program for the public schools. The latter issue came to the forefront as bills appeared more frequently in the House and Senate calling for the creation of a state assessment test and as the national assessment test geared up for its first cycle of testing beginning in March 1969.

The Problem

The focus of the writer of this dissertation is the Michigan Educational Assessment Program and the controversies surrounding it since it was created in 1969. The purpose in this thesis is to analyze the differences over political power surrounding the three major controversies which arose: first, the use of assessment test data between the Michigan Association of School Administrators and the State Department of Education; second, the design and the content of the assessment test between the Michigan Association of Professors of Educational Administration and the State Department of Education; third, the implementation of the assessment test between the Michigan Education Association and the State Department of Education.

Three questions will be considered following the documentation of each controversy in this dissertation.

The questions are as follows: What initiated the controversy? Can the controversy be placed in a framework denoting either a political power struggle or different philosophical assumptions? What changes occurred in the assessment program as a result of the controversy?

The writer's hypothesis is that had the State Board of Education accepted the staff's¹ program recommending three years of planning, many facets of the controversies would have been avoided. This hypothesis rests on the assumption that teachers, administrators and others representing professional educational organizations would have had the opportunity for input during the three years of planning.

Several other assumptions are held by the writer. First, education, going back to its historical antecedents, should be responsible to the taxpayers and parents in a cost-effective manner. Most taxpayers want to know what they are getting for their dollars spent. This is becoming more necessary as schools are becoming a big business and are taking a larger share of property taxes. Second, the State Department of Education is legally correct in assuming responsibility for attempting to increase the cost-effectiveness of the schools and reporting such data to the taxpayers. Third, teachers and administrators, due to their professional competence, should have a large

amount of input in designing and operating the Michigan Educational Assessment Program.

Need and Significance

Investigation into the Michigan Educational Assessment Program indicated a need to write its history so that it may serve as a reference for Michigan and other states following Michigan's pioneer work. By documenting the controversies and testing the hypothesis Michigan and other states might avoid the circumstances which led to these controversies.

Limitations

The writer has limited this dissertation to a study of the development of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program. In this study the writer will focus on the interpretation and analysis of the data and documents which relate to the major controversies surrounding the Michigan Educational Assessment Program which was legally mandated by the passage of Public Act 307 of 1969 and Public Act 38 of 1970.

The primary sources used are the letters, papers and documents kept by the State Department of Education, the Michigan Association of School Administrators and the Michigan Education Association as well as interviews with those having knowledge of the controversies. Documentation of the major controversies are limited to these

sources. Major controversies will not be construed from secondary sources.

Definition of Terms

The following are definitions of terms used frequently in this dissertation.

Assessment: the act of determining the status of educational achievement at a point in time and the rate of educational progress over a period of time.

Accountability: the state of being responsible for educational achievement and progress.

Michigan Educational Assessment Program: a data gathering process for determining the basic skills' achievement levels of pupils and groups of pupils in Michigan and for describing the general, financial, staffing and other conditions in the schools and districts.

Michigan Accountability Model: a six step process to improve the schools through controlling the process of change. The steps are: (1) identify goals, (2) develop performance objectives, (3) assess needs, (4) analyze and change the delivery system, (5) evaluation of these changes after a period of time, and (6) recommendations for further changes.

Overview

The writer organized this study as follows:
Chapter I contains the introduction for the dissertation.

It presents the problem, its need and significance, its limitations, a definition of terms and overview of the thesis. Finally there is a review of the literature that establishes the national context of the assessment and accountability movement.

In Chapter II the writer documents the events that preceded passage of Public Act 307 of 1969 and Public Act 38 of 1970 which mandated the assessment program. In addition, in this chapter the writer explains the design of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program and the Michigan Accountability Model.

In Chapter III the writer documents the controversy over the use of assessment test data between the Michigan Association of School Administrators and the State Department of Education. In addition the following three questions will be answered: (1) What initiated the controversy? (2) Can the controversy be placed in a framework denoting either a political power struggle or different philosophical assumptions? (3) What changes occurred in the assessment program as a result of the controversy?

In Chapter IV the writer documents the controversy over the design and the content of the assessment test between the Association of Professors of Educational Administration and the State Department of Education. The following three questions will be answered: (1) What

initiated the controversy? (2) Can the controversy be placed in a framework denoting either a political power struggle or different philosophical assumptions? (3) What changes occurred in the assessment program as a result of this controversy?

In Chapter V the writer documents the controversy over the implementation of the assessment test between the Michigan Education Association and the State Department of Education. As in the previous two chapters, the following three questions will be answered: (1) What initiated the controversy? (2) Can the controversy be placed in a framework denoting either a political power struggle or different philosophical assumptions? (3) What changes occurred in the assessment program as a result of this controversy?

In Chapter VI the writer tests the hypothesis that had the State Board of Education accepted the staff's program recommending three years of planning many aspects of the controversies would have been avoided. The three controversies are updated and then drawn together around a central theme. Finally, implications for future research are stated.

Review of the Literature

The review of the literature will establish the national context that contributed to the development of the

Michigan Educational Assessment Program and Michigan Accountability Model. It will show that four factors converged during the sixties which created an atmosphere that encouraged the development of these programs. These factors were: (1) the national assessment program promoted by Dr. Francis Keppel, (2) the increasing adoption by schools of the systems approach used in the business and military communities, (3) the growing pattern of public anxiety from Sputnik in 1957 through the Coleman Report in 1965 culminating in the late sixties with increased pressure on legislators, governors, state boards of education and state departments of education as the public became more aware of the lack of equality in educational opportunity for minorities and the culturally disadvantaged, and (4) Dr. Leon Lessinger's application of accountability to education.²

The development of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program must be viewed in the context of this national movement. In the early sixties the lack of information about educational outcomes in relation to the growing expenditure of public funds became the concern of Dr. Francis Keppel, United States Commissioner of Education (1962-1965). Following Sputnik in 1957 vast sums of federal money were being spent through the National Defense Education Act of 1958. With the lobbying for even more money it was only a matter of time until federal

legislators sought evidence concerning the benefits received for the sums already spent on education.

Dr. Francis Keppel initiated a series of conferences funded by the Carnegie Foundation to explore ways of securing data on student achievement. He expressed many of his thoughts in his book The Necessary Revolution in American Education. Published in 1966, the following four paragraphs are ideas paraphrased from this book. They give insight into Dr. Francis Keppel's perception and understanding of the problems facing education during his years as United States Commissioner of Education.

The first American educational revolution was in quantity. Everyone was to be given the chance for an education. That revolution is history. Almost everyone is now assured of an education up through the community college level if he desires it. The second revolution is over equality of educational opportunity and is presently underway. In a pluralistic society, to avoid turmoil, all individuals must have equality of educational opportunity. The quality of life is dependent on this. The wealthy cannot be safe if the poor do not learn.³

President Johnson and his economic advisors stated that the education of our people is the most basic resource of our society, the most important force behind economic growth. Simply as a matter of economics, the nation can no longer tolerate education meted out unevenly on the

basis of income, class, color or any other accident of birth. Wastage in education cannot be condoned but the principle of equality of educational opportunity must be preserved. This fact forces educators to think about the process by which future educational decisions will be made. To determine the process of change is in part to determine the nature of the changes themselves.⁴

Between 1963 and 1965 Congress acted to provide: (1) special programs for the disadvantaged, (2) support of educational research and innovation, (3) opportunities for decisions to be made at the state level whenever possible, (4) expansion of facilities for higher education and financing of costs of such an education for needy students by loans or scholarships, (5) assessment of the results of federally financed programs by requiring data from local and state authorities and by the establishment of advisory committees, and (6) assurance that federal expenditures be over and above, not in place of, existing expenditures. If the national goal of equal educational opportunity is to be met, the states must act to collect more accurate information of the condition of education, to provide stronger leadership and to base actions on sound research.

The states' main hurdles in controlling the process of change in education lie in four areas: (1) decisions influenced by economic and political developments,

(2) thinking and planning restricted by the American pattern of local control, (3) reliance on public opinion, and (4) accurate information lacking on which to base changes in educational programs.⁵ State governments will find it increasingly difficult to carry out their constitutional duty and growing responsibilities without overcoming these hurdles.

According to the writer, Dr. Keppel called on the states to assume more control over education. He seemed to believe the present society will become increasingly unstable if inequality of educational opportunity continues. Further, he encouraged states to adopt the systems approach as he placed emphasis on the decision making process since this system determines, in part, the nature of the policies it devises. He encouraged states to adopt assessment programs by saying that their planning and decision making should be based on reliable data.

As a result of the conferences Dr. Keppel initiated, the Carnegie Corporation in 1964 formed the Exploratory Committee on Assessing the Progress of Education. Dr. Ralph W. Tyler, Director of the Center for the Advanced Study in Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University, Palo Alto, California, was asked to serve as its chairman. The Committee's assignment was to confer with teachers, administrators and other individuals to obtain advice in developing and trying out instruments and

procedures for educational assessment. The actual assessment began in 1969 and later that year came under the auspices of the Education Commission of the States. When this occurred the project was renamed the National Assessment of Educational Progress and was funded by the United States Office of Education.⁶

In the article "Assessing the Progress of Education" Dr. Tyler explained that the Committee wanted the project to be constructively helpful to the schools and avoid injuring educators. A January 1964 conference of national educational leaders had warned of potential misuse of such data but felt that the need for dependable data was great enough to proceed with the project. There were three basic concerns. The first was that teachers would be judged, punished or rewarded as a result of the tests. The Committee's response was that this was impossible since their test would not be an individual testing program. The second concern was that this test would enable the federal government to control the curriculum to a degree. The Committee's response was that this would be unlikely since teachers, administrators and lay leaders had assessed the objectives and approved them. The third concern was that the test would discourage change and innovation. The Committee's response was that this would be avoided by reviewing the objectives each year and designing the test so that it would not be dependent upon

any instructional methods.⁷ The writer observed these same concerns raised again in the controversies surrounding the Michigan Educational Assessment Program.

Dr. Ralph Tyler's explanation, however, did not calm the project's critics. The debate continued. The American Association of School Administrator's Executive Committee advised its membership to refuse to participate in the testing program. They gave three objections to the assessment tests. First, the tests ignored regional, ethnic, racial and economic differences. Second, the tests would brand any geographic area that fell below the national average; this would result in excessive pressure from parents and legislatures. Third, the tests would yield very little new information.⁸ The writer believes the first and second objections had a factual basis but the third objection to be weak and self serving. In the administrators' objections and the teachers' objections the writer perceived an underlying fear that the development of an assessment test would upset the balance of political power.

The second factor was the adoption by the schools of the systems approach in use in the military-industrial community. The twentieth century has witnessed the increasing impact of business values and practices on the public schools. The systems approach is management by objectives based on output or program yield.

Since 1957 administrators were under pressure to emphasize science, mathematics and foreign languages. There was added pressure to keep up with the latest technological innovations. These increases in input kept raising the per-pupil costs while it became exceedingly difficult to put a figure on the value of the output. It was easy to compute the increase or decrease in productivity for industry. But the schools had a great deal of difficulty in justifying the increase in per-pupil cost without showing an increase in effectiveness. Therefore, superintendents began to experiment with systems approaches.

Systems engineering developed in industry in order to analyze the subsystems of persons, processes and properties. Its goal was to provide a problem solving model that would obtain maximum effectiveness at minimum cost. More recently the military devised the Planning Programming Budgeting System to reduce waste. Many now consider this system an essential tool of management and believe it holds great promise for the future, although one cannot say that something will work in the schools because it works in business.

In many school districts a systems approach has evolved that includes the following steps: (1) specification and systematic analysis of objectives, (2) search for ways of achieving the objectives, (3) estimate of

initial and total cost of each alternative, (4) estimate of effectiveness of each alternative, and (5) decide as to which alternative or combination thereof provide the greatest effectiveness for the least amount of resources. This model has been implemented in the categories of pupils, curriculum, personnel, faculties and finances in some districts.⁹ The writer believes the Michigan Accountability Model is an example of the systems approach applied to education.

The third factor was the pattern of public anxiety that developed during the late 1950's and 1960's over education. In 1957 the arms race was running ahead at full speed during the midst of the cold war. Yet most Americans were complacent in the knowledge that the United States had an insurmountable lead. That idea was shattered in October when the Russians put the first man-made satellite, Sputnik I, into orbit. They were years ahead of the United States in the development of rocket thrust. Worse than that was the fear that anyone on earth was vulnerable to the nation that had the potential to put atomic weapons into orbit around the earth. The public wanted to know what was wrong with the schools. The national security of the United States depended upon the quality of graduates the schools were producing.

In 1958 came the National Defense Education Act and a flood of federal dollars into education at all

levels. It brought aid for training teachers, a return to the basic skills, more homework, a much greater stress on the physical sciences, the New Math, new student testing programs, an increased emphasis on counseling services, new technological devices into the classroom, more and earlier teaching of foreign languages and increased aid for scientific and technological research. In 1965 the Elementary and Secondary Education Act provided much more federal aid but without all the limitations that were attached to the National Defense Education Act funds. The federal government seemed willing to provide the aid, but the schools were being asked to be accountable.

With the increasing pressure on local, state and federal levels for more money came the 1965 Coleman Report, "Equality of Educational Opportunity," which empirically indicated that input (per pupil cost) is not an accurate measurement of how effective the schools are. Many factors besides expenditures affect the instructional outcome such as facilities, classroom and neighborhood environment, services, pupil and staff characteristics and the social context of the school. The schools needed to change their cost index from input (per pupil cost) to output (a learning unit factor). In the later 1960's the stress on reaching the culturally deprived and providing equality of educational opportunity brought many to see the need for educational accountability. Schools

had become big businesses whose product played an increasingly important role in the stability and economic welfare of society.

The fourth factor was the contribution of Dr. Leon Lessinger. As United States Associate Commissioner for Elementary and Secondary Education until 1970 he grafted the accountability concept into Titles VII and VIII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The following four paragraphs contain ideas paraphrased from Dr. Lessinger's book Every Kid A Winner: Accountability in Education.

America's schools can be transformed within the decade by employing the following sources: (1) a process of management that defines educational goals in measurable terms, (2) using innovations whether discovered by schools, the federal government, or private enterprise, (3) testing programs to discover what actually works, and (4) accepting the idea that the schools are accountable to the public for what they do or fail to do. These sources are a method of management that uses engineering insights.¹⁰

These changes become more imperative when the schools recognize three basic rights. First, each child has a right to be taught what he needs to know in order to take a productive, rewarding part in society. Second, the taxpayer and his elected representative have a right to know what educational results are produced by a given

expenditure. Third, the schools have a right to be able to draw on the resources and technology from all sectors of society. Stated most simply, the schools' goal is the guaranteed acquisition of basic skills by all children. This goal can be reached through accountability and the process of educational engineering.¹¹

When a school's curriculum is well engineered, it will meet several tests. It will require educators to specify, in measurable terms, what they are trying to accomplish. It will provide for an independent audit of results, allowing taxpayers and their representatives to determine the benefit of a given expenditure. It will call forth ideas, talent and technology from all sectors of society and not only from within the school system. It will experiment with new programs. Above all, it will guarantee results in terms of what students can actually do. Educational engineering is a technique not only for the management of change, but for the adoption of the principle of public accountability.¹²

Accountability requires that the schools create performance criteria, obtain an independent audit and make a public report. Once a school has thorough, relevant and reliable data, it can raise questions about how it can increase the effectiveness and lower the cost. The process used to answer these questions is educational engineering. The seven steps used in actually starting

a new program are: (1) obtain funding, (2) obtain consultants, (3) produce a proposal, (4) request bids, (5) select leading bidders to present proposals, (6) select the best bid and enter into a performance contract, and (7) engage an independent auditor to assess results and execute the performance contract.¹³

Dr. Lessinger's goal was to have schools adopt an engineering process to control the process of change. This required first the adoption of an accountability model involving performance objectives, assessment and public auditing. He highly recommended performance contracting and as an example designed the 1969 Texarkana Dropout Prevention Program under ESEA Title VIII. This school district was the first to use: (1) performance contracting with private enterprise for instruction, (2) management support group, and (3) a separate rapid learning center to measure cost-effectiveness. Other school districts have tried incentive contracts where teachers receive bonus pay contingent upon the academic improvement of their students and the voucher plan in which a student and his family choose between schools offering a variety of educational philosophies and instructional systems.

The writer believes that if most school districts in Michigan had adopted an engineering process similar to Dr. Lessinger's the State Board of Education might not have pushed for the development of a state assessment

test. But he questions the feasibility of this. The personnel and funding needed for such an operation would be beyond the means of all but the wealthiest districts.

In 1969, within the climate and context previously described, the pressure was applied in Michigan for an assessment program. The need and benefits of an assessment program occurred concurrently to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the State Board of Education, the State Department of Education, the Governor, his Education Reform Committee and the legislators. In January 1969 the Superintendent of Public Instruction gave two major purposes for creating a state assessment test. The first purpose was the need for accurate, comprehensive information concerning student achievement. The public, State Legislature, Department of Education and local school districts would benefit from this data. The second purpose was that the data would provide a basis for improved decision making. The data would assist in rationally allocating state and federal aid. It would hopefully show a correlation between expenditures (input) and student achievement (output). The data would also provide guidelines for upgrading delivery systems.¹⁴ The writer also surmises that some individuals hoped to shake up the special interest groups such as administrators and teachers by making assessment data public.¹⁵

Pressure was also being applied by dissatisfied taxpayers. A 1969 Citizen's Research Council of Michigan Report asked for evidence of educational progress for increasing expenditures.¹⁶ The legislators undoubtedly felt responsible to a more cost-conscious constituency and introduced several bills demanding an accounting for educational expenditures.

Under Dr. Philip Kearney, Associate Superintendent of Public Instruction, the State Department of Education offered the State Board of Education a program which would design a Michigan Assessment Program. Dr. Kearney desired three years to develop and test a pilot program. The Board said yes to the idea but no to the three years. The Board wanted it within 12 months. Within a few months Governor William Milliken, in a special educational address to the Legislature outlining some recommendations of his Educational Reform Committee, said it would be irresponsible to increase educational spending until it was known what results were being achieved from present expenditures. He called for a State Assessment Testing Program. Supported by Superintendent of Public Instruction, Ira Polley, the Legislature mandated the Michigan Educational Assessment Program. It became law in August of 1969 and stated that the first assessment test was to be administered in January of 1970.¹⁷

In summary, four factors converged during the sixties to create the atmosphere which existed at the time of the passage of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program: (1) the national assessment program promoted by Dr. Francis Keppel, (2) the increasing adoption by the schools of the systems approach used in the business and military communities, (3) the growing pattern of public anxiety from Sputnik in 1957 to the Coleman Report in 1965 culminating in the pressures of the late sixties, and (4) Dr. Leon Lessinger's application of accountability to education.¹⁸ Within this context the pressure was applied for a Michigan Educational Assessment Program. In Chapter II the writer will examine the events that occurred preceding the passage of Public Act 307 (1969) and Public Act 86 (1970) and explain the design of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program and the Michigan Accountability Model.

FOOTNOTES

¹Under the direction of Dr. Philip Kearney, Associate Superintendent of Public Instruction.

²Robert Shafer, "National Assessment: Backgrounds and Projections 1975," speech at the Conference on English Education, Colorado Springs, March 20-22, 1975.

³Francis Keppel, The Necessary Revolution in American Education (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp. 1, 29.

