



BLUEGRASS
INSTITUTE

School Based Decision Making Policy

A CLOSER LOOK

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KENTUCKY'S SCHOOL BASED DECISION MAKING POLICY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

School Based Decision Making (SBDM) is arguably one of the most unusual and controversial features in the massive public education system restructuring created by the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 (KERA). At the time of KERA's enactment, Education Week reported that the legislation "is the first in the country to mandate site-based management in every district," and "the bill's mandate for site-based management appeared to evoke the most apprehension among educators."¹

Under KERA, virtually every Kentucky public school had to install a "School Council" by the end of 1996. The law directed that many important responsibilities formerly held by local school boards and their superintendents were transferred to these new, school-based councils. Some of the powers KERA transferred to the school councils included final authority to select curriculum and make staffing decisions and final decision-making regarding actual expenditure of money received by the school.

Flash forward to the present and the SBDM program has now been in place in virtually every Kentucky public school for more than two decades.

Given the pivotal role the law says school councils play in the quality of education in Kentucky, one might expect a considerable amount of ongoing research has been conducted on council effectiveness. That expectation, however, would be incorrect. In fact, although many issues regarding SBDM functioning and effectiveness remain in question today, it appears virtually all research into the impacts of SBDM in Kentucky came to a halt after 2001.

Still more disturbing, that last major SBDM report from 2001 indicated there was still considerable concern about how school councils were functioning, prompting the author of that report to write that, ***"due to a lack of comprehensive evaluation data on SBDM, no one can answer definitively any questions concerning the reform's effects on any group or agency."***

While formal research regarding the SBDM approach went lacking in the new century, there's been ongoing criticism since KERA's enactment regarding Kentucky's public school performance and of the SBDM program, as well.

For example, parents correctly complain that they really have no control over the school councils. Superintendents lament the fact that they are completely locked out of control over important issues like selection of most school staff members and critical curriculum choices. Local voters are amazed that the school board members they elect are powerless to influence many major policy decisions in Kentucky's schools.

Meanwhile, even experienced school professionals continue to get into major trouble when they step on a school council's toes. A steady trickle of official sanctions for local board members and superintendents has been a feature of Kentucky education since KERA was enacted. A recent example from the well-regarded Boone County Public School District highlights the fact that massive confusion about SBDM authority continues even today, more than a quarter-century after KERA's enactment. Before the dust settled on this latest SBDM boil up, the superintendent and two principals in the district found themselves sanctioned for misunderstandings about authority areas reserved to the councils. It was an amazing example of how, 27 years after KERA's enactment, even some of the state's highest regarded educators still encounter major problems working within the SBDM program.

Perhaps trumping all the complaints is the fact that Kentucky's education system isn't making dramatic progress using the SBDM approach to school governance. As of the latest available results from the 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), fewer than half of Kentucky's fourth-grade students are proficient or better in math and reading. The NAEP picture for Kentucky's eighth-graders is worse. Barely more than one in three eighth-graders in Kentucky reads at or above the NAEP proficiency level, and in eighth-grade NAEP math, a shockingly low 28 percent met the NAEP proficiency muster in 2015.

With such low proficiency rates even today, it's obvious that progress on the NAEP since KERA's enactment has been excruciatingly slow. That does not bode well for the future. In fact, based on Kentucky's demonstrated performance on NAEP from the earliest to the latest available test results, it will be many decades – more than a century in the case of NAEP Grade 8 reading – before the state's students approach something like an 80 percent proficiency rate in NAEP Grade 4 and Grade 8 reading and math.

For black students, the state's major racial minority, the rate of progress is even more astonishingly slow. Kentucky's demonstrated progress to date in NAEP Grade 8 reading indicates the commonwealth should not expect black students to reach an 80 percent proficiency level in the next two-and-a-half centuries. That's simply unacceptable.

Clearly, school management plays an important role in the state's slow education progress.

Thus, while comprehensive research covering all of Kentucky's schools remains unavailable today, it seemed worthwhile to consider some cases where available data can provide insight into the real functioning of SBDM in Kentucky.

In one case, SBDM programs have been examined with extensive, publicly available management audits in a small group of Kentucky's schools. The schools involved have the lowest education performance in the state, ranking in the bottom five percent. Initially, these schools were called "Persistently Low-Achieving Schools." Later, the identification process for these schools was revised and the title currently used is "Priority Schools." Schools originally identified as Persistently Low-Achieving Schools were automatically included in the new Priority system.