⁴Ibid., pp. 51, 56.

⁵Ibid., pp. 69, 81, 119, 159.

⁶The Education Commission of the States, Report Number 03/04-GIY. "National Assessment of Educational Progress-General Information Yearbook," December 1974.

⁷Ralph W. Tyler, "Assessing the Progress of Education," Science Education, April 1966, pp. 239-242.

⁸"AASA vs National Assessment Plan," School and Society, Summer, 1967, pp. 288-289.

⁹Candoli, Hack, Ray and Stollar, School Business Administration (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1973), pp. 174-176.

¹⁰Leon Lessinger, Every Kid A Winner: Accountability in Education (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), p. 3.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 4, 12.

¹²Ibid., pp. 13, 30, 31.

¹³Ibid., pp. 32-33, 36-37.

¹⁴Superintendent Ira Polley, "The Assessment of Educational Progress in Michigan," memorandum to the Michigan Department of Education, January 28, 1969.

¹⁵Jerome T. Murphy and David K. Cohen, "Accountability in Education--the Michigan Experience," Public Interest, Summer 1974, pp. 55-56.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 57.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 57-58.

¹⁸Robert Shafer, pp. 20-22.

CHAPTER II

THE ENACTMENT OF THE MICHIGAN EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

In this chapter the writer will explain the actions of the State Department of Education, the State Board of Education, the Governor and the Legislature which led to the passage of Public Acts 307 (1969) and 38 (1970); in addition it will describe the Michigan Educational Assessment Program and finally it will discuss the Michigan Accountability Model.

Passage of the Laws

The State Board of Education Minutes reveal that on January 29, 1969, in the general context of accountability, the Board was discussing whether or not it should assume the accreditation process from the University of Michigan. Members were concerned that accreditation alone did not motivate districts to make the necessary improvements. The writer surmises that some Board members felt that districts were improving their high school programs to gain and hold accreditation while allowing their elementary programs to casually drift

along year after year. The previous September (1968) the Board directed its staff to prepare a summary and evaluation of testing programs existing in Michigan's elementary schools. As part of the discussion (January 1969) Dr. Philip Kearney, Associate Superintendent, Bureau of Research, presented a staff report on assessment. It contained: (1) some background information on assessment testing at the national level, (2) a possible rationale and procedure for Michigan's own assessment program, (3) a discussion of opposing views, and (4) recommendations. He said the primary purpose of the assessment program would be to gain more accurate information concerning educational progress.

Five potential arguments against the assessment program were discussed. First, the outcome of instruction cannot be measured in material units as are manufacturing products. Such attempts dangerously oversimplify the educational process and fail to consider the environmental influences of community, home and peers. Second, outcomes assessed through achievement tests fail to consider educational goals involving the physical and emotional growth of children. They are often biased against minorities and creative learners. Third, a statewide assessment test over a period of time would create a tendency for teachers to teach-for-the-tests and districts to standardize curricula, both to appear favorably in the

ratings. Fourth, these tests endanger individual and academic freedom. Undoubtedly, some will misuse the tests to evaluate the effectiveness of specific teachers, administrators and districts. Fifth, there is the danger that the state will use the test results to allocate state and federal funds, withholding money from those that need it the most. The question might be raised as to why the State Department of Education did not alert the Board to the potential problem of local control versus state control.

Following the discussion, the Board adopted a resolution calling for a state assessment testing program to measure the educational progress of the students enrolled in the public schools. The writer believes that the Board felt that this was a politically popular move. Furthermore, the Board members underestimated the potential opposition and fear the test would create. However, the Board felt that a periodic assessment test was needed to provide information: (1) to make citizens aware of the achievements and problems of students in the schools, (2) to provide data for the Legislature to enable it to enact appropriate legislation, (3) to provide information for the Michigan Department of Education so that it can identify priorities to equalize educational opportunities, and (4) to assist the local districts in planning and administering their curriculum.¹ The writer surmises that the

Board members felt that the need for the test overrode the arguments made against it.

At the Board's meeting on February 26, 1969, Dr. Philip Kearney presented some preliminary details for the statewide assessment plan. The Board redefined assessment as

The determination, over time, of the achievement and performance outcomes of education interpreted in light of differing resource levels and differing pupil and community background characteristics.²

These resource levels and background characteristics included factors such as per-pupil expenditures, equipment, staff, materials, facilities, curriculum, organizational structure, family socio-economic status, pupil attitudes, peer group characteristics and neighborhood environment. The tentative assessment plan included three cycles each with a definition phase, a collection phase and an analysis phase. The first cycle constituted a pilot study involving a stratified random sample of school districts. The plan called for this cycle to last approximately 36 months. The definition phase of cycle one included input by the lay public, scholars and professional educators in determining educational goals and factors affecting the outcome of education. The collection phase, as time permitted, used consultants in developing and improving testing instruments. The analysis phase attempted to answer the following questions: (1) How do

outcomes relate to resource levels and background characteristics? (2) How well are pupils attaining the desired goals? (3) How well are the schools providing needed resources for increasing attainment? (4) Where are the greatest resource weaknesses? (5) How may Michigan's resources be used more effectively? The second cycle included a more inclusive assessment and extensive implementation. The third cycle built on feedback from cycle two. No rigid time scale was provided for cycles two and three since these two cycles would expand and improve the program initiated in cycle one.³

Several board members expressed concern over the 36 months involved in the first development cycle of the program. Motions were made and an amendment offered to complete the first cycle within 12 months. However, Dr. Kearney emphasized that, in the opinion of his staff a comprehensive and effective program would require 36 months of preparation. The issue was tabled until the meeting of April 23, 1969.

At that meeting Dr. Kearney consented to the possibility of administering a basic skills test to pupils at two grade levels during the 1969-1970 school year, although he again emphasized that a comprehensive program would require 36 months. Even though the staff would be given only a few months for development, the test results could still be reported in a manner that would take into

consideration the operating conditions of the school district yet allow that district to be compared to another district. The writer feels that given some Board members' wishes to do the politically attractive thing the Board endorsed the 12 month proposal and recommended that the Superintendent of Public Instruction prepare and submit to the Legislature the needed legislation.

After discussion the board pass a motion providing the following guidelines:

(1) the local school districts will provide completed but unscored tests to the State Department of Education by the first Monday of March each year, (2) the purpose of the tests will be to measure individual and group progress at the conclusion of grades three, seven and eleven, (3) the tests will measure achievement in the basic skills, (4) the results of the assessment tests will be public information. The Department of Education will present the results to the board so that it can be published by the first week of June.⁴

In addition, the Board asked that the data be computed to enable comparisons between the districts with similar economic backgrounds.

On May 14, 1969 the State Board of Education was told that the assessment program would cost the State approximately \$500,000 or \$1.00 per student to administer as proposed. Dr. Ira Polley said that although there seemed to be some concern over the cost, he felt the Legislature favored the idea of an assessment program. This was an understatement. The Legislature's quick

action even caught the staff at the State Department of Education off guard.

On August 12, 1969 Governor William Milliken signed into law Public Act 307 (previously Senate Bill 68). The Legislature amended a standard appropriations bill for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1970, adding Section 14, entitled: "Assessment of educational progress; pupil achievement tests." It allocated money for the 1969-1970 assessment test.

Section 14 said that the Department of Education should develop a state assessment program for periodically testing students in the basic skills. These tests should be designed to objectively measure instructional goals among elementary and secondary students. In addition, the State Department should produce an annual report of the data collected and computed. An appropriation of \$59,000 was made to provide prompt implementation of Section 14. This did not include the appropriations for other aspects of the research and educational planning section.⁵

On Thursday October 9, 1969, Governor William Milliken, in a special message to the Legislature on educational reform, said:

I am absolutely convinced that the people of Michigan are willing to pay more for education if they can be convinced they are getting their money's worth... All indications are that parents are highly concerned not only about the costs

of education but also about the quality of education.⁶

Governor Milliken stated that the entire educational process needed continuing evaluation and improvement; therefore he was preparing legislation to establish a comprehensive program for evaluation and improvement in the basic skills. The writer notes that it appears that both the Governor and Legislature as well as the Board of Education wanted the public to be aware of their support for educational assessment at this time. The Governor's program offered five objectives: (1) to establish achievement standards in the basic skills and identify children with the greatest need in relation to these standards, (2) to provide the public with periodic data concerning educational progress, (3) to establish an atmosphere where school districts are encouraged to make improvements to help needy students, (4) to provide incentives so districts can introduce innovative programs to improve the acquisition of basic skills, and (5) to provide the state with needed information to allocate scarce dollars and services to equalize educational opportunity. His program requested testing of the basic skills of all students in grades one, two, four, seven and ten.⁷

These recommendations were the findings of the Governor's Commission on Educational Reform, created early in 1969 to study Michigan's public schools, to suggest

necessary changes to improve the quality of the schools and to offer methods of implementing these changes. After listing the five objectives previously given by Governor Milliken, the Committee recommended the following steps for implementation: (1) create an assessment test for the basic skills for grades one, two, four and seven, (2) make funds available based on the assessment information to introduce new programs or improve existing ones carefully auditing the program's effectiveness, and (3) reassess State assisted programs by continuing the assessment program in various grades.⁸

In October 1969 the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Dr. Ira Polley, resigned due to the long standing differences with the State Board of Education. It appointed a new Superintendent, Dr. John Porter, who strongly supported the development of an assessment program. Thus the Board of Education pressed ahead at full speed. Initially, cycle one was to be a 36 month pilot study (February 1969). This 36 month pilot study never materialized. The Board of Education wanted more immediate results and asked for an assessment test to be administered with 12 months (April 1969). Four months later the assessment test was mandated by law (August 1969) with the first test to be administered in the 1969-1970 school year (January 1970). The State Department of Education was given very little time to develop a reliable and valid

assessment test. The short time allotted for test development also precluded any input from the public, scholars and professional educators as was called for in the original pilot study. Therefore, the State Department of Education used the Educational Testing Service, the lowest bidders, to create the norm referenced tests which would be used for the next four years. Furthermore, to assist in the confusion, the assessment tests were not placed in an accountability context until the Michigan Accountability Model was published in March of 1972. Things were moving rapidly, too rapidly some critics would soon say.

At the November 19, 1969 Board of Education meeting Dr. Philip Kearney gave a progress report. He said that every school district and intermediate district had been contacted and asked to appoint someone to serve as coordinator of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program. This person would act as a liason between the district and the Department of Education and would attend regional meetings for the purpose of setting up the mechanics for administering the tests. Dr. Kearney said that the supplemental data to be obtained by the test were: (1) the children's social and economic class, (2) the children's attitudes toward school, (3) the children's aspirations, (4) family financial data, and (5) teaching staff characteristics.⁹

At the November 25, 1969 Board meeting a staff report was read that suggested that a task force be appointed to define an educational goal, then to formulate common educational goals for Michigan and finally to group them according to their importance.¹⁰ The Board discussed this report at its next meeting. It debated whether it should define, formulate and group educational goals for Michigan or appoint a task force to do it. Since the Board felt it would be best to get the input of experts in the educational field, it passed a motion to begin reviewing biographical information on proposed task force members to work with Dr. Kearney's staff to define, formulate and group educational goals.¹¹ At the December 17, 1969 meeting Dr. Porter provided biographical information on proposed task force members. Several board members suggested other people, including a student, for service on the task force.¹² At a later Board meeting it was recommended that Dr. Porter select one additional student to the task force.¹³

On January 13, 1970 the Board approved the appointment of 19 persons to the Task Force on Goals of Michigan Education. It was also decided that the task force meet with the Board February 24, 1970 to review Board goals and priorities.¹⁴ Dr. Kearney then presented the following goals prepared by his staff: Education should help every person (1) understand himself and his worth to

society, (2) appreciate others regardless of their race, creed or social level, (3) master the basic skills, (4) acquire a positive attitude toward the learning process, (5) become a responsible citizen, (6) acquire what is needed for emotional and physical health, (7) be creative, (8) prepare himself for a productive life, (9) appreciate the natural and social sciences, humanities and fine arts, (10) prepare for a rapidly changing world, and (11) enhance himself. The Board accepted this report as "The Goals of Michigan Education, Revision 2."¹⁵ It appears to the writer that these goals are so broad and inclusive that few people would argue against them.

On June 9, 1970 the Board formally received the recommendations of the Task Force on the Goals of Michigan Education and expressed gratitude for its work. Dr. Porter said that even though the report had become public the Board must still remember that it was responsible for developing Michigan's educational goals and therefore, could make any changes it felt were necessary. This is the first instance the writer has noticed where the Board has received input relating to the Assessment Program from professional educators.

The Board also received a report on the recently administered Assessment Tests. An explanatory booklet, norm tables and computer printouts were distributed. The Board was told it would soon receive along with all

school districts, a report explaining the results of the Assessment Test. Dr. Porter said it was important that people realize that the main purpose of the assessment test was to provide more accurate knowledge concerning children's achievement in school.¹⁶

On June 23, 1970 the Board received the promised assessment report, "Levels of Educational Performance and Related Factors in Michigan." The report attempted to compare the achievement level of districts with others in the same geographic region and with those in similar communities.¹⁷ When this data became public it helped ignite the first controversy with the Michigan Association of School Administrators.

As previously cited, in August 1969, the assessment test first became law by an amendment to Public Act 307, an appropriations bill. On June 24, 1970, Public Act 38 (previously House Bill 3886) formally mandated an annual State Assessment Testing Program in the basic skills for two grade levels and made possible at State Board of Education discretion, needs assessments in the other grades. It charged the State Department of Education to: (1) establish achievement goals in the basic skills, (2) provide data for a basis on which to allocate funds and services to equalize educational opportunity, (3) provide districts with incentives to improve education, (4) develop a system for educational self renewal, and

(5) provide the public with information concerning the progress of the state system of education.¹⁸ Public Act 38 (1970) provided a basic structure but the Board was free to make decisions in designing and directing the program.

The writer believes the State Board of Education has changed its attitude. In 1969 it pushed for quick action but in 1975 it passed a resolution to hold expansion of the assessment program for two years except for pilot testing. Ironically this was the very idea Dr. Kearney suggested in 1969 when he presented the three year planning program. In 1972 the Board approved the change from norm reference to objective reference test items. In 1975 it adopted "The Long Range Plan of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program." However in 1977 the Board refused to give permission to expand the test to the tenth grade. Later in 1977 it responded to the lobbying pressure of the Michigan Education Association and adopted a policy forbidding assessment data to be used to make a district, building and teacher comparisons, while in 1969 it was anxious to see district comparisons commencing with the first test. These events will be discussed in greater detail in the sections and chapters to follow.

The State Board of Education changed its attitude as the members changed following elections and resignations and as the members have listened to teachers,

administrators, taxpayers and the staff of the State Department of Education. Some Board members have pushed for the assessment test, others have opposed parts of it and others have not taken a position about it. Since the election of 1974 the State Board of Education seemed to be more aware of field dissatisfaction with the assessment program and more responsive to professional educators. The writer believes State Board of Education members respond to the climate of their environment as politicians do.

Design of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program

The Michigan Educational Assessment Program is the means by which the State attempts to find out what Michigan's students know compared to what they should know. By doing this the State is assuming its Constitutional responsibility to assure all students an education. The assessment test is meant to provide reliable information on the achievement level of Michigan's public school children in the basic skills. The second goal is to improve the basis for educational decision making at all levels.¹⁹

There are five assumptions implicit in the stated goals of the assessment program according to Dr. Kearney. First, children's achievement levels are influenced by both school related and non-school related factors.

Therefore, in addition to performance measures, data should be collected on the students' socio-economic status. Misleading conclusions could be drawn if children from different districts are compared without recognition of the differences in educational opportunities they have had. Each school must deal with different input, that is, children with different abilities, values and attitudes. Then each school must operate under the restraints its surrounding community places on it. Finally, each school uses a delivery system that attempts to meet the needs of its children, faculty and administrators. This means that any attempt to compare educational programs necessitates a knowledge of the input and conditions under which it must work.

The second assumption is that professional educators, scholars and citizens can reach agreement on a set of common goals acceptable to all public schools. This means that all public schools have the same purpose. Each school may use different means or have unique features, but there is an underlying commonality of purpose as defined by the minimal behavior objectives in the basic skills.

The third assumption is that the means exist or can readily be developed for measuring student progress in attaining these goals. Current instruments may be imperfect, but this calls for caution in interpreting the

results, not in abandoning the attempt. The State Department of Education said it considered the assessment test one component in a comprehensive battery of instruments that will measure both cognitive and affective domains.

The fourth assumption is that the many factors which influence student achievement are inequitably distributed among the schools in Michigan. This was reduced down to the fundamental problem of inequality of educational opportunity. The State Department of Education viewed this as the most important educational problem facing the nation. There appears to be a correlation between socio-economic status and school expenditure. If students have a low socio-economic status, the school district and community have a low resource level and the students have a low performance level.

The fifth assumption is that the data gained from a statewide assessment test can be used as a basis for decision making. A body of reliable and meaningful data would help the public understand the attainments, needs and problems of the schools; it would help the Legislature enact legislation more suited to Michigan's educational needs. Also, it would help the State Department of Education identify needs and priorities providing for more cost-effective education and equalized educational opportunities. Finally, it would aid the local school districts in identifying needs and priorities to plan

and administer more efficient and effective delivery systems.²⁰

At present, all fourth and seventh graders in the public schools are given the assessment test each fall. The test evaluates students in reading and mathematics. The test provides a composite score for each student tested as well as a score for each objective measured. The tests are objective-reference, meaning the questions were written to tell whether the student has mastered specific objectives. The minimal performance objectives were written and are being revised by specialists and professional educators from all over the state of Michigan in line with the 22 broad Common Goals of Michigan Education developed by the 1970 Task Force. Objectives in other areas will be tested in years ahead.

Each objective to be tested contains five multiple choice questions. If the student answers four out of five questions correctly, he has mastered the objective. The State Department of Education states that statistical methods show the tests to be reliable. In addition, curriculum specialists review the tests each year to assure validity.

The Michigan Educational Assessment Program plans assessment tests for grades one, four, seven, ten and twelve. A new battery of tests are being tested for first graders, tenth graders and twelfth graders. The

pre-primary objectives for first graders would test school entry readiness while the objectives for twelfth graders would test life-role competency skills necessary for the young adult years. These life-role competency skills are the ability to assume responsibilities of employment, marriage, citizenship, continuing education and interpersonal relationships. The test for tenth graders is being designed along the lines of a competency test over the basic skills using minimal performance objectives as in grades four and seven. The State Department of Education stated that each of the tests is to assess needs and thereby help improve learning.²¹ All tests are to be given in the fall except the grade twelve tests which would be given in the spring near graduation. The tests are meant to monitor Michigan's students' educational progress in steps of approximately three years.²²

From the 1969-1970 school year through the 1972-1973 school year, the State Department used a norm referenced test composed largely of existing items from alternate standardized tests. As a result of the short time between legislative mandate and the first testing, the State Department of Education relied heavily on the Educational Testing Service to help create the testing instrument. Many educators questioned the utility of the test since the score only told the examinee's standing relative to a norm referenced group. They claimed this

was not as meaningful as a score based on specifically stated performance objectives. For example, a norm reference score tells how a student achieved in reading compared to the norm of other examinee's reading scores. An objective reference score could be broken down to show which objectives were met and which were not. Objective reference scores can help determine the areas where students need help and the effectiveness of a specific program. In response to the demand from the field to increase the utility of the test the State Department changed to an objective reference test in the 1973-1974 academic year. This was the most important change in the test to date. Also beginning in that year, the test was administered in September rather than January as in previous years to avoid any attempts to use the test to evaluate the current teacher's performance.

In October 1975, encouraged by the State Department of Education, the Board of Education adopted "The Long Range Plan of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program." Since 1969 the Board of Education had made crucial decisions and periodically approved annual program plans as they were needed. The State Department of Education wanted to avoid making decisions on the basis of quickly changing attitudes. The long range plan was a general developmental outline for the next five to ten years. It defined the purpose of the assessment program as a means

to assist educational decision making by providing data on pupil achievement and human and financial resources.

The long range plan listed eight objectives of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program: (1) to provide current information of pupil achievement, (2) to produce evidence illustrating the progress in student achievement over a period of several years, (3) to identify areas of success and weakness that could be used as a partial basis for allocating resources, (4) to provide information and assistance to local districts, (5) to provide help for the development of local district assessment tests, (6) to establish standards and instrumentation for pupil assessment, (7) to promote the utility of assessment data by disseminating it to all concerned audiences, and (8) to provide the State Board of Education with an annual audit of policies and procedures including input from advisory groups.²³

The plan proposed the selection of a minimum number of core objectives to test all students at the previously designated grade levels. All other objectives would be used on a sampling basis over a given number of years. For example, sample A objectives would be used with the core objectives every fourth year, allowing samples B, C, and D to be used in turn the other years. The performance objectives were to undergo a periodic review process involving large numbers of professional

educators and their organizations. Michigan educators were also being asked to write test items as well as review and revise them. Data analysis was aimed at identifying the objectives that were and were not being attained state-wide and the reasons for high and low attainment. The State Department of Education intended to encourage those who developed the objectives to help interpret the results so that the tests would aid teachers, administrators, the State Department of Education, the State Board of Education and legislators in making decisions.²⁴

Design of the Michigan Accountability Model

In 1971 the State Board of Education felt the need for an accountability model that would provide a process that each district could use to improve the delivery of educational services to Michigan's children. It would provide a rational context for the Common Goals, performance objectives and needs assessment test. It would be a systems approach analogous to program budgeting for business, yet it would not be imposed on districts.

Superintendent of Public Instruction, Dr. Porter, said that accountability is the means by which the State guarantees

that nearly all students, without respect to race, geographic location or family socio-economic status will acquire the minimum school skills

necessary to take full advantage of the adult choices that follow successful completion of public education.²⁵

He said that the accountability model was developed first, to tell taxpayers what they were getting for their tax dollars and second, to tell parents what their children were supposed to know at each level and if, in fact, they did know these things.

In 1972 the State Board of Education adopted a six-step accountability model that can be applied at every educational level. The six steps are: (1) the identification of statewide goals, (2) the development of measurable performance objectives designed to meet these goals, (3) a statewide assessment to measure if the students are meeting these objectives, (4) an analysis of necessary changes in the instructional delivery system, (5) an evaluation of how the changed delivery system has performed, and (6) recommendations for further changes in the delivery system to better meet the objectives.²⁶

In 1971 the State Board of Education published The Common Goals of Michigan Education. Twenty-two goals were specified within three areas: (1) citizenship and morality, (2) democracy and equal opportunity, and (3) student learning. The identification of statewide goals was completion of step one of the accountability model.

Because the Common Goals were written in general terms, specific measurable performance objectives needed

to be written. The development of these measurable performance objectives was step two of the accountability model. These were written by curriculum specialists and professional educators from throughout Michigan in accord with the 22 Common Goals. New ones are still being written for the first, tenth and twelfth grades and old ones are being revised. Step two is an on going process involving educators' continuous input.

The Michigan Educational Assessment Program serves the state as step three of the accountability model. It seeks to determine if each student tested has reached each objective. Besides providing individual data, group data are provided on the classroom, building, district and state levels. Local districts may add additional questions to measure their own performance objectives.

During step four changes are made in the delivery system. This action is based, in part, on the feedback from the assessment tests. For the State Department of Education this step involves redistributing services and state aid to equalize educational opportunity.

Step five evaluates the changes made in the delivery system or changes in the educational goals or changes in the performance objectives before the cycle begins anew. Over a period of time a school district should establish a data base which tells which delivery system is most cost-effective given a set of variables.²⁷

Superintendent Porter asserted that this accountability model will force professional educators to state in objective form what students are to achieve, to declare after testing whether they have achieved the objectives and finally to decide what else needs to be done to assure that the remaining students will achieve the objectives. Dr. Porter hoped that accountability would prevent students from being passed from level to level simply because of their age or size.²⁸

Now that the Assessment Program and Accountability Model have been discussed the writer wishes to stress that accountability and assessment are not synonymous. Assessment is a step in assuming accountability. However, these words have become so firmly linked together that many people use them interchangeably. Because the assessment program was in use several years before the accountability model was designed the public did not come to understand that the assessment test was only a step toward accountability. Some have erroneously identified the results of the assessment tests as a report card for which the teachers and administrators are held accountable.

In this chapter the writer has explained the actions surrounding the passage of Public Act 307 in August 1969 and Public Act 38 in June 1970. He has also described the Michigan Educational Assessment Program and the Michigan Accountability Model. In the next chapter

the writer will examine the controversy that developed after the first assessment test was administered.

FOOTNOTES

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²³Michigan Department of Education, The Long Range Plan of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (Lansing, Michigan: Research, Evaluation and Assessment Services, May 1976).

²⁴Ibid., pp. 10-13, 17-18, 25, 29-30.

²⁵John W. Porter, "The Accountability Story in Michigan," Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 54 (October 1972):98-99.

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²⁷Michigan Department of Education, A Position Statement on Educational Accountability (Lansing, Michigan, 1972), pp. 6-7.

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CHAPTER III

THE FIRST CONTROVERSY

The objective of the writer in this chapter is to document the controversy between the Michigan Association of School Administrators and the State Department of Education over the use of assessment test data. In addition, the following three questions will be answered: (1) What initiated the controversy? (2) Can the controversy be placed in a framework denoting either a political power struggle or different philosophical assumptions? (3) What changes occurred in the assessment program as a result of this controversy?

As the writer noted in Chapter II, the assessment program was created three years prior to the accountability model. With impetus from the State Board of Education, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the State Department of Education, the Governor and the Legislature legislation was signed in August 1969 mandating a basic skills assessment test for the 1969-1970 school year. This gave the State Department of Education only four months to develop a test; therefore, the State Department of Education was prevented from doing any extensive

research on developing objectives or tests. As a result, the State Department of Education contracted with the Educational Testing Service to provide test items. The resulting assessment test was composed from existing forms of standardized, norm referenced tests. It was used for four school years (fall 1969-spring 1973) until it was replaced with objective referenced tests in the 1973-1974 school year. The norm referenced test was accompanied by an attitude survey and questionnaire collecting socio-economic status data.

The State Department of Education's initial conflict with school superintendents came about after the public release of the results of the 1969-1970 assessment test despite a promise not to do so. In August 1970 each school district received its own results in addition to norm tables allowing each district to compare its mean scores with other districts and the state as a whole. When word of this spread, legislators, the Governor's office and the press demanded the same information. Even some members of the State Board felt the data should be made public. The State Department of Education had underestimated the curiosity the tests would create. Having to withdraw from their promise to local superintendents, the State Department of Education stalled until October. Soon legislators were declaring that information gathered

at taxpayer's expense was being withheld. Under pressure the State Department of Education released the data.¹

Superintendents' fears were soon realized. The press and public, without knowledge of the limitations, validity or reliability of the test, were interpreting the test scores as measures of school quality. In at least two districts, school board members were attempting to lay blame on particular teachers for low test scores. Some experienced horror, others delight, as district scores were compared "proving" that greater expenditures do not provide greater achievement. Some teachers became angry when they believed they were being held accountable publicly due to the test scores. Many questioned whether or not the tests measured what was being taught in the classrooms. Some administrators and teachers argued that philosophically this test was turning the clock back years in education. More important, few had been involved in developing the assessment program.

Controversy Over the Use of Assessment Test Data

After administering the assessment tests the second year (1970-1971) superintendents of 43 school districts banded together and withheld the answer sheets for their districts pending negotiations with the State Department of Education. There was widespread concern about the direction the Michigan Educational Assessment Program

was taking. Some superintendents supported the action of the 43 without withholding their test results. Other superintendents supported a "wait and see" policy. After their first meeting with the State Department of Education, the representative superintendents of the 43 districts asked the Michigan Association of School Administrators to give them some official status in their dealings with the State Department of Education. In response, President Ianni named Burl Glendenning, Superintendent of Greenville Public Schools; Larry Gagon, Superintendent of Hillsdale Community Schools; Simon Kacheterian, Superintendent of Taylor Public Schools; Howard Parr, Superintendent of Huron Valley Public Schools; Harry Howard, Superintendent of Wayne Community Schools; Larry Read, Chairman and Superintendent of Jackson Public Schools and Norman Walker, Superintendent of Madison Public Schools as the Ad Hoc Committee of the Michigan Association of School Administrators on Assessment. These men, as representatives of the 43 districts and the Ad Hoc Committee on State Assessment of the Michigan Association of School Administrators, met with the representatives of the State Department of Education during the spring of 1971 in an effort to clarify misunderstandings and resolve differences.

Previous to the first meeting, the 43 superintendents who had withheld their answer sheets made their concerns known in a letter to the State Board of Education.

The superintendents felt that the burden of accountability was resting on their shoulders. In their opinion the State Department of Education had not made a sincere effort to obtain and use the opinions of those most affected. The manner in which the data had been released the previous year strongly implied to them that the State Department of Education felt that local superintendents could not be trusted to handle and release the data in a responsible manner. Furthermore, they were convinced that the State Department of Education would attempt to make judgments, control change and direct the course of education in the state of Michigan using the data collected from this single instrument. The Ad Hoc Committee quoted Dr. Herbert C. Rudman who called this "examining education from a mole's point of view." Effective decision making that resulted in changes at the classroom level required various types of evaluation procedures. If the State Department of Education continued to follow its present course, the superintendents believed it would lead to erroneous judgments resulting in harm to children, schools and districts for which they would have to answer.²

The superintendents then listed some limitations of a standardized test score. It was not, they claimed, an exact measure of student achievement. They suggested that the assessment test was subject to curriculum

differences, test administration, student experiences, cultural bias and the emotional and physical condition of students.

In conjunction with this, the superintendents contended that the socio-economic questions were "absurd" and a "serious invasion of privacy." A fourth grade student hardly had an accurate knowledge of his family's circumstances. It was foolish to rely on children's impressions when factual data concerning the economic level of a school district was available.³

The superintendents, in the light of their concerns, requested the State Board of Education to take the following actions with the results of the 1971 assessment test: (1) prevent it from being used to judge district programs, (2) prevent it from being used to influence curriculum changes in districts, (3) prevent it from being used as a basis for allocating funds, and (4) release it only to local district officials.⁴

The superintendents also requested that a broad advisory committee be established immediately to aid in the development and implementation of the assessment program. The committee should include representatives from at least the: Michigan Department of Education, Michigan Education Association, Educational Advisory Staff of Governor William Milliken, Michigan Congress of Parents and Teachers, National Association for the Advancement of

Colored People, Michigan Association of School Administrators, Michigan Secondary Principal's Association, Michigan Elementary Principal's Association, Michigan Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Association of Professors of School Administration, Michigan Federation of Teachers, Michigan School Board's Association, Michigan Association for Childhood Education, National Assessment Association and the Michigan Association for the Study of Retarded Children.⁵

On March 4, 1971, representatives of the State Department of Education met with representatives of the 43 school districts withholding their 1970-1971 test results. At this initial meeting Dr. William Emerson, Superintendent of the Oakland Intermediate School District, presented a paper, A Critical Assessment of Michigan's School Assessment Program, in which he expressed his concerns over the purposes, objectives and procedures of the assessment program.

Dr. Emerson's first criticism was that the test lacked a primary objective. Three purposes had been given for the assessment test of the 1969-1970 school year; four had been given for the assessment test of the 1970-1971 school year. For both years the test contained three types of measures necessary to meet the objectives: (1) state report variables, (2) self report variables, and (3) test variables. State report data were collected from

district officials while data for the latter two variables were collected from the students. Dr. Emerson believed that a basic decision must be made about the definition of a prime objective before the instrument could be properly constructed. The writer found this criticism less than convincing but probably due to Dr. Emerson's perspective in 1971.

The second criticism was that the measures of testing socio-economic status were neither reliable nor valid. The 1969-1970 test contained only 13 socio-economic status questions. However, the 1970-1971 test expanded this area of testing to 19 questions. This expansion, combined with the elimination of items which did not discriminate between socio-economic levels, was needed to create reliability. Validation studies also needed to be performed which compared the tests items to external measures. Without this the assessment test would continue to be suspect.

Dr. Emerson's third criticism was that the data had been published improperly. It made misinterpretation and the assumption of causal relationships almost inevitable for professional educators, not to mention the public. If the results were intended to be useful the test must first be designed around a primary objective. Then the concepts measured must be fully understood by teachers, specialists and administrators. Finally the data must be

reported with the limitations carefully explained. Since any test score has a standard of error, it should be used with other measures. Without this information, the public, as well as legislators were misled. Publishing comparative data implied that the test had sufficient information on districts' curricula and socio-economic background. This it did not have, according to Dr. Emerson.

The fourth criticism was that the test data should not be used as a basis for allocating state funds. Doing so was unwise considering the lack of reliability and validity of the measures of socio-economic status. Furthermore, considering the vast sums that were at stake for some districts, using test data as a basis for allocating state funds was an open invitation for them to manipulate this data.

Dr. Emerson's final criticism was that the state was performing a task that could be better done by the local officials who knew their curricula. The results would be more meaningful and could be used immediately to increase the effectiveness of learning. Allowing school districts to perform individually would decrease the likeliness of public misinformation, the loss of public support and the chance that quality educators would lose their jobs through a "witch hunt."⁶

In April 1971 the State Department of Education released A Response to the Major Issues Raised in the

Paper Entitled "A Critical Assessment of Michigan's School Assessment Program." The State Department of Education responded to the first criticism by stating the general goal and specific objectives of the assessment test. The general goal of the assessment test was to provide information to all, taxpayers as well as educators, concerning the quality of education and the progress of the students in Michigan's public schools. Since the general goal and specific objectives had been set forth in reports the State Department of Education said there was little reason for administrators to be confused on this issue.

The second criticism was that the measures of socio-economic status were not reliable or valid. The State Department of Education responded that reliability involved the effectiveness with which a test measured whatever it measured while validity involved the effectiveness with which a test measured what it was intended to measure. A test's unreliability imposed limits upon its validity. By viewing the socio-economic status means for districts based on a comparison of fourth grade responses with seventh grade responses, the resulting correlation was high enough to show that the socio-economic status was adequately reliable for making decisions at the group level. The determination of validity depended upon finding a suitable comparison measure. Past informal studies showed the assessment test to be valid. However,

this was not claimed to be conclusive, and the State Department of Education acknowledged the need for additional validation studies.

The third criticism was that the test data were published improperly. The State Department of Education stated that the way the data were displayed was chosen deliberately with the intention of showing possible generalizations for groups of districts. Preceding this was a section dealing with precautions to follow in interpreting the data which the Department expected would be read and heeded.

The fourth criticism was that the test data should not be used as a basis for allocating state funds. The State Department of Education responded that this was the trend being followed in New York, California and the District of Columbia. The search for an effective and appropriate way would continue. The writer believed that this criticism was not adequately answered.

The fifth criticism was that the state was performing a task that could better be done by local districts. The State Department of Education did not respond directly to this criticism, but in its conclusion stated that the assessment program intended to supplement local efforts. All districts had unique objectives, but those they shared formed the basis for the state assessment program.⁷

In response to the frustration felt by Michigan's superintendents the Michigan Association of School Administrators passed a resolution February 17, 1971 informing the State Board of Education that

support of a state assessment program in 1971-1972 by the Association will be contingent upon the development of a system of evaluation which will remove the aura of suspicion which exists relative to the present program and the concerns which are being voiced by school board members, educators and citizens throughout the state.⁸

The resolution expressed the following concerns:

(1) the socio-economic status questions are "unnecessary, unwarranted, costly and an invasion of privacy, which interferes with the individuals' basic freedom,"⁹ (2) the socio-economic status measures are inadequate for obtaining the desired data, unrealistically based on children's impressions and unnecessary since factual data are available elsewhere, (3) the academic measures have questionable validity, (4) the test instrument does not provide the best possible information to use as a basis for educational decision making, and (5) a quality educational assessment needs to consider all input present within each district.¹⁰

After the initial March 4 meeting, the Ad Hoc Committee reported that Dr. Porter, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, was both "conciliatory but firm." He agreed that parts of the test were faulty but was totally committed to continuing it. He felt that an

advisory committee was a good idea. However, each of the 43 superintendents would receive a telegram by March 8 ordering them to send their test results to Educational Testing Services.¹¹

As the monthly meetings continued, the State Department of Education representatives issued assurances that they were aware of the perils of uniform testing and had no intention of imposing a state curriculum. The Department also promised that future bulletins would caution readers against making generalizations based on unreliable test data. The Ad Hoc Committee viewed the meetings as helpful since positions were clarified.

The Committee also felt it had influenced minor changes. Dr. Porter indicated that the superintendents had forced the State Department of Education to take a second look at the assessment program. The socio-economic status portion of the test would be changed and piloted before being used again. An elementary and secondary education commission had been authorized by the State Board of Education to advise it on major issues, such as the assessment program. However, the Ad Hoc Committee viewed these results as minor and superficial.¹²

The fundamental issue remained unresolved. The State Board of Education was still convinced that the test data should be used to make educational decisions. The Ad Hoc Committee stated:

In our deliberations we were never able to impress state officials with the serious implications of the assessment program for local school districts...Certainly we tried to strike at the heart of the problem, but the apparent disparities between our respective positions precluded any significant communication between us.¹³

As a result of these meetings, the Committee prepared a position paper that clarified the issues and called for a basis of collective action to change the direction of the assessment program particularly as it demonstrated evidence of state control. The Committee stated that its position was that the Michigan Educational Assessment Program was a "reactionary, unprofessional, undemocratic" standardized test that "will cause irreparable damage to public education" if allowed to continue on its present course. The test data will ultimately be used to coerce or force change.

Left unchallenged in this area, there is a strong possibility that the state will use this powerful instrument of testing to impose stringent, rigid and unprofessional restraints on students, classroom teachers and local school districts.¹⁴

In the writer's opinion the Ad Hoc Committee's position paper was an emotional statement as well as an informational one. In one of its weakest portions the Committee said the test reinforced the behaviorist psychology model that had not worked in the schools because it disregarded the dignity and worth of the individual as important to a democratic society. The individual was considered essentially not free. Through a conditioning

process he was rewarded for conforming not creating. The test was used to motivate better conditioning. In contrast, educational reformers in recent years have attempted to give the schools a humanistic climate where each student's emotions, attitudes and self concept were considered important. The learner was judged on how well he used his talents, not on how his talents compared to others' talents. Testing was rejected unless it assisted individual learning. The Ad Hoc Committee considered the test reactionary because it was a tool that would tend to return the schools to the behaviorists' mode.