Each Persistently Low-Achieving/Priority School receives a professionally completed management audit shortly after formal identification. Those audits provide important insights into the functioning of long-established SBDM councils in these low-performing schools.

We examined the management audits for 10 Persistently Low-Achieving/Priority Schools in detail, and the findings are troubling. Some of the problems commonly found include:

- A lack of focus on students, and sometimes on key adults;
- Not using data to inform decisions;
- Failing to adopt needed policies;
- Failing to implement adopted policies;
- Failing to coordinate with other schools and/or the school district;
- Failing to include all stakeholders;
- Poor use of resources;
- Poor focus on goals; and, perhaps most disturbing of all,
- Curriculum neglect.

These are all serious issues that have important, negative impacts on student learning.

Keep in mind that these problems were found in dramatically low-performing schools that had SBDM councils in place since at least 1996, implying these problems were institutionalized and unlikely to change without external pressure such as that created because of the Persistently Low-Achieving/Priority Schools programs.

It also needs to be kept in mind that while we have quality management audits to examine for Kentucky's Persistently Low-Achieving/Priority Schools, which essentially comprise the bottom five percent in terms of education performance, no detailed research has been conducted in schools performing just slightly higher. Could similar issues be found in the management of, say, schools ranking in the bottom six to 10 percent range – or even in the bottom 25 percent? No research exists to inform us.

However, the fact that SBDM councils operated for years without correction in seriously under-performing schools shows the mere existence of school councils provides no guarantee that students will receive a solid education.

Worse, the Bluegrass State's current laws regarding SBDM work in ways that prevent local on-scene personnel such as the superintendent and locally elected board of education from stepping in to make things right for students.

Looking at another question, we also explored disturbing evidence that one of the major goals of the SBDM program – increasing parent participation in Kentucky's public schools – has not been effective. Our comparison of student enrollment to the number of parents voting in the school council elections in the vast majority of Kentucky's schools indicates astonishingly low interest on the part of those parents. In a total of 818 of 1,124 Kentucky public schools, the ratio of voting parents to school enrollment in 2016-17 was only a single-digit percentage. So, the parents of fewer than about one out of 10 students took the interest and time to vote for parent representatives in their child's school. In 101 schools, the parent-voter-to-membership ratio was less than one percent! The ratio of voting parents to enrollment exceeded 50 percent in only 15 schools in the entire state.

Clearly, if a major goal of having school councils is boosting parent involvement, the latest school council election information indicates that goal – after more than a quarter-century of KERA – remains very sorely unmet.

While data is limited, the findings of our study point to a need to rethink Kentucky's current SBDM policies. Is it now time to allow local, on-scene individuals with the most knowledge of their schools, namely locally elected school boards and district superintendents, to have more say regarding how the schools in their taxpayer-supported district operate? In fact, in a representative democracy, is it even appropriate to block locally-elected school boards from effective oversight and control of the schools they fund?

– ***Richard G. Innes is Staff Education Analyst for the Bluegrass Institute, Kentucky's free-market think tank. January 2018***

FORWARD

As Education Week noted, School Based Decision Making (SBDM) is one of the most unusual and controversial features in Kentucky's massive public education restructuring that began after enactment of the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 (KERA).^{1,2} Under Kentucky's version of SBDM, or local school governance, many important elements of responsibility of local school boards and their superintendent were transferred to new school-based decision-making councils. The ultimate intent was to improve education for students by getting more involvement from parents and teachers at the place where education happens – the local school. To bring this about, KERA directed a dramatic shift in authority over school governance. Some of the extensive powers KERA transferred to the school councils include:³

- Determination of curriculum, including needs assessment, curriculum development, alignment with state standards, technology utilization and program appraisal within the local school board's policy;
- Assignment of all instructional and non-instructional staff time;
- Assignment of students to classes and programs within the school;
- Determination of a school's daily and weekly schedule subject to the beginning and ending times of the school day and school calendar year as established by the local board;
- Determination how space is used during the school day;
- Planning and resolution of issues regarding instructional practices;
- Selection and implementation of discipline and classroom management techniques, including responsibilities of the student, parent, teacher, counselor and principal; and
- Selection of extracurricular programs and determination of policies relating to student participation based on academic qualifications and attendance requirements, program evaluation and supervision.

Councils also were charged with additional responsibilities as directed by the local school board for:⁴

- School budget and administration, including discretionary, activity and other school funds;
- Maintenance, supplies and equipment funds; accounting and auditing;
- Assessment of individual student progress, including testing and reporting of student progress to the students, parents, school district, community and state;
- School improvement plans, including the form and function of strategic planning and its relationship to district planning;
- Professional development plans;
- Parent, citizen and community participation, including the relationship of the council with other groups;

- Cooperation and collaboration within the district and with other districts and public and private agencies;
- Requirements for waiver of district policies;
- Requirements for record-keeping by the school council; and
- A process for appealing a decision made by a school council.

This unprecedented power transfer clearly created a new and extremely high workload within each Kentucky school for a large list of duties that formerly had been handled by district offices and locally elected school boards. Whether schools across Kentucky would have enough staff with enough extra time and the additional skills required to handle such matters as budgeting and curriculum remained unknown during unfolding of the last decade of the 20th Century.

Nevertheless, KERA forced Kentucky's schools to attempt to make this new education governance plan work. KERA required virtually all Kentucky public schools to install their school-based decision-making council no later than December 1996.⁵ Once up and running, these SBDM councils would take authority for all decisions regarding the massive group of responsibilities listed above.

The question was, could this system work and work well in every Kentucky school building? Could – and would – the principal, teachers and others in each local school develop the skills and devote the time required to perform these duties and requirements? Would removal of extensive authority from the locally elected school board and its superintendent prove appropriate and effective for every school? Were other unforeseen problems lurking in the education shadows, as well?

Problems surfacing in the 1990s

Early research on SBDM in Kentucky identified several problems with trying to implement this highly experimental new governance model statewide.

For example, in late 1995 Professors Thomas Guskey and Kent D. Peterson wrote about Kentucky's SBDM program, saying, "We believe that a variety of specific problems are keeping school-based decision making from improving teaching...."⁶ Guskey and Peterson outlined major issues concerning:

- "The Power Problem" – Actual power didn't transfer from the local superintendent/board as intended. Instead, boards and superintendents continued to make decisions in areas that the law had actually removed from board/superintendent authority.
- "The Implementation Problem" – Schools were proving unequal to the challenging responsibility thrust upon them by KERA.

- “The Ambiguous Mission Problem” – SBDMs were losing a primary focus on student learning as their many supporting responsibilities and duties swamped them.
- “The Time Problem” – The totally unsurprising fact that staff within each school lacked enough extra time to meet the extensive demands KERA placed upon them.
- “The Expertise Problem” – Teachers and parents didn’t have requisite expertise in newly developing education programs and in key areas of professional and curriculum development.
- “The Cultural Constraints Problem” – The school culture simply was proving too difficult to change to accommodate KERA’s demands.
- “The Avoidance Problem” – SBDMs tended to avoid making demanding decisions in the most important areas – like curriculum – where staff could not develop a consensus.
- “The Motivation Problem” – People in Kentucky’s schools were not universally thrilled with the SBDM concept. Getting parents to run for the councils was proving difficult in many schools.

The Guskey/Peterson paper did offer some suggestions about how to improve these council problems. However, as of 1995 the paper made it clear: implementation of SBDM in Kentucky had a very long way to go.

Six years after the Guskey/Peterson paper was issued, Professor Jane Lindle produced a very interesting meta-analysis examining several papers and dissertations on SBDMs issued throughout the 1990s.⁷ Lindle’s paper provides a one-stop summary of the state of the research on Kentucky’s SBDM program as of 2001.

In her paper, Lindle asks a central and very important question about Kentucky’s SBDM program:⁸

What have been the effects of the program area on students, schools, school districts, communities, educators, governmental agencies, and the public?

She then answers that question this way:

Due to a lack of comprehensive evaluation data on SBDM, no one can answer definitively any questions concerning the reform's effects on any group or agency. Speculation, opinions, and anecdotes are plenty, but no single, reliable source of data, analysis, or interpretation currently exists.

In other words, more than a decade after KERA launched SBDM as the school governance plan for Kentucky, Lindle said there was not a single reliable source of data and analysis available to tell us how the SBDM approach was working for any group –

including students – or any agency such as the schools. This finding is particularly problematic because Lindle’s paper references numerous reports and dissertations about SBDM. Her analysis also indicates that “the number and types of complaints and disputes relating to SBDM has remained steady since 1992” up to the issuance of the 1999 annual report from the Kentucky Office of Education Accountability.⁹ So, at least through 1999 there had not been a reduction in identification of SBDM complaints to the state agency charged with investigating those issues.