Stronger sections of the Committee's position paper cited research evidence and rational arguments illustrating actual weaknesses in the assessment program. The Committee reported the following weaknesses of standardized tests: (1) No test was valid under all conditions for all students. (2) No standardized test existed that could judge the educational level of a community, state or nation. (3) Tests could not assess the extent to which students had learned what the schools attempted to teach. (4) Educational scholars had rejected all achievement tests commonly used in American schools as unsuitable for measuring educational achievement. (5) Test scores of Negroes poorly predicted their performance. (6) Uncritically accepting test results were unjustified and resulted in unwise decisions. (7) No test measured the

important learning factors of listening comprehension, ability to analyze or motivation. (9) Tests could not match the instruction with the achievement so no scale of similarity existed. (10) Test interpretation was frequently wrong. (11) Tests did a poor job of predicting future performance.¹⁵ This research evidence showed, the Ad Hoc Committee stated, that a standardized test should be used as only one tool in a battery of tests.

The Ad Hoc Committee also presented the following common sense arguments against the assessment test: (1) Using comparative data, 50 percent of the students always scored below average. (2) District comparison based on test norms would lead to deception as a means of escaping the degrading identification of being in the lower percentiles. (3) District comparisons based on test norms have created injustices for many individuals who were held responsible for schools or districts that had low norms. (4) Comparisons based on test norms have created dissension and controversy because those in authority sought to place blame for low norms. (5) The assessment test has wasted funds needed elsewhere. (6) Using test scores as a basis for allocating compensatory aid has been unfair because districts lost the needed aid by increasing students' norms. (7) If the assessment program continued to expand without local involvement, it would produce an autocratic, uniform state school system.¹⁶

The following quotations show that the Ad Hoc Committee of the Michigan Association of School Administrators viewed their controversy with the State Department of Education as local control versus state control:

Although this committee has dealt essentially with assessment, it became quite apparent during our deliberations that we were really involved with the much broader issue of state control. In our judgment, assessment is but one important manifestation of a determined effort by the State, through its Department of Education, to impose a uniform system of education on local school districts.

This trend can be readily identified in the areas of tax reform, student discipline, length of the school day, state aid, curriculum and the like. Certainly the proposal to create ten State Education Department regional offices can only be interpreted as an attempt to extend the influence, jurisdiction and control of the State over the operation of local boards of education.

While there may be some who view this as a positive trend, it is the unanimous opinion of this committee that educational problems are best dealt with at the local level; that those directly affected by an institution must be directly involved in its operation. We consider assessment and other programs designed to limit ability as harmful to the cause of good education.¹⁷

Near the end of the position paper, convinced that unified, immediate action was necessary by the various educational associations, the Ad Hoc Committee members tendered their resignations. In addition, they offered to implement the following steps: (1) identify, gather and publish data showing the consequences of the assessment program and abuses of state power, (2) initiate action for a constitutional amendment defining and limiting the

powers of the State Board of Education, (3) raise money to finance legal action against the state whenever its actions negatively affected education, (4) seek the assistance of national as well as state educational associations, (5) urge educational organizations to adopt sanctions against the State Legislature and State Board of Education for encroaching on local leadership and improperly using test data, and (6) urge educational organizations to assess the performance, function, professionalism, efficiency and quality of the State Legislature and State Department of Education.¹⁸

In January 1972, the Michigan Educational Research Council conducted a survey of Michigan superintendents to determine whether they were supportive, neutral or not supportive of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program. They found 18 percent supportive, 41 percent neutral and 41 percent not supportive. In May 1972, the Assessment Committee of the Michigan Association of School Administrators sent a follow-up questionnaire to the same superintendents to further refine the survey. The questionnaire offered choices of degrees of support and opposition for both the superintendent and Board of Education. It also contained a question seeking the superintendents' opinion of what course of action the Michigan Association of School Administrators' should follow in dealing with the assessment program.¹⁹

The questionnaire found 6.4 percent of the superintendents strongly supported the assessment program, 24.9 percent mildly supported it, 34.7 percent mildly opposed and 34 percent strongly opposed it. This gave a 31.3 percent total that supported the test and a 68.7 percent total that opposed the test. Superintendents believing that the Michigan Association of School Administrators should attempt to abolish the assessment test numbered 15.5 percent; 79 percent believed they should attempt to modify it and 5.5 percent believed they should support it as it was.²⁰ The questionnaire showed that the Michigan Association of School Administrators' course of action had the support of the large majority of superintendents answering the questionnaire. However, the writer found no course of action being taken by the Association to modify the assessment program.

Interpretation

The first question that needs to be answered is: What initiated the controversy? The controversy was ignited by the public release of the test data in October 1970 after the superintendents had been promised this would not be done. It is important to note that the State Department of Education had not deliberately misled the superintendents. The State Department of Education had vastly underestimated the impact the assessment test would have and the pressure to make the results public.

After the test data became public, the superintendents found themselves in an uncomfortable situation. They were being held accountable by comparative scores they had not helped to interpret from an instrument they had not helped to develop. The superintendents saw themselves as caught in the middle. The public and boards of education were attempting to lay blame and demanding to know why the scores were low when expenditures were high. Teachers and administrators were becoming defensive when they perceived themselves as being made scapegoats by a single instrument of questionable reliability and validity.

The superintendents saw this use of the assessment test data as a preview of things to come. Their uneasiness, fears and frustrations quickly increased as they found themselves unable to respond adequately to the crisis. More expectations were being placed on them while their resources and autonomy were being eroded. The State Board of Education, Superintendent of Public Instruction, State Department of Education, Governor and Legislature were publicly pointing with pride to the implementation of the assessment program as a major accomplishment while the superintendents had practically been excluded. Something was seriously wrong with the local-state relationship as it related to decision making. The superintendents saw the traditional partnership decaying as the State

Department of Education made more unilateral decisions without consulting them first.

This leads into the second question: Can the controversy be placed in a framework denoting a political power struggle or different philosophical assumptions? As previous quotations showed,²¹ the Ad Hoc Committee perceived the controversy as essentially a political power struggle. The Ad Hoc Committee was struggling to maintain traditional local autonomy in contrast to increasingly stronger controls and demands by the state. They viewed the role the State Department of Education was adopting as an improper intrusion on local autonomy.

The State Department of Education was acting in an unprecedented fashion; coming in uninvited, collecting data with an instrument of questionable reliability and validity, evaluating students, programs and districts based on a single instrument and then making the comparative data public without an adequate warning of the limitations of the test. The Ad Hoc Committee feared that further misuses of the data would quickly follow: using it as a basis for allocating state aid, using it to mandate changes in district delivery systems and programs and permitting the public to draw inaccurate conclusions destroying public support and costing educator's their jobs.

During their meetings with the representatives of the State Department of Education the Ad Hoc Committee felt that the insinuation had been made that since the local districts had failed to solve the problems facing the schools today, it was now time for the State to take over and assume the authority given it by the State Constitution. Considering this state of mind, the writer understands why the Ad Hoc Committee over-reacted in emotional sections of the position paper calling the assessment program reactionary, unprofessional and undemocratic.

This brings up the third question: What changes occurred in the assessment program as a result of this controversy? The Ad Hoc Committee did not succeed in its primary goal of preventing the State Department of Education from using the assessment test data as the basis for making educational decisions. However, the changes that did result were significant. Three changes occurred in the assessment program as a direct result of this controversy. A fourth change occurred as a partial result of this controversy.

First, there was an increased emphasis on providing guidelines for proper interpretation as well as assistance to districts in making the data public. The second year's test results were released to the districts six weeks before the State Department of Education made

them public. New staff members were hired and charged with these additional responsibilities.

Second, the socio-economic status portion of the test was changed to a questionnaire that the principal filled out the third and fourth years. Then this section was dropped entirely.

Third, after Dr. David Donovan became the director of research, evaluation and assessment in February 1971, there was more openness in information and decisions. A broad based advisory council was formed and continues actively today. Hereafter, the superintendents had an opportunity to provide input and express their opinions.

Fourth, the State Department of Education announced early in 1972 that beginning with the 1973-1974 school year the assessment test would change from norm reference to objective reference. Although the Ad Hoc Committee did not directly suggest this change, it was implied by references to the lack of utility of the norm reference test.

The act of moving from a norm reference test to an objective reference test was the most significant change that occurred to the Michigan Educational Assessment Test. The norm reference test maximized the ability to make district comparisons but was of minimal use in the classroom. It provided a score that compared a student's ability to a norm established by other students'

performance. It did not tell what a student actually knew or did not know. The objective reference test maximized instructional use but was of minimal use for making district comparisons. It provided a score for each performance objective so a teacher, parent or administrator knew which objectives the student had mastered. The writer questions whether or not norms might not be developed from the objective reference test in order to provide both.

The move from norm referenced tests to objective referenced tests occurred as a result of four things. The Superintendent of Public Instruction was convinced that objective referenced tests would be of more value in assuring that every Michigan student mastered the basic skills. He was hopeful from the beginning that this was what the assessment and accountability movement would insure. A second factor was that staff members in the State Department of Education and scholars in the field of testing and measurement had recommended this change. A third factor was the Michigan Association of School Administrators' implied references to the tests' lack of utility during their controversy with the State Department of Education. A fourth factor was the negative feedback from the field.

Each fall the State Department of Education staff went into schools to make a series of presentations to

teachers and administrators concerning the assessment test to be given the following January. After the presentations in the fall of 1971, they became fully aware of the intense dissatisfaction many teachers and administrators felt toward the test. Often during the presentation someone stood up and attempted to debate with the speaker in a heated verbal exchange while other members of the audience jeered. The same sentiments were frequently felt when staff members were invited to speak before professional organizations. Educators in the field complained about the unfair comparisons of districts and the damage incurred through the release of the data by the press without explanation of the limitations. But various other complaints were surfacing that kept pointing out the uselessness of the test.

Therefore early in 1972 the State Department of Education announced that beginning with the 1973-1974 school year the norm referenced assessment test would be replaced with the objective referenced assessment test. It was hoped that this change would make the test more useful to all interested parties. Parents, teachers and administrators would actually know what each student could do. The State Department of Education would have more useful data for evaluating a school's effectiveness, making crucial decisions and allocating resources. But this change, as significant as it was, did not quell

the indignation of the test's opponents. Two more controversies were to follow.

In this chapter the writer has examined the controversy over the use of assessment test data between the Michigan Association of School Administrators and the State Department of Education. In the next chapter the writer will examine the second controversy.

FOOTNOTES

¹Murphy and Cohen, pp. 59-60.

²Letter, Superintendents of 43 public school districts to the Michigan State Board of Education, February 8, 1971, pp. 1-3.

³Ibid., pp. 4-5.

⁴Ibid., p. 6.

⁵Ibid., pp. 6-7.

⁶Dr. William Emerson, A Critical Assessment of Michigan's School Assessment Program, March 1971, pp. 2-19.

⁷Michigan Department of Education, A Response to the Major Issues Raised in the Paper Entitled "A Critical Assessment of Michigan's School Assessment Program, April 1971, pp. 1-15.

⁸Ad Hoc Committee on State Assessment of the Michigan Association of School Administrators, The Michigan State Assessment Program--A Critical Evaluation, 1971, p. 2.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., p. 10.

¹²Ibid., p. 11.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 13-14.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 24-29.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁹Lawrence F. Read, A Survey of Opinions of Michigan Superintendents Concerning the Michigan State Assessment Program, 1972, pp. 1-2.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 2-3.

²¹Ad Hoc Committee, p. 30.

CHAPTER IV

THE SECOND CONTROVERSY

The objective of the writer in this chapter is to document the controversy between the Michigan Association of Professors of Educational Administration and the State Department of Education over the design and the content of the assessment test. In addition, the following three questions will be answered: (1) What initiated the controversy? (2) Can the controversy be placed in a framework denoting either a political power struggle or different philosophical assumptions? (3) What changes occurred in the assessment program as a result of this controversy?

Controversy Over the Design and the Content of the Assessment Test

The Michigan Association of Professors of Educational Administration is an association of professors from Michigan colleges and universities who have the responsibility for designing courses and programs dealing with educational administration. Not only do these professors help prepare public school administrators, but they also serve them in a continuing education function. A goal of

their organization is to clarify problems administrators face in the public schools and to offer possible solutions.¹

When the Michigan Association of Professors of Educational Administration met in the spring of 1970, they were aware of the emerging problem superintendents were facing concerning the Michigan Educational Assessment Program. The nature of the job as well as their organization necessitated that they keep in close communication with public school administrators. In order to focus on this educational problem, the Michigan Association of Professors of Educational Administration appointed a Task Force on Assessment and Accountability. The following men were appointed to the Task Force: Donald O. Bush, Central Michigan University; Jack D. Minzey, Eastern Michigan University; Herbert C. Rudman, Chairman, Michigan State University; George Richens, Northern Michigan University; George Mills, University of Michigan; Gerald Boicourt, Wayne State University; and Ted Ploughman, Western Michigan University.²

At the Task Force's first meeting in October 1970 the members stated their main objective was the examination of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program and the identification of its strengths and weaknesses. They felt they should strive for objectivity and not draw conclusions until all the data had been collected and

analyzed. The final report was to be given to the Michigan Association of Professors of Educational Administration. It would be left to the entire body to decide on modifications and distribution.³

In November 1970 the Task Force met for the second time to decide on data gathering methods. They decided to gather data from state and national publications on assessment and interviews with personnel from the Michigan Department of Education, professional educators, administrators and professional educational associations. The collection of data was completed in the fall of 1971.⁴

A series of five reports were released by the Michigan Association of Professors of Educational Administration in the spring of 1972. The first report was The Michigan Educational Assessment Program: A Background Report. It contained a brief historical summary of the assessment program from the fall of 1969 to the fall of 1971. The second report was The Michigan Educational Assessment Program: A Technical Analysis of the Michigan Assessment of Basic Skills. It examined the validity of the assumptions underlying the assessment program in the process of answering these questions: (1) What are the essential elements of a standardized achievement test?, (2) How many of these elements are present in Michigan's assessment test?, and (3) What is the relationship between the vocabulary portion of Michigan's assessment test and

Part I of the School and College Ability Test, II, Form 4B. The Task Force was analyzing the norm referenced assessment test which had been made from national standardized tests. The third report was The Michigan Educational Assessment Program: Selected Working Papers. It contained copies of documents, transcribed tapes of interviews and transcribed tapes of the Task Force's work sessions. The fourth report was The Michigan Educational Assessment Program: Recommendations for Modification. It contained a series of suggestions which will be examined shortly. The fifth report was The Michigan Educational Assessment Program: An Abstract. It was approved for distribution by the Michigan Association of Professors of Educational Administration on April 25, 1972. It contained portions from the previous four reports and was widely distributed.

After analyzing the assessment test the Task Force drew several conclusions. The Task Force stated that the weakest part of the entire assessment program lay in the construction of the test; they further commented that there was no substitute for good test construction if the results were to be meaningful or used to make educational decisions. With the chairman of the Task Force, Dr. Herbert C. Rudman, being a co-author of the Stanford Achievement Tests, the Task Force felt qualified to make

judgments in the area of test and measurements and prepare a report for school administrators.

The Michigan Assessment of the Basic Skills is characterized by patch-work construction, peer item analysis information, the use of untried items in the published editions of the test, shoddy cosmetic changes in words or letters or names of people and representing these as "new" items.⁵

The writer perceives this as a strong indictment, to the point of being provocative.

The Task Force reported that a minimum of 11 steps are common to all well constructed standardized achievement tests. The Michigan Assessment Test did not include five of the steps in its test preparation as stated below. The 11 steps were: (1) An analysis is conducted of old and new programs being used in the schools. (2) Specifications are written for the achievement test. (3) Test items are written by skilled writers. (4) Test items are administered to a pilot group of pupils to assure that the test items are interpreted as intended. The State Department of Education omitted this step. (5) The test manuscript is rewritten. The State Department of Education omitted this step also. (6) The test manuscript is submitted to a test editor for review. (7) Another item analysis is made including geographic distribution and testing two grades above and below the intended level. The State Department of Education omitted this step. (8) Once again the test manuscript is rewritten. The State

Department of Education omitted this step also. (9) Norm data is gathered. (10) Manuals are written for explaining, administering, and interpreting the test. The State Department of Education omitted this step. (11) The test is released to be used by the classroom teacher.⁶ Since the test was actually prepared by the Educational Testing Service, the writer raises the following question: Why did the Task Force not describe the steps the Educational Testing Service used in preparing the test as well as list those steps omitted according to the Task Force's procedure?

In addition, the Task Force stated that the test was said to be a test of content taught in Michigan's schools. Yet its validity was not established through content or related criteria which would show that what was being tested was indeed being taught at the appropriate grade levels. Neither was evidence supplied showing how the test related to an independent, external measure.

On the more positive side, the Task Force reported that the reliability for the test and the degree of error in the subtests compared favorably with other standardized achievement tests. Concerns over small differences between district scores are not justified from a statistical point of view when districts have approximately 100 children per grade. However, if funding is based on this data, there is a need to be concerned.

Then the Task Force drew two conclusions involving the test's contractor, the Educational Testing Service. Since the assessment test did not include an item analysis, there is no evidence to indicate that the items are arranged in order of difficulty. If the items are not arranged in degree of difficulty, the reliability of the test may be low.

A second fault is the claim that the grade four achievement test is valid when the vocabulary portion of the test is marketed nationally as a grade four to six scholastic aptitude test.⁷ This appears to the writer as a serious fault. Instead of using the vocabulary portion as an achievement test, the Task Force suggested using it to interpret the composite achievement score to the public. The vocabulary subtest correlated .91 with the composite achievement score at grade four and .99 with the composite achievement score at grade seven. This would help to explain which students come to school able to learn and show the input of the schools from the community.⁸ The writer believes this would strengthen the administrators' position.

After analyzing the assessment test, the Task Force made 12 recommendations for improving the assessment program. The recommendations took into account the recently announced accountability model. The Task Force acknowledged the need for an assessment program as a basis

for educational decision making and unanimously supported the concept of educational accountability. They commended the Governor and legislature for "their concern and their sensitivity to the need for data-based decision making." They also commended the State Department of Education for "its attempt to develop a model for gathering this [sic] data." But the Task Force characterized the program as using "make-shift approaches, intransigence to suggestions from sources who differed with them, and as manipulating data rather than reporting it [sic]." ⁹

The Task Force first recommended that the State Department of Education reexamine its assumptions implicit in its approach to the assessment program. The Task Force listed seven assumptions they felt the State Department of Education made that needed careful analysis: (1) Michigan has a curriculum so unique that national measures and comparisons are not very useful. (2) The mobility of Michigan's population is not an important variable in assessment. (3) Michigan school district populations are stable within and between districts. (4) There is no "national" curriculum. (5) Michigan's instructional objectives are unique. They are not derived from nationally produced instructional materials. (6) Since expenditure is causally related to achievement, districts with low achievement scores need more funds than districts with high achievement scores. (7) Non-experts can produce a

standardized achievement test with documented validity and with scores that possess high reliability to allow educators to be held accountable.¹⁰

The second recommendation was that information on student mobility be provided for each district. Before judgments are made concerning the effectiveness of a district's programs, it should be known what percentage of the tested students received their schooling in the district in the years prior to the time of testing. To the writer this would strengthen the administrators' position.

The Task Force feared the State Department of Education would use this opportunity to develop a unified state curriculum. If this be the case the Department should base its performance objectives on instructional materials for the cognitive part of the curriculum. School districts would still be able to choose their own delivery system, organization and non-cognitive courses and materials. This was the third recommendation.