Lindle concludes her 2001 paper saying,¹⁰

Most of the questions raised in this review remain unanswered. A concentrated initiative for designing an adequate evaluation of Kentucky’s systemic reform remains an unattainable goal without resources necessary for research.

Thus, as of 2001 many questions about the functioning of SBDMs still existed and Lindle was strongly concerned that research seemed in short supply.

An additional concern about school councils involves composition of the membership. By law, the councils are composed with a ratio of three teachers to only two parents (or four teachers and three parents if there is an unmet need for a minority representative). A majority vote rules. Thus, the council process not only removed locally elected school board members from many important decisions about school governance, it also prevented parents from exerting control. Responsibility for major areas of school operations passed to the teachers and principal in each school. Parents and local citizens lost control.

And then, the research just stopped

When I started to more extensively examine the SBDM issue, I was astonished to discover that, despite many unanswered questions lingering as of Lindle’s 2001 paper, since then virtually no follow-on research on SBDM functioning has been conducted.

Online searches didn’t surface any papers of note regarding Kentucky’s SBDM operations following Lindle’s 2001 study.

Aside from a web search, I contacted Professor Lindle and staff members at education departments in several of Kentucky’s four-year public universities to see if any research of significance was available. I also talked to the small SBDM section at the Kentucky Department of Education and others such as the Kentucky Association of School Councils. No one I contacted seemed aware of a significant paper more recent than Lindle’s 2001 study.

While the Kentucky Office of Education Accountability staff did indicate they had reported on some small sub-areas of SBDM responsibility in two of their reports, the central focus of those studies was not the functioning of SBDMs overall.

Thus, while our study focuses on SBDM performance in Kentucky's Persistently Low-Achieving/Priority Schools (PLAs/Priority) and on analysis of current parent support for school council elections, this paper could represent about the only SBDM research available since Lindle's paper was issued 17 years ago.

SBDM in the Persistently Low-Achieving Schools

Shortly after a Kentucky school enters the Persistently Low-Achieving Schools category (later renamed Priority Schools), it receives a detailed management audit from a team of education professionals selected by the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE). Because school councils are required to be a major element in the school management process, we expected to find comments in those management audits that would provide insight into the functioning of the SBDM activities in each Persistently Low-Achieving/Priority (PLAs/Priority) school at the time each school was identified for poor performance.

The first step was to identify which schools had entered the original Persistently Low-Achieving School or the later Priority School status and what happened to their SBDM authority after they were identified. An open records request was made on April 19, 2017, to the Kentucky Department of Education for information concerning all the schools identified as PLAs/Priority Schools in Kentucky since the Persistently Low-Achieving School program began in 2010.

The specific request asked for these items:

1. Name of each school identified as a PLAs/Priority School.
2. Date each school entered PLAs/Priority status.
3. Date, if appropriate, when each school was removed from PLAs/Priority status.
4. Date of first management audit of each school after entering PLAs/Priority status.
5. Date of the last management audit of each school while in PLAs/Priority status.
6. Date, if appropriate, when each SBDM council had its governing authority removed.
7. Date, if appropriate, when each SBDM council's governing authority was restored.

The key part of KDE's response to the open records request is a table very similar to the one found in Table 1 below, including the notes at the bottom left on the table. Table 1, however, adds some shaded highlighting for emphasis and a shaded comment about the KDE's note regarding the existence of management audits for each of the

PLAs/Priority schools. The KDE's claim that these schools don't undergo such audits is incorrect. In fact, Kentucky Revised Statute 160.346,¹¹ which deals with actions to be followed in a "persistently low-achieving school," requires "an audit team to review and report on persistently low-achieving schools." These audits are even available online, as discussed further below.