The fourth recommendation was to forsake the present "patchwork test" for nationally produced standardized tests that could provide national, state, district and building norms. This would provide much improved data for decision making. In addition, contracts for these tests could be negotiated which might save the state money.¹¹

If school districts are to be compared on a percentile rank basis, the districts' percentile rank should be expressed as being within a given range rather than as a single point. This was the fifth recommendation. For purposes of comparison, raw test scores, the number of correct answers, are often transformed into percentile ranks. A percentile rank is a derived score often used for comparative relationship. In this case it could be used to compare districts or school systems. A percentile rank of 85 means that 85 percent of the other districts fall below that point, and 15 percent lie above that point. Since no test is perfectly reliable, every test score has some chance of error. Therefore, it is preferable to express a test score within a given range. This makes the chances for meaningful interpretation much better than reporting the score as a single point.

The sixth recommendation was that the State Department of Education should collect the following data about each district: (1) each student's score on a scholastic aptitude test, and (2) socio-economic data such as parents' occupations, years of schooling for those in the community over age 25 and the median family income. These factors were important because they had a high positive correlation to achievement. Again the writer notes that this information would strengthen the administrators' position.

The seventh recommendation was that the State Department of Education should identify the data having a negative or low positive relationship to achievement. It appeared that the following factors would be included: (1) state equalized valuation per pupil, (2) local revenue per pupil, (3) state aid per pupil, (4) kindergarten through twelfth grade instructional expense per pupil, (5) total operating expense per pupil, (6) percentage of teachers earning more than \$11,000, (7) pupil-teacher ratio, and (8) pupil-professional staff ratio. The aim in identifying these variables was to change legislation which assumed that cost (input) was related to achievement (output).¹²

The eighth recommendation was to establish ability norms to serve as indicators of the effectiveness of learning within and between districts. It was felt that Scholastic aptitude scores might serve to establish these norms, since the scores had a high positive correlation to achievement. Furthermore, it was felt that these scores would allow comparisons between aptitude and achievement to be made in various subject areas and should, according to the writer, strengthen the administrators' position.

The ninth recommendation suggested that the State Department of Education continue to experiment with criterion referenced tests. The Task Force stated that

criterion referenced items should be used only for gathering supplementary information since norm referenced items were most useful for state-wide comparisons. It was suggested that bids be solicited from contractors who could supply detailed information on each item.

The Task Force considered the existing assessment test as no different than any other standardized achievement test given in any school district because it had not been related to what the children ought to learn. To have an assessment test the test must be based on performance objectives. So far the assessment test is a misnomer. In an assessment program the State Department of Education must first identify what ought to be taught at a particular level. Then it tests to evaluate the achievement made on these objectives. The present set of common educational goals lack specificity and may not represent local curricula. The assessment test was measuring how well the schools taught nationally produced instructional materials.

The tenth recommendation was that the State Department of Education focus on the substantive content of the curriculum, that is, the instructional materials. The present accountability model sought to change the delivery system if students did not meet the objectives. However, the Task Force believed the emphasis should be on the selection of more appropriate instructional

materials that aid the teacher in teaching toward the defined objective. A list of state approved instructional materials would aid in this selection process. The Task Force said to "de-emphasize the 'gimmicky' dimensions of step four" in the accountability model.¹³

The eleventh recommendation asked the State Board of Education, the office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Department of Education to involve teachers and administrators in a more meaningful way in planning and implementing the accountability and assessment programs. The Task Force stated that it was necessary to seek out those with diverse opinions to widen the base of support. Continuing to involve a select few or only those who agreed with the present program would result in widened resistance in the field.

The twelfth recommendation was that the State Department of Education should realize that a quality assessment program was only a portion of the accountability model. The State Department of Education should not allow itself to be deterred in developing or implementing a total accountability system in Michigan. This was felt to be necessary for the improvement of public education.

After receiving the Task Force papers, the State Department of Education prepared a response. The Educational Testing Service also prepared a reply. The State Department of Education stated that it recognized the

substantial effort in time and money expended by the Task Force in preparing the reports. Since the Task Force's goals was to improve the assessment program, the State Department of Education said it welcomed the constructive criticism of the Task Force. However, there were several aspects of the reports that the Department did not agree with even though the Task Force professed unanimous support for educational accountability and acknowledged the need for an assessment program.

The first question raised by the State Department of Education was the Task Force's objectivity. Could the Task Force be objective since it was intimately involved in preparing and serving administrators? It was also probable that many of the professors had been public school administrators. The selection of such descriptive phrases as "patchwork," "shoddy cosmetic changes," "make-shift approaches," "intransigence to suggestions" and "manipulating data" in the report could not be said to be objective. The writer agrees that these phrases clearly create a negative image in the reader's mind.¹⁴ But, in like manner, the State Department of Education's staff members acknowledged their bias in favor of the assessment program, recognizing their large investment of time and effort.

The second objection the State Department of Education had was that many of the conclusions and

recommendations of the Task Force were outdated by 1972. The data were collected from late 1970 to late 1971. The assessment program had evolved to such an extent that by the spring of 1972 portions of the data collected by the Task Force were no longer applicable. Due to limited staff and resources within the State Department of Education, a time lag existed preventing the Task Force from receiving the State Department of Education's most recent analysis and technical reports. In addition, the assessment program had responded to suggestions from the field and made changes in the program during the time the Task Force was collecting data and writing its report.

A third matter raised by the State Department of Education was factual errors made by the Task Force. These errors were: (1) that disbursement of Section Three funds was not one of the announced purposes of the 1969-1970 assessment test, (2) that the assessment test was represented as a test of Michigan content, (3) that no evidence of criterion-related validity existed for the assessment test, (4) that concerns were not justified statistically for small score differences between districts when they had approximately 100 students at each tested grade level, (5) that over one million dollars was spent to produce a patchwork test, (6) that a nationally produced test would do a better job for less money, (7) that only select socio-economic factors correlated highly with

achievement, (8) that the State Department of Education should identify all variables correlating with achievement, and (9) that the State Department of Education had only sought the opinions of those who supported their present policies.¹⁵ The writer notes that the Task Force had only the data to work with given by the State Department. Some of these errors might be due to the lack of information.

Finally, the State Department of Education responded to the Task Force's twelve recommendations. The first recommendation was that the State Department of Education reexamine the assumptions implicit in their assessment program. The State Department of Education denied having made the following assumptions: (1) that Michigan curriculum was unique, (2) that mobility was not an important factor, (3) that there was no uniformity in nationally produced instructional materials, (4) that the stated educational goals were unique to Michigan, (5) that educational expenditures were causally related to achievement, (6) that additional money would help low achieving schools, and (7) that test items could be composed by non-experts.¹⁶

The second recommendation asked the State Department of Education to add the variable of student mobility, indicating the number of years of education in that particular district prior to the test. The State Department

of Education replied that they were willing to do this if it added to the understanding of the data and was easily gathered by local districts. However, the writer notes, this was never done.

The third recommendation was that performance objectives should be based upon nationally produced instructional materials with the State Department of Education's adoption of an approved list. The State Department of Education believed educators and citizens, not publishers, should determine Michigan's educational goals and objectives. Neither was the State Department of Education interested in developing a state curriculum.

The fourth recommendation was to use a nationally standardized achievement test. The State Department of Education accepted this as a possibility.

The fifth recommendation was to give the percentile rank of a district as a range rather than as a single point. The State Department of Education conceded that this had merit, that data were being reviewed in this area. This was done in the last year of the norm referenced test (1972-1973).

The sixth recommendation was that each assessment test score should be reported with an aptitude score and selected socio-economic data as input variables. The State Department of Education stated that this could be done, but great care would have to be taken to keep it

from being interpreted as an excuse for low achievement. This sharply illustrates the political differences between the Task Force and State Department in the writer's mind.

The seventh recommendation was to identify correlations between input data and achievement. The aim was to change legislators' assumptions that cost was causally related to achievement. The State Department of Education replied that these correlation tables were available upon request. The writer notes that the State Department did not respond to the suggestion that legislators be encouraged to use this information.

The eighth recommendation was to establish ability norms to better judge the effectiveness of learning within and between districts. The State Department of Education stated that such an action would reinforce the opinion that the assessment test was intended to evaluate the schools. This would be of limited value and would prevent the professional educators as well as the public from getting the idea that the purpose of the assessment test was to measure needs. This indicates to the writer that the present tests are used to evaluate the schools as high, moderate or low need districts.

The ninth recommendation was to experiment with criterion referenced tests for gaining supplementary information. The State Department of Education said it

was constructing an objective referenced test for the areas of reading and mathematics.

The tenth recommendation was to concentrate on changing instructional materials instead of on delivery systems to help students better meet the objectives. The State Department of Education stated that this was a matter of opinion. Both the delivery system and the materials should serve to help students achieve stated objectives. The writer agrees it should not be an either-or choice for each school district.

The eleventh recommendation was to involve more educators and administrators in a meaningful way in planning and implementing the assessment and accountability programs. The State Department of Education said they had tried to be responsive to this need and would continue to form broad representative advisory committees.

The twelfth recommendation was to recognize that an effective assessment test was only a portion of an accountability program and therefore, the State Department of Education should not be deterred from implementing an entire accountability system. The State Department of Education agreed. The Task Force and State Department of Education had both agreed on the need for an accountability and assessment program. Their points of contention centered on the details of design and content. The State

Department of Education felt that the assessment program had benefited from this exchange of ideas.¹⁷

Following their exchange of reports in the spring of 1972, the Task Force and State Department of Education representatives met several times to clarify agreements and disagreements. It was found that many of the differences were due to poor communication and the fast evolution of the assessment program while the Task Force was collecting its data between late 1970 and late 1971. In summary, the Task Force and State Department of Education reached agreement, at least in part, on recommendations one, three, five, seven, nine, ten, eleven and twelve. However, this did not mean these recommendations were being adopted into the program. They disagreed on recommendations four and eight. They left recommendations two and six undecided. These conclusions were reported to the State Board of Education in August of 1972.¹⁸ The writer is skeptical of what level of agreement was reached. Clearly, the political difference of educational control was never settled.

The Educational Testing Service prepared a reply to the second Task Force report, The Michigan Educational Assessment Program: A Technical Analysis of the Michigan Assessment of Basic Skills. The reply was written by Thomas F. Donlon. He began his response by saying that the Task Force's second report was a "sincere," "personal"

and "strongly felt" document but not a technical analysis in the psychometric sense. He chided the Task Force for writing the appraisal of the Michigan Assessment Test without getting the aid of a psychometric specialist or contacting the Educational Testing Service.¹⁹ The writer assumes that Mr. Donlon either did not know of Dr. Rudman's qualifications or believed his background did not qualify him as a psychometrician.

Mr. Donlon found two aspects of the Task Force's report significant. He said the eleven step description of test construction was a personal approach presented as if it had widespread acceptance in the measurement community. The Task Force found fault with the Educational Testing Service for failing to comply with five of the eleven steps without any explanation of the item construction procedures used by the Educational Testing Service. The concerns raised about the test construction were unfounded, he concluded.

Second, he said, the Task Force gave the impression that the Educational Testing Service misrepresented vocabulary test items by giving the State Department of Education test items previously used in nationally standardized tests. The writer agrees that the choice of terms used in the report emotionally colored the issue as something underhanded. Mr. Donlon concluded that the vocabulary test items supplied by the Educational Testing

Service, although used in nationally standardized tests, were still legitimate and appropriate for the Michigan Assessment Test.²⁰

In his summary, Mr. Donlon asked the Task Force to withdraw the second report and replace it with a more sophisticated, psychometrically adequate one. He stated that the Task Force did a technically poor job of evaluating the assessment test. Finally, he stated that the report implied that the Task Force did not have a good relationship with the State Department of Education. If the children of Michigan were to benefit from the assessment program, both parties should establish respect for each other and cooperate in developing a successful program.

Interpretation

The first question that needs to be answered is: What initiated the controversy? The controversy was initiated by the desire of the Michigan Association of Professors of Educational Administration to provide better service to current and future school administrators. To a degree, it appears to the writer that there was a vested interest to be served since many of the professors had or will serve as instructors of and consultants to school administrators. This is not meant to imply that the study was not professionally done. A goal of this

organization was to clarify problems administrators faced and to offer possible solutions. The professors were aware of the superintendents' initial fears and their positions when the Ad Hoc Committee of the Michigan Association of School Administrators met with the State Department of Education during the spring of 1971.

The position of the Michigan Association of Professors of Educational Administration was that when Michigan mandated the use of a single test, the State Department of Education had the responsibility for specifically designing and constructing the instrument for a single purpose. In addition, the Department had the responsibility to assure the teachers and administrators using the test that the material being measured was indeed being taught in every classroom for which the test was mandated. Finally, the State Department of Education had the responsibility to avoid situations placing administrators in an unnecessarily vulnerable position.

Administrators were placed in a vulnerable position by being held accountable for a poorly constructed assessment test according to the Task Force. The test should have been designed to measure specific performance objectives based on an approved list of instructional materials. The content of the test should have been drawn from what was being taught in every classroom using the test. The State Department of Education was giving the public

partial data which were being used to judge the administrators. The public was not receiving data on the students concerning their family's mobility or scholastic aptitude. Therefore, the controversy between the Michigan Association of Professors of Educational Administration and the State Department of Education was over the design and content of the assessment test.

This leads into the second question: Can the controversy be placed in a framework denoting a political power struggle or different philosophical assumptions? The writer believes the controversy is political: local autonomy versus state control. Because the Task Force did not find its own traditional power base being eroded by the State as the Ad Hoc Committee did in the first controversy, it did not directly bring charges against the State. As professors of educational administration, they knew that the State Board of Education was exercising power legally given to it by the State Constitution. But the Task Force's comments indicated the responsibilities it felt the State Department of Education should assume in dealing with local administrators. The administrators were being held accountable before the public for a poorly constructed test they had not developed. They had little understanding of its design or content and no manuals to further explain it. The State Department of Education was placing the administrators in a weak position.

The Task Force's recommendations sought to strengthen the administrators' positions.

This was occurring in several ways. First, administrators were asked to make educational decisions on the basis of the scores of the state assessment test. When instructional programs, delivery systems and educators' jobs rest on the results of a single test score, there should be no question in administrators' minds regarding the design and content of the test. They should feel confident that each item has been analyzed to assure it was not misinterpreted, affected by geographic distribution or written at too high or low a grade level. They should feel confident that the content tested was indeed taught at the appropriate grade levels in their schools. This would mean defining performance objectives. They should feel confident that the validity of the test had been established through related criterion. Before the Task Force reports were released in the spring of 1972 the State Department of Education had announced that beginning with the 1973-1974 school year the norm referenced tests would be changed to objective referenced tests. Committees had been formed to define minimum performance objectives.

Second, administrators were asked why their building or district scored lower than another when they had not received manuals with the test explaining its

construction or limitations. The State Department of Education corrected this before the Task Force reports were released in 1972. Limitations were written providing warnings against careless comparisons between districts.

Third, the State Department of Education was not collecting or publishing data telling what percentage of the tested students received their schooling in the district in the years prior to the time of testing. Neither was the district given the benefit of the doubt by having its percentile rank expressed within a given range. Many administrators had to dig for available data such as students' aptitude test scores to provide themselves with any adequate defense. There were many factors that had a high positive correlation to achievement and could serve to establish ability norms. However, the State Department of Education wanted to publicly avoid providing administrators with excuses for students' lack of achievement.

Therefore, the recommendations made by the Task Force of the Michigan Association of Professors of Educational Administration were aimed at improving the design and content of the assessment test. This would strengthen the position of local administrators and given them more power in dealing with their local boards of education, parents and the public.

This brings up the third question: What changes occurred in the assessment program as a result of this

controversy? As mentioned earlier, the time lag between collecting the data from fall 1970 to fall 1971 and releasing the report in spring 1972, in conjunction with the rapid evolution of the assessment program during these years, made several of their recommendations irrelevant. Of major significance was the announced change from a norm referenced test to an objective referenced test and the formulation of minimal performance objectives. It is important to note that the Task Force was aware of the rapid evolution of the assessment program and the probable change to an objective test when the report was written.

All of the recommendations except for five and eleven came to nothing. Recommendation five was to give the percentile ranking of a district as a range rather than a single point. This was adopted with the 1972-1973 assessment test. Recommendation eleven was to involve more educators and administrators in a meaningful way. This change occurred as a result of several influences in addition to those of the Task Force's. The Ad Hoc Committee of the Michigan Association of School Administrators had stated the need for more input. Professionals in the field agreed this need existed. Furthermore, after becoming Director of Research, Evaluation and Assessment Services in February 1971, Dr. David Donovan established a permanent assessment advisory group. The assessment program advisory council was first created in

the fall of 1972. The Michigan Association of Professors of Educational Administration selected Dr. Rudman, Chairman of the Task Force, as their representative on the advisory council.

Did the Task Force succeed in getting the State Department of Education to reexamine the design and content of the assessment test? The answer would be a qualified "yes." The answer is qualified because the basic decisions to formulate minimal performance objectives and change to an objective reference test had already been made. Regardless of the relevance of specific recommendations, the Task Force raised valid questions concerning the quality and representation of the material received from the Educational Testing Service. The Task Force also pointed out the immense responsibility the State Department had in constructing a test, especially when this test would serve as the basis for educational decisions affecting teachers, administrators and legislators. The State Department of Education did not take the Task Force reports lightly. They prepared a response and then met several times with the Task Force to exchange ideas.

There were several other results, in addition to the two stemming from the Task Forces' recommendations. The State Department of Education, realizing the pressing need for item analysis to validate their test items, began pilot studies using state-wide samples during the 1974-

1975 school year with potential tenth grade objectives. The items for the fourth and seventh grade 1973-1974 assessment test were already under development during the 1972-1973 school year in Alma, Jackson, Pontiac and Waterford School Districts. Psychometricians agreed that a process involving experienced classroom teachers in writing, reviewing and editing the test items would assure a maximum amount of validity. Modifications of the test items used in the 1973-1974 assessment test were made after their initial use.

The other result of the controversy, at least in part, was that the State Department of Education desired to know what impact the assessment program and the controversies surrounding it were having on the public. The Detroit teachers' strike in the fall of 1973 was another factor that encouraged the State Department to seek out public opinion. The Detroit School Board and administrators were attempting to impose an accountability system on the teachers which incorporated the scores from the assessment test as a component of the teacher's evaluation. Opinion Market Research Survey was hired and in May 1974 a survey was conducted. It found 96 percent of those surveyed did not recognize the State's accountability model. More than 69 percent had not seen their district's assessment test results. The public was largely unaware of the controversy over assessment and

accountability. However, the State Department of Education had yet to feel the impact of the third controversy.

In this chapter the writer has examined the controversy over the design and the content of the assessment test between the Michigan Association of Professors of Educational Administration and the State Department of Education. In the next chapter the writer will examine the third controversy.

FOOTNOTES

¹The Michigan Association of Professors of Educational Administration, The Michigan Educational Assessment Program: An Abstract, East Lansing, Michigan, 1972, p. 1.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., pp. 1-2.

⁴Ibid., p. 3.

⁵Ibid., p. 6.

⁶The Michigan Association of Professors of Educational Administration, The Michigan Educational Assessment Program: A Technical Analysis of the Michigan Assessment of Basic Skills, East Lansing, Michigan, 1972, pp. 5-9, 21.

⁷The Michigan Association of Professors of Educational Administration, An Abstract, p. 8.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁰The Michigan Association of Professors of Educational Administration, A Technical Analysis of the Michigan Assessment of Basic Skills, p. 2.

¹¹The Michigan Association of Professors of Educational Administration, An Abstract, p. 11.

¹²Ibid., pp. 12-13.

¹³Ibid., pp. 13-14.

¹⁴Michigan Department of Education, Staff Report to the MAPEA Task Force Papers, 1972, pp. 3-4.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 9-12.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 6-8.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 13-16.

¹⁸Michigan Department of Education, Report of Conferences Between the MAPEA Task Force on Educational Accountability and the Michigan Department of Education, 1972, p. 7.

¹⁹Letter, Thomas F. Donlon, "Reaction to MAPEA Document: A Technical Analysis of the Michigan Assessment of Basic Skills," 1972, pp. 1-2.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 2-4.

CHAPTER V

THE THIRD CONTROVERSY

The objective of the writer in this chapter is to document the controversy between the Michigan Education Association and the State Department of Education over the implementation of the assessment test. In addition, the following three questions will be answered: (1) What initiated the controversy? (2) Can the controversy be placed in a framework denoting either a political power struggle or different philosophical assumptions? (3) What changes occurred in the assessment program as a result of this controversy?

Controversy Over the Implementation of the Assessment Test

By 1973 the Michigan Education Association became more concerned about the assessment test than it had in the past. The test in the fall of 1973 would be objective referenced, based on the recently completed minimal performance objectives. Some teachers became extremely worried when they considered the possible implications. With the test scores being much more useful in the classroom, administrators could use the test scores to hold

teachers accountable for student performance. Instead of being with the administrators against a common enemy, the State Department of Education, the teachers now found themselves standing alone.

In August 1973, the Michigan Education Association Task Force on Assessment and Accountability released a report giving the concerns and recommendations for the Michigan Education Association's action. The Task Force reported concerns over the lack of: (1) demonstrated validity, (2) teacher improvement, (3) sufficient testing to assure usefulness, (4) announced ultimate purposes for collected data, (5) input in the decision making process, (6) clearly defined areas of accountability for all people responsible for the growth and development of the child, (7) good fiscal policy by the threat of withholding funds, (8) emphasis on individualized instruction, the objective domain and creativity, and (9) the usage of other instruments beside the assessment test as a basis for decision making.¹

The Task Force made the following recommendations for the Michigan Education Association to: (1) cooperate in implementing the assessment test in the fall of 1973, (2) halt any extensions of the assessment program until the 1973-1974 assessment test has been evaluated, (3) prohibit Michigan Education Association members from participating in further developing the assessment program,

(4) encourage the Public Affairs Division to work against any legislation that might restrict the educational process, (5) train local leadership and Uniserv-Directors to deal effectively with assessment and accountability on the local level, (6) encourage the Minority Affairs Division to study and report the assessment test's impact on minority students, (7) encourage the Teacher Education and Professional Standards Commission to review the State Board of Education's programs in light of the assessment program, (8) encourage local associations to evaluate all aspects of the testing program and make a district report to the public, (9) inform the public that the assessment test is aimed at evaluating minimal performance with experimental and arbitrary measures, (10) encourage the Professional Development Division to monitor state and local activities in the assessment and accountability area, (11) encourage the Professional Development Division to prepare a prototype contract that states that assessment test results will not in any way be used to evaluate the teachers' fitness for retention, (12) work closely with the National Education Association to develop projects to deal more effectively with assessment and accountability, (13) work with other educational organizations to publicize the schools' needs and the assessment test's limitations, and (14) continue the Task Force until the Representative Assembly in the spring of 1974.²

The Michigan Education Association had decided to become more actively and vocally opposed to the assessment program. It feared the worst and enlisted the help of the National Education Association as recommendation twelve suggested. In the fall of 1973, the Michigan Education Association and the National Education Association conducted a talent search for individuals qualified to evaluate Michigan's assessment and accountability programs. Dr. Ernest House, University of Illinois, Dr. Wendell Rivers, University of Missouri at St. Louis and Dr. Daniel Stufflebeam, Western Michigan University, were selected as a panel of experts. All three men had good backgrounds in tests and measurements. In addition, each man had a speciality. Dr. Ernest House had experience in evaluating entire school programs. Dr. Wendell Rivers provided a minority point of view. Dr. Daniel Stufflebeam was an expert in statistics and test evaluation. None of the men had past ties with programs or politics in the state of Michigan. Dr. Daniel Stufflebeam left Ohio State University in the fall of 1973 to join the faculty of Western Michigan University. These three men were chosen from a pool of men and women selected by the Michigan Education Association and National Education Association.

Jerome Murphy and David Cohen suggested that these men had been selected with the idea in mind that the Michigan Education Association and National Education

Association intended to use Michigan as a testing ground for methods that could be used elsewhere to battle accountability.

House has attacked the basic ideas behind accountability and last summer he helped NEA develop its anti-accountability platform; Rivers has written about the evils of culturally biased tests; and Stufflebeam is an expert on evaluation and a stickler for research design.³

Although these men were not manipulated, the question could be raised whether or not the Michigan Education Association and the National Education Association could have used the study if panelists had been selected whose views differed widely from the associations'. The writer raises the question whether or not these three men would have been selected if the State Department of Education as well as the two associations would have had to approve them.

In the introductory remarks of An Assessment of the Michigan Accountability System, the three authors stated that they believed accountability should be practiced at all levels of education to improve the quality of education. However, new accountability systems should be tested under field conditions and critically examined before being implemented widely. The State rushed ahead without taking time for "conceptualization, development and testing." Because of the legislature, the program had to be implemented on a crash basis even though

tested standards and procedures for state accountability systems did not exist. The State Department of Education staff performed skillfully and enthusiastically, but not without error.⁴

The Michigan Education Association and National Education Association contracted the study for the general purpose of examining the quality of State leadership and its implications as it related to the accountability and assessment programs. The specific purpose of the study was to analyze "the educational soundness and utility for Michigan of the Michigan Accountability System with particular emphasis on the assessment component." The three panelists were given complete freedom in writing, editing and releasing the report.⁵

The study was conducted between January and March, 1974. Over 30 hours of testimony were heard, and a large number of documents were read. Most of the testimony was heard within three days in the Lansing area. The panel then spent two days evaluating the testimony. During the next two months they shared questions by mail and telephone. Later in the winter they met for a day in Chicago to read their individual drafts of the report and discuss differences of opinion. They released their report, An Assessment of the Michigan Accountability System, in March of 1974.

In the first section of the report, the panel addressed itself to the State Department of Education's efforts to implement the six steps of the accountability model (common goals, performance objectives, assessment test, analysis of delivery system, an evaluation of changes made in the delivery system and recommendations for further changes). Step three, the assessment test, was discussed in a later section.

The panel felt that the common goals of Michigan's education had been stated too broadly. The common goals should be rewritten to be more specific because they serve as the basis for the performance objectives. They also need to be periodically reviewed.

The panel found more problems with the objectives than with the common goals. The panel said the objectives did not represent the consensus among educators of minimum performance as the State Department of Education claimed. The sampling procedures used did not guarantee that the people involved represented a cross section of educators. The panelists made a distinction between the number of people involved in initially developing the objectives and the number of educators involved in selecting and refining the objectives for the assessment test. The report did not adequately clarify this distinction to the writer. On page five they stated, "To its credit, the state staff has sought to secure wide involvement of

citizens in Michigan for the development of objectives." However, on page six they noted that only a relatively few educators had been involved in developing and choosing the objectives for the test.⁶ The panel also claimed there was little evidence to prove that the performance objectives were minimal for the stated grade level as the State Department of Education claimed.

The panel highly commended the State Department of Education and the legislature for encouraging innovation in delivery systems, which is step four of the accountability model. They also praised the concentration being given to the problems disadvantaged children have with learning basic skills. However, the panel was critical of the method used to allocate state funds in the Chapter Three Program. Under Chapter Three of the State School Aid Act a school district was given an extra two hundred dollars per child who scores in the bottom 15 percent on the assessment test. The district had to provide a different delivery system and show at least three-quarters of a year gain the following year or be penalized part of the two hundred dollars per child. Since standardized achievement tests are not good measures of what is taught in school, and since individual gain scores have only a fraction of the reliability of the test itself, the money may be given or withheld due to test errors.⁷ Therefore, the three panelists considered demeaning and unprofessional

the practice of giving financial rewards to school districts for getting high test scores from their disadvantaged students. Educational deficiencies are not removed by withholding state aid. The panel recommended abandoning this aspect of the Chapter Three Program and conducting a rigorous field experiment before claiming it had produced real gains.

The panel stated that step five, evaluation of changes in the delivery system, and step six, recommendations for further changes, still needed to be implemented. Most school districts needed a great deal of assistance. Even the Governor, legislators and State Board of Education had not demonstrated that they had used the data collected by the assessment test. Considering the cost of the test, the three panelists urged that testing every pupil at grades four and seven on all items be abandoned for sampling. Overall, the panel stated, the accountability model was an attractive concept but had been poorly implemented to date.

In the next section of the report, the panel discussed the assessment test. They commended the State Department of Education for developing the objective reference test. However, they stated that the testimony they had heard suggested that many concerns stemmed not only from the design and content of the test but also from the way the program was implemented. The panel first

commented that the five items used to measure each objective appeared to be consistently measuring the same thing. Therefore the test had good reliability. However, no evidence was provided to show that the test objectives had validity, that is, that they measured what their authors intended for them to measure. Therefore, the tests' validity was suspect until proven otherwise.

The panel then questioned whether the test might be culturally biased. Some children might be at a disadvantage when taking the test since they did not have the same verbal and cultural backgrounds as the majority of the population. The panel recommended running validity tests on the reading items with minority and low socioeconomic children.

The panel's third comment was that teachers were not significantly involved. The few that were involved testified that they felt their involvement was mostly form with little function. This had fostered a feeling of resentment among some groups.

The panel next suggested moving to a matrix sampling plan. This would provide the same data for statewide decision making while reducing the monetary and time costs. However, the panel stated it did not see any evidence of the data having been of value to state officials. If the test was to be expanded to other grades and other subject areas matrix sampling would be the only

feasible route. Several administrators and teachers had testified that additional testing was the last thing they needed for their educational programs. Yet the present domain of the test was so limited it must be expanded if it was to meet the purpose of a broad based needs assessment. To use its present narrowly defined objectives as a measure of achievement was unfair to students and teachers.

The panel then stressed the need to preserve local autonomy. The State Department of Education could do this by encouraging and helping local districts to develop their own objectives. This would fit curriculum to the children's needs rather than vice versa. It would also remove the threat of a state dictated curriculum. In addition, it would help prevent teachers and principals from having their jobs threatened for low assessment test scores. Finally, it would remove the need to teach for the test and it would encourage different learning styles and teaching techniques.

While the State Department of Education has the authority to demand that the schools do something about their basic problems and even to provide evidence that they are doing something, the State Department of Education certainly does not have the knowledge or expertise to solve all the schools' various problems through some statewide solution.⁸

The panel then questioned the need to continue publishing the list of school districts ranked according

to their test scores. The data were often misinterpreted, and the results were detrimental to many school districts' public images. The public accepted the scores as a report card grade for the district. The State Department of Education felt that making this information public would encourage parents to get involved in their schools. This was a questionable outcome since Detroit had been publishing test scores for years without getting this result.

Finally, the panel addressed itself to the anxiety among teachers caused by the fear that they were going to be evaluated on the basis of student test scores. They recommended that steps be taken to prevent such a practice from occurring. In addition, they warned of possible conflicts if the State Department of Education provided parents with lists of performance objectives for their child's particular grade. Teachers would be held accountable for learning while not having control over many of the variables that influenced it.

This is particularly true for such factors as the background experiences of the student, his emotional and physical readiness for school, the cognitive and affective skills which he brings from his particular family milieu; and numerous other personal and school-related factors. The present state of the art in psychometrics and test development does not allow tests, objective referenced or not, to adequately assess and document the impact of these factors on a child's performance.

Needless to say, tests on which validity is questionable should not be used to evaluate teachers. What if the tests were better? Even so, tests

should not be used to evaluate teachers. This is not to say that teachers should not be evaluated. We believe they should. However, test results are not the way to do it. Test results are not good measures of what is taught in school strange as it may seem. They are good indicators of socio-economic class and other variables. But, unless one teaches the tests themselves, they are not very sensitive to school learning.⁹

The panel concluded that the assessment program had little value and support throughout the educational community. The writer questions whether or not the panelists' study qualified them to reach this conclusion. Although some teachers and school districts saw benefits from the total implementation of the accountability model, most saw the assessment program as a necessary evil.

Perhaps the most unexpected finding is that the assessment program has little apparent value for any major group... this non-support is a reflection of...the potential massive negative impact of a widespread testing program.

The assessment component needs to be reconceptualized and reorganized and its purpose clarified. An overall effort should be expanded to assess the needs of the audiences to be served, and these audiences should be given a part in the determination of the structure and function of the total program.¹⁰

The panel felt that the assessment test had little value because it had little usefulness. There was little evidence that even the State Department was sure how to use the test scores other than publish them to excite parents into doing something about their schools.

The panel said that the State Department of Education staff should be praised for its bold and innovative

attempt to deal with assessment and accountability. The staff was competent, aggressive and highly motivated. Errors were made, and the panel hoped that their analysis would stimulate the needed changes.

In May 1974 the State Department of Education released a response on the report An Assessment of the Michigan Accountability System. They believed that the report contained nine recommendations. The State Department of Education agreed with six of the recommendations and were making the necessary changes to adopt them. The other three recommendations were rejected until future discussion resolved them. The State Department of Education stated that the report contained inaccuracies, appeared biased and was prepared hastily (December 15, 1973-March 1, 1974). In presenting their response, they followed the format of the original report.

The first section analyzed the six steps of the accountability model except for step three, the assessment test. If the model was designed to be a process leading to more careful educational planning then the panel suggested clarifying and periodically reviewing the common goals. The goals were intended to indicate only a general direction and yet appeared to be unclear to some. The State Department of Education said there would be a periodic review of the common goals.

The initial objection the panel found with the objectives was that they did not represent a consensus of educators. The State Department of Education stated that they had been assisted by "hundreds of teachers, curriculum specialists and administrators." Professional educators had not been polled to assure a consensus. However, the objectives had been reviewed by 11 elementary and seven secondary schools as well as the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education. The State Department of Education stated that they recognized the need for further revision and had asked the Michigan Council of Teachers of Mathematics and Michigan Reading Association to review the objectives following the 1973-1974 assessment test.¹¹

The second criticism the panel raised was that the objectives were not minimal. The State Department of Education felt that this objection came down to whether or not a common core of objectives that transcended school district boundaries existed and could be identified. The State Department of Education answered this affirmatively. Most students, they stated, were not expected to meet these objectives on the 1973-1974 assessment test but would with improved instruction.

The panel was complimentary toward the action taken by the Department of Education on implementing step four of the accountability model except for aspects of the

Chapter Three program. The State Department of Education stated that the panel's report contained inaccuracies when dealing with the compensatory education program. First, districts established their own objectives, delivery systems and evaluation instruments. Districts received full payment for grades kindergarten through one if the students attained 75 percent of the local objectives. They received full payment for grades two through six if students attained 75 percent of the goal of one month's gain for each month on the program. Districts could regain all or part of their lost funds by providing a new delivery system. Furthermore, there was no evidence to show that money was awarded on the basis of test error rather than true gain. However, the State Department of Education recognized that this might be occurring to a certain extent. They also agreed that a rigorous field experiment would help the Chapter Three program.

The panel stated that steps five and six of the accountability model still needed to be implemented. The State Department of Education said that more services were being designed to expand the implementation of step five. They denied that they had not used the data collected by the assessment test to make decisions. They stated that there was a need to document the impact the assessment test had on local decision making.

The second section of the report dealt with the assessment test. The State Department of Education stated that the purpose of the test was to identify areas of greatest need. The Department believed that there was no reason why most children could not achieve the basic skills; therefore, there was no reason to design a minority group test. The 1973-1974 assessment tests were piloted in Jackson and Pontiac where minority students were "ever-represented."¹²

The panel questioned the validity of the tests. The State Department of Education mentioned that they had provided the panel with the report "Development of Test Items and Instruments in Reading and Mathematics for the 1973-1974 Michigan Educational Assessment Program." It discussed eight types of information used in selecting items and objectives for the test. The Department questioned how the panel could state that no evidence had been provided showing the validity of the objectives.

The State Department of Education stated that the panel's third comment about teachers not being significantly involved was "totally without merit." Thirteen panels and nine different groups were involved in the preparation and review of the performance objectives, each containing many teachers. In addition, hundreds of educators reacted to the objectives before they were approved by the State Board of Education.¹³

The panel's next suggestion was to move to matrix sampling. This would provide the same basic data for state-wide decision making while reducing the monetary and time costs. The State Department of Education stated that if the panel had read their proposed long range plan, they would have realized that their plan was to use matrix sampling when the program was expanded to other subject areas. However, the grades four and seven tests would continue to test every pupil with the same objectives as presently done. The State Department of Education agreed that the test's present domain was limited and needed to be expanded.

The next issue the panel raised was the need to preserve local autonomy. The State Department of Education held a different opinion. The facts that nearly one-fifth of all American families move annually, that most school districts use nationally produced textbooks and that most teachers receive a similar education at teachers' colleges or universities prevents school districts from operating completely independent and from having widely different programs as they might have had nearly two centuries ago. However, school districts are encouraged to develop their own performance objectives "to supplement the state minimal objectives."¹⁴

The panel then questioned the need to continue publishing the list of ranked school districts. The State

Department of Education agreed that misinterpretations were common. However, the State Attorney General's office advised the State Board of Education to make the scores public. The test scores were public information. Some districts have learned to avoid public criticism by providing interpretations of their scores before the press releases district rankings. The State Department of Education stated that the basic issue was whether school districts were willing to make their test results public regardless of what they were.¹⁵

Then the panel turned to the issue of teacher evaluation. The panel requested that the State Department of Education take steps to prevent teachers from being evaluated on the basis of assessment test scores. The State Department of Education stated it was not their responsibility to get involved in the evaluation procedures of teachers. This was a local responsibility. While not being the sole criteria, assessment test scores could become a component of teacher evaluation. The State Department of Education felt they had some responsibility for developing in-service programs which would provide teachers with assistance in identifying areas of professional effectiveness.

The State Department of Education stated that the panel's final comment had no data to support it. The panel had stated that the assessment program was of little

value to any major group and had little support. Nonetheless, the report had drawn attention to the State Department of Education's attempt to improve the quality of Michigan's public education.