TABLE 1

Priority Schools Entrance and Exit Status and SBDM Authority*					
		Entered priority status	Exited priority status	SBDM authority removed	SBDM authority restored
1	Academy @ Shawnee HS	Spring, 2010	N/A	March, 2010	N/A
2	Bryan Station HS	October, 2011	October, 2015	N/A	N/A
3	Byck Elementary	October, 2015	N/A	February, 2016	N/A
4	Caverna HS	Spring, 2010	October, 2014	April, 2012	October, 2016
5	Christian County HS	November, 2010	N/A	January, 2011	N/A
6	Dayton HS	October, 2011	N/A	N/A	N/A
7	Dayton MS	October, 2011	N/A	N/A	N/A
8	Doss HS	November, 2010	N/A	December, 2010	N/A
9	East Carter HS	November, 2010	October, 2014	November, 2010	October, 2016
10	Fairdale HS	November, 2010	N/A	December, 2010	N/A
11	Fern Creek HS	Spring, 2010	October, 2015	March, 2010	Eligible October 2017
12	Fleming County HS	October, 2011	N/A	February, 2012	N/A
13	Franklin-Simpson HS	October, 2011	N/A	N/A	N/A
14	Frost Middle	Spring 2010	School closed 2014	March, 2010	N/A
15	Greenup HS	November, 2010	October, 2015	January, 2011	Eligible October 2017
16	Hopkins County Central HS	October, 2011	N/A	January, 2012	N/A
17	Iroquois HS	November, 2010	N/A	January, 2011	N/A
18	Knight MS	November, 2010	N/A	May, 2011	N/A
19	Knox Central HS	October, 2011	October, 2015	December, 2011	Eligible October 2017
20	Lawrence Co HS	Spring, 2010	October, 2015	March, 2010	Eligible October 2017
21	Lee County HS	October, 2011	October, 2015	November, 2011	Eligible October 2017
22	Leslie Co HS	Spring, 2010	October, 2013	N/A	N/A
23	Lincoln County HS	October, 2011	October, 2015	February, 2012	Eligible October 2017
24	Livingston Central HS	October, 2011	N/A	N/A	N/A
25	Maupin Elementary	October, 2016	N/A	January, 2017	N/A
26	Metcalfe Co HS	Spring, 2010	N/A	March, 2010	N/A
27	Monticello HS	October, 2011	School closed 2013	November, 2011	N/A
28	Moore Traditional MS	October, 2015	N/A	N/A	N/A
29	Myers Middle	October, 2011	School closed 2014	November, 2011	N/A
30	Newport HS	November, 2010	October, 2015	April, 2011	Eligible October 2017
31	Olmsted North MS	October, 2011	N/A	N/A	N/A
32	Perry County Central HS	October, 2011	October, 2015	December, 2011	Eligible October 2017
33	Pulaski County HS	October, 2011	N/A	February, 2012	N/A
34	Roosevelt-Perry Elementary	October, 2015	N/A	N/A	N/A
35	Seneca HS	November, 2010	N/A	December, 2010	N/A
36	Sheldon Clark HS	November, 2010	October, 2014	N/A	N/A
37	Southern HS	November, 2010	N/A	January, 2011	N/A
38	Stuart MS	October, 2011	N/A	N/A	N/A
39	Thomas Jefferson MS	October, 2011	N/A	N/A	N/A
40	Trimble County HS	October, 2011	October, 2015	N/A	N/A
41	Valley HS	Spring, 2010	N/A	March, 2010	N/A
42	Valley Prep	August, 2014	School closing 2017	N/A	N/A
43	Waggener HS	November, 2010	October, 2015	January, 2011	Eligible October 2017
44	Wellington Elementary	October, 2016	N/A	N/A	N/A
45	Western HS	Spring, 2010	N/A	March, 2010	N/A
46	Western MS	Spring, 2010	N/A	November, 2008	N/A
47	Westport MS	October, 2011	N/A	N/A	N/A

*As requested on Open Records Request

1. Name of priority school--Column B
2. Date school entered priority status--Column C
3. Date school exited priority status--Column D
4. and 5. Dates of management audits--Priority Schools do not undergo management audits
6. Date of removal of SBDM authority--Column E
7. Date SBDM authority was restored--Column F

Innes Note: There are reports, but with different titles. Example: Doss High entered PLAs status in November 2010. It has a report titled: "Jefferson County Public Schools, DOSS HIGH School, Leadership Assessment Report, 12/05/2010 - 12/10/2010."