Dr. Ernest House, Dr. Wendell Rivers and Dr. Daniel Stufflebeam prepared a very brief counter-response to the State Department of Education's response. The panel rejected all charges of inaccuracy except one for which they apologized. They also rejected the charge of bias. As for the charge that the report was prepared hastily, the panel responded that the State Department of Education evidently did not know the difference between long term research and an evaluative study. Each panelist spent approximately eight days planning and implementing. Since many differences still existed, the panel made note that they had assembled a technical report containing supporting data. An assessment test needed to be implemented, they felt, that would strongly support local curricula and respond to diverse individual needs. In their opinion, if the present test prevailed, a state curriculum could not be far behind. The panel felt that their critique was accurate and would stand the test of time.¹⁶

In August 1974, Dr. Daniel Stufflebeam spoke to the staff of the Saginaw Public Schools. His topic was "A Response to the Michigan Education Department's Defense of Their Accountability System." He reiterated the

positions the panel had taken in their report. He stated that the panel had concluded that the six step accountability model was reasonable but that the State Department of Education had done a poor job of implementing it. The most serious implementation breakdown was in the assessment test. The Department had not provided a needs assessment for the entire group of common goals. Objective reference tests had been put into use before being validated. All pupils in two grades were being tested for no useful reason. The weaknesses of the assessment test might undermine support for the entire accountability model. The panel's criticisms pointed to areas needing improvement, not to the demise of the accountability process.¹⁷

Following the release of the panel's report, the Michigan Education Association and the National Education Association took positions on the assessment, accountability issue. The National Education Association's statement was released April 8, 1974. It stated that the panel's report confirmed one of their worst suspicions-- "that the implementation of accountability systems is 'counter-productive'." Statewide objectives could lead to a state dictated curriculum. Teachers ended up teaching for the tests, rather than for the children's needs. The state of the science of test development did not make it possible to base aid on test scores in an accurate

manner. Publication of scores resulted in educators taking a defensive posture and emphasizing public relations rather than children's needs.

The National Education Association recommended preserving local control. Assessment should be on a voluntary basis. Locally based evaluation should involve several tests and devices such as interviews, student performance and self and peer evaluations which would emphasize professional judgment. The role of the state should be that of a facilitator. It should help local districts select between a variety of options. In fact, the state should be accountable to the local districts.¹⁸

The Michigan Education Association presented its position on assessment and accountability at the State Board of Education meeting May 21-22, 1974.

The MEA believes that educators are accountable only to the degree that they share responsibility and authority in educational decision-making and to the degree that other parties who share this responsibility--school board members, parents, students, taxpayers, legislators and other government officials--are also held responsible.¹⁹

The Michigan Education Association stated that the present assessment test excluded the affective domain. It was based on behaviorist psychological concepts. It rested on the premise that students learn at the same rate. Furthermore, the state assumed a function that belongs at the local level with teachers and administrators.

The following recommendation was adopted at the Michigan Education Association Representative Assembly, April 28-30, 1974.

It is recommended that no educator voluntarily cooperate with the SDE in implementing any program or project within the domain of assessment/accountability, and specifically that educators refuse to administer state assessment tests, unless and until appropriate modifications are made.²⁰

These modifications were that: (1) the assessment test use a sampling procedure of no more than one percent of the public school enrollment in any school year, (2) the data not be publicly released that identifies any individual classroom, building or district, (3) the State Department of Education help school districts develop and implement their own improvement programs, (4) the State Department of Education help to increase aid for in-service programs, (5) the objectives and tests be reviewed and modified by panels containing at least 80 percent teachers, (6) narrow performance objectives should not be mandated as the only method of instruction, (7) the Chapter Three Compensatory Education program be dropped for a Developmental Education Grant Program that would remove negative monetary penalties when students fail to meet the desired achievement levels, (8) the Competency Based Teacher Education programs be experimented with at colleges and universities, and (9) the State Department of Education

document the cost and value of the assessment and accountability programs.²¹

The Michigan Education Association stated that education was a social process in which people are interacting with others in such a manner that measurements are imperfect. Teachers have little control over many of the variables that effect the learning process: inadequate diet, lack of sleep, lack of parental support, inadequate instructional materials, crowded classes and the lack of diagnostic services. Any accountability system should recognize seven factors. (1) It should aim to improve education while not being punitive or threatening. (2) Each child is unique and should not be sacrificed to an assessment test that generalizes about student abilities at particular grade levels. (3) Educational decisions can best be made by those who must live with them. (4) The quality of the educational process is a product of education that often long outlives forgotten facts. (5) Standardized achievement tests should not supply the major evaluative data for any accountability program. (6) The true cost of any accountability program should be calculated. (7) All who make a contribution to the learning process should be held accountable. The Michigan Education Association recommended the prohibition of any examinations of the present program until there was evidence

to indicate that the present implemented components were educationally sound.²²

Finally, the Michigan Education Association urged the State Board of Education to closely examine the document Criteria for Developing an Educational Accountability Plan. This document was adopted February 28, 1974 by the Michigan Forum of Educational Organizations, a group of teachers, administrators, school board members and citizens. It was significant, the Michigan Education Association pointed out, that a group this diverse could agree on such a controversial topic as accountability. In this document, the Forum stated seven minimum criteria for developing an educational accountability plan. (1) Its primary goal should be to improve student learning. (2) It must protect the rights of students and staff. (3) All persons involved in the educational process are accountable for their assigned responsibilities in reaching agreed upon goals. (4) The accountability plan and process should be open to interested parties, but student and staff performance should be kept confidential. (5) Local school districts should develop and implement an accountability program. (6) Accountability programs should encourage diversity and creativity. (7) Accountability programs should be periodically evaluated and changed if necessary.²³

The State Department of Education and the Michigan Education Association never met together to discuss the recommendations of Dr. House, Dr. Rivers and Dr. Stufflebeam as the State Department had met with the Ad Hoc Committee of the Michigan Association of School Administrators and the Task Force of the Michigan Association of Professors of Educational Administration. On May 3, 1974, Dr. Donovan, Director of Research, Evaluation and Assessment Services, wrote a letter to the Michigan Education Association requesting a meeting to discuss their differences regarding assessment and accountability. On May 30, 1974, Dr. Arthur H. Rice, Jr., then Associate Executive Secretary for Professional Development, wrote a return letter. In it he stated that the Michigan Education Association was reviewing the latest draft of The Long Range Plan of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program. In addition, the Michigan Education Association had just presented its position to the State Board of Education and were awaiting the Board's response. Dr. Rice said, "Perhaps when these components are known, it would be advisable to sit down again to share our mutual concerns."²⁴ This never occurred.

In late September 1974, Dr. Donovan wrote a letter requesting the Michigan Education Association to nominate two classroom teachers to serve on the State Department of Education's Ad Hoc Committee for the tenth grade assessment

test. About two weeks later, Mr. Keith Geiger, then President of the Michian Education Association, and Mr. Herman Coleman, Executive Director of the Michigan Education Association, wrote that they were not nominating two teachers to serve on the advisory committee in accord with the April 1974 recommendation adopted by the Representative Assembly. As previously stated, that resolution said that no educator should help implement any assessment or accountability projects until modifications were made in the existing program. The modifications they recommended had not occurred.²⁵

In late November 1975, Dr. Porter, Superintendent of Public Instruction, wrote a letter to Mr. Coleman in which he asked for the creation of a task force to carry on a private discussion to explore their differences.

It is the feeling of Department staff (and I agree with them) that the Department and the MEA will never be able to settle their differences in this regard without adequate dialogue. It is not very productive to raise issues in public debate, speeches or even Committee of the Whole Meetings with the State Board of Education. These sessions do little more than raise people's anxiety and create confusion. It would seem to me to be more productive to attempt to define the "real" issues related to the State assessment program, to clearly articulate the MEA position and proposals vis-a-vis assessment, and to do the same for the department. In this way we might achieve some shared definitions of terminology, clarify issues which are presently confusing, and sincerely listen to each others' proposals for the future of the statewide assessment program.²⁶

The task force was never created. The Michigan Education Association continued to attempt to achieve their goals by applying pressure to the State Board of Education and to legislators.

From 1974 through 1977 the Michigan Education Association tried to convince the State Board of Education and legislators that the assessment program should not be expanded. The Michigan Education Association stated that the state had little or nothing to show for its multi-million dollar investment. The assessment test did not provide teachers with diagnostic services since they had other tools more readily available at the time when they were needed. It was not necessary to provide parents with achievement data since most schools have comprehensive testing programs. It has given the state no information for decision making that could not have been gotten by sampling. It should also be possible to tie into The National Assessment Program to further reduce costs. In the same letter the Michigan Education Association offered to assist the State Board of Education in developing an accountability plan that proceeds from the classroom up instead of the opposite direction as exists now.²⁷

In addition to actively opposing the expansion of the assessment program, the Michigan Education Association lobbied to have Public Act 38, 1970,²⁸ amended to

incorporate the recommendations of Dr. House, Dr. Rivers and Dr. Stufflebeam. These recommendations were to:

(1) modify claims that objectives were minimal and represent a consensus, (2) abandon plans to publish objectives list booklet for parents, (3) abandon Chapter Three state aid policy, (4) expand implementation of activities of Step Five of the accountability model, (5) abandon every pupil testing, (6) validate assessment test with minority children, (7) encourage the development of locally developed objectives, (8) move to matrix sampling, (9) encourage and assist local implementation of the accountability model, (10) put the assessment test on a voluntary basis, and (11) expand the score of the assessment test.²⁹

In 1977 the Michigan Education Association created an Accountability Task Force chaired by Michigan Education Association Vice President Edith Swanson. The 24 member group is defining the Michigan Education Association's position on accountability and charting a course of action that will include components that need to be bargained, components that need to be part of legislation and methods of communicating information on how to handle accountability problems to Michigan Education Association members and the public. The Task Force will present its position statement to the executive committee of the Michigan Education Association Board of Directors for review when it has completed its work.³⁰

Interpretation

The first question that needs to be answered is: What initiated the controversy? By 1973 teachers were becoming concerned over the increased momentum of the assessment program. The administrators had had a degree of success in their conflict with the State Department of Education. The administrators were no longer being made the scapegoat. However, with the announced change from norm referenced to objective referenced tests, teachers would be in the proper setting to assume this role. They feared being held accountable for a process in which many variables were out of their control. In addition, the assessment program lacked demonstrated validity and needed additional instruments beyond the single test to accurately assess needs.

In August 1973, the Michigan Education Association Task Force on Assessment and Accountability recommended the Michigan Education Association act. The entire concept needed to be studied especially as it related to teachers. The Task Force recommended that the Michigan Education Association work with the National Education Association to develop a way to deal effectively with assessment and accountability. The National Education Association was reported to be anxious to develop some battle strategies they could use in other states. The Michigan Education Association was concerned over the loss of local control

to the State. Therefore, in December 1973, the Michigan Education Association and the National Education Association contracted Dr. House, Dr. Rivers and Dr. Stufflebeam to analyze the educational soundness and utility of the assessment and accountability programs.

The panel's criticisms centered with few exceptions on the implementation of the assessment test. The Michigan Education Association built on these recommendations when it explained its position to the State Board of Education. It was risky to use a score from a single test to measure a student's educational achievement. The state of the science has not developed to the point where anyone can measure and empirically manipulate all the variables related to educational achievement. The science of psychometrics has not developed to the stage where it can define or measure all of the classroom dynamics involved in the learning process. At present, many instruments and inputs are needed to adequately say how a student is performing. But even then it is only an educational guess as to what should be done to change a low achiever into a high achiever. There are no variables to manipulate which consistently give the desired result. The Michigan Education Association was for accountability developed and implemented by local teachers and administrators.

This leads into the second question: Can the controversy be placed in a framework denoting a political power struggle or different philosophical assumptions? The controversy can clearly be seen as a political power struggle because at its heart is the disagreement over what the role of the State Department of Education should be. The Michigan Education Association believed that the State Department of Education should be a facilitator:

(1) collecting statewide data for statewide decision making, (2) developing a pool of valid objectives and a program of alternatives from which districts could select the options which best meet their needs, and (3) aiding each district in the development, implementation and evaluation of an accountability system. The opposing assumption was that the State Department of Education should objectively perform these functions for the districts, imposing sanctions where necessary, to assure that students achieved the minimal objectives.

The Michigan Education Association would rather not have a statewide accountability system. But if there must be one, it should use matrix sampling and be expanded to cover the entire body of common goals. The State Department of Education should encourage and aid local districts in the development and implementation of accountability programs and not expropriate their powers and

responsibilities by attempting to perform these functions for them.

The Michigan Education Association wished to keep the maximum amount of power possible with the local districts. The more power and responsibilities administrators and local school boards have, the greater voice in these decisions the local teachers' associations would have. During negotiations local associations strive to gain more control over the environment in which teachers perform their professional services. Through this, the Michigan Educational Association believes, the students' individual needs are better met, and they receive a better quality education.

The alternative to this, that the Michigan Educational Association fears, is a state designed and directed school system of which the present assessment program is a component. In this type of system, as the Michigan Education Association pictures it, there exists little or no room for integrating human needs in a manner compatible with the organization's goals. Differences in learning rates and teaching styles are not recognized. Students are viewed with a Skinnerian attitude, to be conditioned and molded by predetermined standards.

By keeping local control of the development and implementation of the accountability program, the Michigan Education Association believes teachers would be able to

operate within the defined responsibilities of students, parents, community leaders, school personnel, board members, intermediate district personnel, state department officials, state board members, the Governor's office and legislators. Each would be accountable for his responsibilities in the learning process. The teachers could not be made the scapegoats.

This brings up the third question: What changes occurred in the assessment program as a result of this controversy? The most significant change occurred at the State Board of Education meeting January 8, 1975. The State Board of Education adopted the following recommendations: (1) cease the expansion of the assessment program for two years with the exception of pilot testing, (2) shift the resources originally planned for every pupil testing at grade one for research to show the value of the program for state level policy making and to show the relationship between educational programs and student learning, (3) hire an outside consultant to prepare a plan for improving student learning, and (4) develop the affective domain and provide humanistic education for Michigan's students.³¹

In April 1976 the Michigan Education Association felt the State Department of Education had not lived up to the moratorium placed on the assessment test. They were continuing to develop and prepare for an expanded

assessment program. The Michigan Education Association requested a moratorium on all developmental activities until several important questions had been answered. What has the assessment program accomplished? How cost effective has it been? What alternatives to it could be used? Is it valid? Is it helpful to teachers? Is it necessary and cost effective to test all students? These questions have not yet been answered. The Michigan Education Association also pointed out that their concerns were shared by Governor William Milliken. He requested \$250,000 for an evaluation of the assessment program.³²

A second result of the controversy occurred in the last few months. In 1977, although the two year moratorium had expired, the State Board of Education did not give its permission for the expansion of the assessment test. First it asked the State Department of Education to prepare a report citing ways in which the assessment test has been misused and to recommend guidelines for developing safeguards to prevent these things for recurring. On May 3, 1977, the State Board of Education adopted the policy that superintendents, principals and assessment test coordinators were not to use the test scores to evaluate teachers' performance. On September 7, 1977, the State Board of Education adopted the policy that the assessment tests did not portray the total performance of teachers, buildings and districts. Therefore,

the test scores should never be used as an instrument of evaluation in an individual or comparative manner. Both policy statements were mailed to the superintendents of local and intermediate school districts. The State Department of Education has now been given permission to expand the test. They are waiting for the legislature to appropriate the needed funds. If the funds are forthcoming, the tenth grade assessment test will be implemented as the fourth and seventh grade tests are now (every pupil testing in reading and math).

A third result of the controversy has been the increased effort of the State Department of Education staff to work with teachers and their professional organizations. They want more teacher input and feedback to develop and improve assessment procedures and instruments. Seminars have been given in different regions of the state to local staffs and administrators. The following professional organizations have been involved: Michigan Council of Teachers of Mathematics, Michigan Reading Association, Michigan Music Educators Association, Michigan Association of Health, Physical Education and Recreation, Michigan Science Teachers' Association, Michigan Association of Elementary School Principals and Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals. These organizations, in addition to contributing to the development of the

test items and objectives, have been involved in analyzing the test results to improve its validity.

The Michigan Education Association has had some success in getting the State Department of Education to reexamine the implementations of their accountability model, particularly the assessment component. They have achieved success while taking a hardline against teacher involvement and refusing to sit down and discuss their differences with the State Department of Education as the Michigan Association of School Administrators and the Michigan Association of Professors of Educational Administration did. The Michigan Education Association utilizes a great deal more political power than the other two associations. But more important, their lobbyists and executives are experienced in using this power to their advantage. It has yet to be seen if the Michigan Education Association will be successful in its attempt to amend Public Act 38, 1970, to incorporate the panelists' recommendations.

There is a definite danger involved in the course the Michigan Education Association is following. If the Michigan Education Association overextends itself in the political arena it can develop a public image problem. The public will perceive the Michigan Education Association as just another union placing self-interest above the welfare of children. If this occurs, the political power the Michigan Education Association now possesses

will diminish. Perhaps the Board of Directors should poll its members before setting a course of action even though the Representative Assembly has given its approval. The writer believes this might be particularly wise before the Michigan Education Association attempts to organize state employees. Teachers will be the losers if the Michigan Education Association's course of action reveals to the public the fact that, like any other guild, its first loyalty is to its members. The implications of the use of this political power will be discussed in the following chapter.

In the last chapter the writer will tie the three controversies in with the central theme of a political power struggle between local control and state control. The hypothesis, that many facets of these controversies could have been avoided if the State Board of Education had given Dr. Kearney's staff the 36 months for development, will be tested. Finally, implications for future research will be stated.

FOOTNOTES

¹Michigan Education Association Board of Directors, Report from the MEA Task Force on Assessment and Accountability, East Lansing, Michigan, 1973.

²Ibid., pp. 3-8.

³Murphy and Cohen, p. 66.

⁴Ernest House, Wendell Rivers, and Daniel Stufflebeam, An Assessment of the Michigan Accountability System (1974), pp. 1-3.

⁵Ibid., p. 1.

⁶Ibid., pp. 5-6.

⁷Ibid., p. 22.

⁸Ibid., p. 21

⁹Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 19, 21.

¹¹Michigan Department of Education, A Staff Response to the Report: An Assessment of the Michigan Accountability System, Lansing, Michigan, 1974, pp. 6-7.

¹²Ibid., p. 12.

¹³Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁶Ernest House, Wendell Rivers and Daniel Stufflebeam, "A Counter-Response to Kearney, Donovan and Fisher," Phi Delta Kappan, September 1974, p. 19.

¹⁷Dr. Danitel Stufflebeam, "A Response to the Michigan Education Department's Defense of Their Accountability System," speech to staff of the Saginaw Public Schools, August 27, 1974, pp. 1-29.

¹⁸Dr. Helen Wise, "Statement on 'An Assessment of the Michigan Accountability System'," April 8, 1974, pp. 1-5.

¹⁹Michigan Education Association, "Statement on Assessment/Accountability in Education," presented at the Michigan Board of Education meeting, May 21-22, 1974, p. 1.

²⁰Ibid., p. 6.

²¹Ibid., pp. 6-9.

²²Ibid., pp. 9-11.

²³Michigan Forum of Educational Organizations, Criteria for Developing an Educational Accountability Plan, 1974, pp. 1-2.

²⁴Letter, Arthur H. Rice, Jr., to Dr. David Donovan, May 30, 1974.

²⁵Letter, Keith Geiger and Herman W. Coleman to Dr. David Donovan, October 3, 1974.

²⁶Letter, John W. Porter to Herman W. Coleman, November 25, 1975.

²⁷Letter, David J. McMahon and Herman W. Coleman to the State Board of Education, "Michigan Education Association Recommendations to the State Board of Education Regarding Expansion of the State Assessment Program," December 21, 1976.

²⁸Public Act 38, 1970, formally enacted the annual Michigan Educational Assessment Program.

²⁹Michigan Education Association Division of Public Affairs, MEA Legislative Bulletin (East Lansing, Michigan, 1976).

³⁰"MEA Refining Accountability Position," Teacher's Voice, Vol. 55, No. 7, December 19, 1977.

³¹Michigan Board of Education, Abstract of State Board of Education Minutes, January 14, 1975, p. 2.

³²Michigan Education Association, MEA Recommendation to the State Board of Education Concerning: Michigan Educational Assessment Program, April 2, 1975, p. 1.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The objectives of the writer in this chapter are to: (1) bring the controversial development of the assessment test up to date, (2) tie the three controversies together with the central theme of a political power struggle, (3) test the hypothesis and provide conclusions, and (4) state implications for future research.

Recent Developments

In the last chapter the writer described the controversy between the Michigan Education Association and the State Department of Education through September 1977. Concurrent with this controversy, Dr. Herbert C. Rudman¹ frequently published articles in periodicals analyzing the evolving assessment program. His most recent series of articles dealt with the 1976-1977 assessment test.

Dr. Rudman was concerned with why Michigan's students had such a low level of attainment on the minimal objectives. He speculated that the causes were one or more of the following. The objectives were not minimal for the grade levels at which they were placed. The teachers, materials and delivery systems were inadequate.

The test items were confusing and mismatched so that they were not measuring the objective for which they were written. Finally, there was an insufficient number of items for each objective to measure mastery of that objective.²

Dr. Rudman reached several conclusions as he viewed the test from its inception in 1969. The test over-emphasized the measurement of reading and mathematics to the exclusion of other academic areas. It also failed to provide much useful information. It should have become a comprehensive program using matrix sampling, testing each student on a part of the content. The results could have been reported by objectives as well as norm reference modes. The increased stress schools have placed on reading and mathematics due to this test has resulted in the deemphasis of the language arts, social sciences and natural sciences. This was a negative result of the test's infringement upon school districts' comprehensive curricula.

Another conclusion he reached was that the test items and objectives were of questionable quality. Within a given objective, the five items were not of sufficient comparability to adequately measure minimal knowledge of the objective. The reading objectives were poorly developed. The fourth grade objectives omitted auditory discrimination and phonetic analysis. The seventh grade

reading objectives were very similar to the fourth grade objectives, omitting vital skills that should have been mastered between third and seventh grade. In addition, many of the objectives were simply not minimal for the grade level specified. Non-attainment of these objectives was due more to poor placement of the objectives than to inadequate teachers, materials or delivery systems.

One of his final conclusions was that the State Department of Education ignored input variables that effect student performance. These variables could be used to help interpret assessment scores and avoid misinterpretation. One of the most important is scholastic aptitude. Others are mobility, the attitudes and aspirations of the children and adults in the community, the socio-cultural composition of the community, financial factors of the school district and the training level of the faculty. Each factor either accelerates or depresses student performance. An explanation of these variables is necessary since education is something that exists outside of school as much as inside. For example, an achievement test tells what a child knows but not where he received his knowledge. The assessment tests for a school district with many transient families does not measure the output for that district. A high percentage of the students received many of their previous years of education in other districts and in other states.³

Since 1974 the State Department of Education has taken the assessment test's data from the previous three years and developed criteria to determine which schools have high needs, moderate needs or low needs. If 50 percent of a school's students do not pass 75 percent of the minimum objectives in mathematics, reading or both, the school is classified as having high needs. If the range is 25 to 49 percent, the school is classified as having moderate needs. Below 25 percent the school is classified as having low needs. The State Board of Education adopted this criteria March 1, 1977. Districts have been notified of their category for the 1976-1977 school year and asked to inform the State Department of Education of their plans to improve their programs if they have been classified as having moderate or high needs.⁴

Development of the Central Theme

All three controversies have involved the political power struggle of state control versus local autonomy. Dr. John Porter, Superintendent of Public Instruction, felt that if children did not learn the basic skills, it was primarily the fault of the schools. In the state Constitution the state was given the responsibility of guaranteeing a basic education for all children regardless of their race or socio-economic status. The Michigan Educational Assessment Program was designed to help carry

out this responsibility by providing data that could be used to make decisions. The State Department of Education has used it as a lever to encourage study, analysis and change in local instructional programs and delivery systems by making public a comparative listing of the scores of individual school districts.

Initially, the move to a state assessment program was politically attractive for legislators and the State Board of Education. Taxpayers were in favor of knowing what they were getting for their large educational expenditures each year. They also had doubts as to whether or not their children were learning the basic skills. The State Board of Education did not want to wait for three years of planning as Dr. Philip Kearney recommended. The Board asked for something that could be implemented within the next school year and then expanded in coming years. The Governor and legislators were quick to approve this approach. In fact, the initial mandate became law as an amendment to an appropriations bill. The formal bill was not written and signed into law until ten months later, after the first assessment test had been given in the schools.

The problem was compounded by the lack of clarification over the relationship between assessment and accountability. Less confusion would have resulted if the accountability model had been developed before the

assessment program instead of after it. Administrators and teachers became confused and threatened. They, as many taxpayers, thought that the assessment program was going to measure their productivity and effectiveness. When the accountability model came out in 1972, it clarified that the assessment test was step three in the model with the purpose of measuring needs. However, local autonomy had already been threatened and many had been alienated. The lines had been drawn for a political power struggle.

The Ad Hoc Committee of the Michigan Association of School Administrators stated that they were struggling to maintain traditional local autonomy in light of stronger controls and demands by the State Department of Education.

Although this committee has dealt essentially with assessment, it became quite apparent during our deliberations that we were really involved with the much broader issue of state control. In our judgment, assessment is but one important manifestation of a determined effort by the State, through its Department of Education, to impose a uniform system of education on local school districts.

This trend can be readily identified in the areas of tax reform, student discipline, length of the school day, state aid, curriculum and the like. Certainly the proposal to create ten State Education Department regional offices can only be interpreted as an attempt to extend the influence, jurisdiction and control of the State over the operation of local boards of education.⁵

The Task Force of the Michigan Association of Professors of Educational Administration indicated that the controversy stemmed from the political power struggle of local autonomy versus state control. The State Department of Education was placing local administrators in a vulnerable position by denying them the power necessary for assuming the responsibilities of their position. The administrators were being held accountable before their boards of education and the public for an assessment test the Task Force considered to be poorly constructed and of questionable validity. They had no input in developing the test and little understanding of its design and content. Furthermore, they were not given accompanying data that had a positive correlation to achievement such as aptitude scores or mobility that would serve to interpret the assessment scores and provide them with an adequate defense. The Task Force believed the State Department of Education should assume responsibility for its programs and act to strengthen the position of the local administrators.

The Michigan Education Association controversy with the State Department of Education centered on local autonomy versus state control as did the previous two controversies. The controversy was over the implementation of the assessment program. The Michigan Education Association believed the State Department of Education should

assume the role of facilitator rather than taking the power and responsibilities to perform these assessment and accountability functions away from the local districts.

The Michigan Education Association fully endorsed the following:

There should be no single or state-wide accountability system. The appropriate role of the state should be to facilitate educational improvements at the local district and building levels. In order to do this, the state needs to collect general information for state-wide decision making. It may develop a pool of objectives and a program of alternatives from which school districts may select those options which suit their needs. It should require that each district have a locally-developed program which provides for instructional planning, research and program development, dissemination, staff development and inservice training, and evaluation of progress. The state cannot and should not attempt to perform these functions for the local district or for the local building. The state should provide adequate funding to assure that these improvement functions can be carried out by districts.⁶

The Michigan Association of School Administrators, the Michigan Association of Professors of Educational Administration and the Michigan Education Association were trying to maintain the maximum amount of control over the assessment program at the local level. In the first two controversies the Ad Hoc Committee and the Task Force met and discussed their disagreements with representatives of the State Department of Education. However, the Michigan Education Association refused to do this. Instead they used their political power to lobby the State Board of Education and legislators. They have achieved several

objectives through the State Board of Education. It is yet to be seen what will be achieved with the legislators. Although the funds to expand the assessment test to the tenth grade have been denied once, the State Department of Education is planning to renew their request. Although all parties involved in these controversies have said that they are in favor of the concept of accountability, the fear of the loss of local autonomy has brought the assessment program into the political bargaining arena where the children of Michigan and the taxpayers might be the losers.

The State Department of Education has acted legally under Michigan's Constitution. Local school boards operate with the permission of the state government. Legally, the state government could consolidate the state into one district with one curriculum. The State Department of Education, in boldly enacting the assessment program, exercised its power in an unprecedented fashion. It jarred many school districts out of their doldrums. It is likely that if a few of the larger districts had been responsive to the climate of the late sixties and created their own assessment and accountability programs, the State Board of Education might not have been in such a rush to institute a statewide program. But reliable assessment data were not available, only the demands for more local, state and federal funds. The State Department

of Education's bold, innovative assessment program and accountability model has resulted in changed attitudes, instructional programs and delivery systems. But could it have been implemented in a more politically realistic manner? If the State Board of Education had accepted Dr. Kearney's program recommending three years of planning, would many aspects of the controversies have been avoided?

Testing the Hypothesis

The hypothesis is that had the State Board of Education accepted the staff's⁷ program recommending three years of planning, many aspects of the controversies would have been avoided. Even if teachers, administrators and others representing professional educational organizations had had the opportunity for input during the three years of planning, the writer still believes the controversies would have occurred. The only way many aspects of the controversies could have been avoided would have been if the State Department of Education had assumed the role of facilitator and removed the threat against local autonomy. Although this is more realistic politically, the State Department of Education did not consider this a viable alternative.

Another reason why the hypothesis is false is that there is no reason to believe that many aspects of the controversies would ever have been brought up as potential

problems. Since this was pioneer work, there was no pattern to follow. The biggest change, from norm referenced to objective referenced, could not have been foreseen. Much initial time would have been spent establishing channels of communication and trust to convince the invited parties of the value, utility and need for an assessment test.

The final reason why the hypothesis is false is that it is doubtful whether or not all the hurdles could have been overcome to get the assessment program off the ground. It is possible that the invited parties could have collaborated to sway political pressure against financing the program. The State Department of Education would probably not have been able to allay the fears of teachers and administrators that they were not going to lose local control.

This controversy illustrates the need for the State Department of Education to exercise central leadership and protect the interest of students, parents and taxpayers. However, the Department must still view their position realistically. The Department is partners with teachers and administrators, but must represent the interests of children and the public. They need educators' cooperation if the assessment test and accountability model is to be utilized successfully, yet they must

not feel they are compromising a quality education for children and the public's interest.

The State Department of Education saw its role changing from that of an outsider to that of an insider. Its old image has been that of a kindly father who provided general guidelines and financial aid. However, society is now more mobile. The old family farms are disappearing. Many families move every few years. Social problems such as unemployment and the breakdown of the family are shared nationwide. These changes in society call for a stronger role of leadership to be assumed by the State Department of Education. The State Department of Education felt it had the responsibility and duty to assure that all students learn the basic skills and that the taxpayers get a return for their educational expenditures. In addition, the courts and federal government were demanding that states equalize educational opportunities. To make the necessary decisions, the state needed the reliable data provided by the assessment test. The Department wanted the data to be useful for district, building and classroom level decision making. It also felt that local districts needed the assets and liabilities of their deeds exposed to public scrutiny since they were publicly financed. Finally, the Department believed local districts needed a third party to monitor their performance and thereby encourage

change in what might otherwise become a stagnate organization.

The State Department of Education now finds itself up against the political power of the Michigan Education Association. As a parent and taxpayer, it is the writer's opinion that the State Department of Education should assume a pragmatic, politically realistic posture that will assure the accomplishment of its basic objective while accommodating some of the Michigan Education Association's recommendations. The Department's perceptions of the needs for its changing role are correct. The concept of local autonomy that originated 200 years ago is becoming more and more a myth. Education is big business and needs to be held accountable by the taxpayers in a cost-effective manner. Parents should be guaranteed that their children are learning the basic skills and will not be given a high school diploma because of their age or size. Each child should have an equal opportunity for an education, regardless of his race, socio-economic level or place of birth. School districts need to have their performances monitored, their degree of success and failure exposed, and their personnel motivated.

However, the State Department of Education should consider adopting some of the Michigan Education Association's recommendations. It should test entirely by matrix sampling unless it can justify the additional cost of

maintaining the testing of each pupil. Basically, the same data for state level decisions could be achieved at less cost. Or the difference in cost could pay for testing in new subject areas which have been largely omitted up to now. The State Board of Education could mandate local districts to formulate and operate assessment programs and accountability programs within five years with the State Department of Education serving as a facilitator to assure the presence of commonality among the minimal objectives. The Department would also have to provide special help for small districts. This would give teachers and administrators more input into designing and implementing their assessment program. In addition, districts could use a battery of tests and personal evaluations to measure needs. This is a particularly important consideration, given the fact that the science of psychometrics has not developed to the point where it can define or measure all of the classroom dynamics involved in the learning process. The loss of individualized scores for each tested objective is not crucial since many teachers have already developed a pattern of pre and post tests or give standardized achievement tests. With teachers designing their own assessment test, they could much better meet individual needs as well as avoid misplaced objectives.

Instead of testing every pupil on reading and mathematics objectives at the fourth and seventh grade

levels, the state could better use these tests by developing them into early warning competency tests to be followed by a tenth grade statewide competency test which could serve as one factor in determining whether a student receives a high school diploma if the district desired it. This is an area where the state needs to provide central leadership. The writer knows of only a few school districts with a community advisory committee studying the feasibility of developing a competency test. With two school districts now being sued by graduating students who could not read or write well enough to fill out a job application, it appears obvious that the public would be in favor of such a test. But it is important to note that teachers, administrators and parents have a right to a large degree of input in designing such a test and determining the extent of its use.

In conclusion, three years of planning, even with teacher and administrator input, would not have prevented many aspects of the controversies. In fact, planning might have prevented the assessment program from ever getting off the ground. In this mobile society, there is a need for strong central leadership which assures parents that their children are learning the basic skills and that their educational expenditures are being spent as cost-effectively as possible. However, the State Department of Education should assume a politically realistic posture.

It is a partner with teachers and administrators. Little can be gained by acting in a manner that robs teachers and administrators of their control when they are being held accountable. Likewise, the Department should attempt to gain the most reliable data for the least expenditure. There is no reason for every pupil testing in two subject areas when matrix sampling could be used and involve more content areas. This suggests areas for future studies in five to ten years.

Implications for Future Research

By 1985 a study should be done to see which objectives of the long range plan of the assessment program have been accomplished. The study should also explain, in the cases where the objectives were not met, if the cause was a political power struggle or a unilateral change by the State Department of Education. In addition, the following questions should be answered. Have the data collected by the assessment program been useful for statewide decisions? If not, why not? Has it been a worthwhile investment for the state's taxpayers? Could the same results have been achieved for less money? Have there been negative outcomes from the assessment program? Has the accountability model been implemented in the local districts? Have data been established to show that learning is more cost-effective than it was in the past? Have

data been established to show that instructional programs and delivery systems have been improved so that a greater number of students are learning the basic skills? Has the public become more informed of the achievements of the public schools in the area of assessment and accountability, or are they just as wary of the schools becoming ineffective, self perpetuating bureaucracies as they were in the late sixties?

By 1985 another study should be done to show if any school districts by their own volition have instituted assessment tests, accountability programs or competency tests. What role have administrators and teachers played in the initiation, development and implementation of these programs? In the event that these questions have become academic through state mandate a study should be done to show to what extent teachers, administrators and school board members have exercised their local control to respond to the needs and concerns of the people in their district. How many school districts conducted a needs' survey? How many school districts employed community advisory councils? What needs were discovered? How were they met? How many school districts' approaches to gain public input could be characterized as being insincere or public relations' stunts as some politicians use before elections? Is there evidence to show that strong central leadership on the part of the State

Department of Education is needed if certain needs are to be met or problems solved? Or does the evidence show that school districts are quick to respond to local needs and do not need state level involvement?

Conclusion

The impact of the four factors that converged during the sixties (national assessment, adoption of the systems approach to education, growth of public anxiety and the application of accountability to education) has been felt nationwide. Forty-nine states now have assessment problems and are actively studying proposals. Twenty-six states have conducted assessment tests to date. The educational scene in the United States has evolved to a point where there is a demand to show evidence of children's achievement as a return on taxpayers' investments. This translates into the concepts of assessment and accountability. With the present situation of declining enrollment, demand for higher property taxes and graduation of students deficient in the basic skills, it is doubtful that the public would support a movement to remove assessment and accountability from education. Education has become a big business and it will continue to adopt the practices of the commercial-military establishment.

But the climate has changed since 1969. Both superintendents of school districts and State Department of Education officials have become more aware of the political implications of each other's actions. Superintendents and officials of educational associations now closely watch and attempt to advise the State Department. The Department listens to professional educators' reactions and provides channels so they will continue to receive recommendations.

In 1969 the State Department of Education appeared to be a sleeping giant, largely overlooked by superintendents and officials of educational organizations. In addition the latter showed little interest or anxiety during the time the State Board of Education was discussing the possibility of creating a state assessment test.

During the early seventies the anxiety level was high as the controversies have shown. The State Department of Education was exercising aggressive leadership. The focal point of its changing role was the assessment test since it represented the most tangible and principal intrusion on local autonomy. Superintendents fought to abolish the assessment test since they had to administer it, report the data and watch the results become public.

The last few years have been a period of low anxiety characterized by cooperation and resignation. Superintendents have resigned themselves to the presence

of the assessment test and are seeking ways to use it. The State Department of Education is kept under a watchful eye. Fears of centralization still exist but the Department's role has largely been supprotive. The State has not usurped as much local control as was initially feared. Teachers still are anxious over the role the assessment test will play in determining their accountability. This has yet to be determined as well as the extend of future development of the assessment program.

Few feel they have seen the last of this controversy for the underlying question in this controversy as in the preceding controversies was: Who is going to control education? Even though local school districts and the state share the balance of power the pendulum appears to be swinging to the state. The State Department of Education has challenged local power bases. Politically the Michigan Education Association is now threatening the assessment program's existence. The program has caused changes and drawn attention to the results of the educational process. However, it has yet to prove its own utility or provide Michigan's taxpayers with data to show how cost-effective the public schools are. The Department needs to deal with the tenuous existence of the assessment program in a politically realistic manner. There are many potential benefits of the assessment program and accountability model if the Department can find and hold

a secure, realistic, political power base. The assessment program can provide data on which to make state-wide decisions. It can help provide equality of educational opportunity for all children regardless of their race, socio-economic status or geographical location. It can help guarantee that the basic skills are being taught. It can provide regular measurements of the schools' progress in achieving their objectives and make this data public. It can become a catalyst to encourage the improvement of staff, building organizations, instructional materials and delivery systems.

FOOTNOTES

¹Dr. Rudman was chairman of the assessment/accountability Task Force for the Michigan Association of Professors of Educational Administration in the 1972 controversy with the State Department of Education.

²"The Michigan Assessment Program 76-77: The Objectives," Michigan School Board Journal, XXIV (1977): 10-11.

³"The Michigan Assessment Program 76-77: It's Meaning to School Boards," Michigan School Board Journal, XXIV (September, 1977):19,30.

⁴Lewis A. Morrissey, "State to Spot Low Achiever Schools," Jackson Citizen Patriot, March 2, 1977, p. A-3.

⁵Ad Hoc Committee, p. 30.

⁶Michigan Forum of Educational Organizations, p. 2.

⁷Under the direction of Dr. Philip Kearney, Associate Superintendent of Public Instruction.

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