Table 1 reveals several interesting things:

- A total of 47 Kentucky schools have been placed in the PLAs/Priority program since it started in 2010.
- Four of the 47 PLAs/Priority schools were closed or scheduled for closing by the end of the 2016-17 school year. These schools never exited PLAs/Priority status and closed without making a successful recovery.
- There are multiple cohorts of PLAs/Priority schools.
 - Spring 2010 – 10 schools identified in original group
 - November 2010 – 12 schools added
 - October 2011 – 19 schools added
 - August 2014 – 1 school added
 - October 2015 – 3 schools added
 - October 2016 – 2 schools added

New schools generally are not added to the Priority Schools' list until existing schools on the list are removed. Thus, the decrease in the number of schools added in more recent cohorts should not be interpreted as a general sign of improvement. It's just that the bottom five-percent classification continues to be occupied by numerous schools unable to exit Priority status.

Table 1 is broken down further in Table 2 to show only those schools that lost their SBDM authority as part of the PLAs/Priority process, or in one case (Western Middle School), as part of an even earlier program. Table 2 also includes a status update to Table 1 based on a March 31, 2017, report in the Louisville Courier-Journal newspaper that the Valley High School had just been removed from Priority status.¹² Apparently that recent change, made only two weeks before the open records request was filed, was overlooked when the KDE assembled their open records response.

TABLE 2

Statistics for Kentucky's Persistently Low-Achieving/Priority Schools That Lost SBDM Authority						
Original Number in KDE Listing	School	Month/Year Entered Persistently Low-Achieving or Priority Status	Exited priority status	SBDM authority removed	SBDM authority restored	Number
8	Doss HS	November, 2010	N/A	December, 2010	N/A	1
10	Fairdale HS	November, 2010	N/A	December, 2010	N/A	2
35	Seneca HS	November, 2010	N/A	December, 2010	N/A	3
12	Fleming County HS	October, 2011	N/A	February, 2012	N/A	4
33	Pulaski County HS	October, 2011	N/A	February, 2012	N/A	5
3	Byck Elementary	October, 2015	N/A	February, 2016	N/A	6
5	Christian County HS	November, 2010	N/A	January, 2011	N/A	7
17	Iroquois HS	November, 2010	N/A	January, 2011	N/A	8
37	Southern HS	November, 2010	N/A	January, 2011	N/A	9
16	Hopkins County Central HS	October, 2011	N/A	January, 2012	N/A	10
25	Maupin Elementary	October, 2016	N/A	January, 2017	N/A	11
1	Academy @ Shawnee HS	Spring, 2010	N/A	March, 2010	N/A	12
14	Frost Middle	Spring 2010	School closed 2014	March, 2010	N/A	13
26	Metcalfe Co HS	Spring, 2010	N/A	March, 2010	N/A	14
45	Western HS	Spring, 2010	N/A	March, 2010	N/A	15
18	Knight MS	November, 2010	N/A	May, 2011	N/A	16
46	Western MS	Spring, 2010	N/A	November, 2008	N/A	17
27	Monticello HS	October, 2011	School closed 2013	November, 2011	N/A	18
29	Myers Middle	October, 2011	School closed 2014	November, 2011	N/A	19
30	Newport HS	November, 2010	October, 2015	April, 2011	Eligible October 2017	1
19	Knox Central HS	October, 2011	October, 2015	December, 2011	Eligible October 2017	2
32	Perry County Central HS	October, 2011	October, 2015	December, 2011	Eligible October 2017	3
23	Lincoln County HS	October, 2011	October, 2015	February, 2012	Eligible October 2017	4
15	Greenup HS	November, 2010	October, 2015	January, 2011	Eligible October 2017	5
43	Waggener HS	November, 2010	October, 2015	January, 2011	Eligible October 2017	6
11	Fern Creek HS	Spring, 2010	October, 2015	March, 2010	Eligible October 2017	7
20	Lawrence Co HS	Spring, 2010	October, 2015	March, 2010	Eligible October 2017	8
21	Lee County HS	October, 2011	October, 2015	November, 2011	Eligible October 2017	9
4	Caverna HS	Spring, 2010	October, 2014	April, 2012	October, 2016	1
9	East Carter HS	November, 2010	October, 2014	November, 2010	October, 2016	2
41	Valley HS	Spring, 2010	March 2017*	March, 2010	N/A	3

* The Courier-Journal reported on March 31, 2017, that Valley High School was no longer in Priority Status. That is not reflected in the Mid-April 2017 Open Records response from KDE and there are questions about whether or not Valley actually met requirements for Priority Status removal. The Courier's article did not mention the status of the SBDM.

Table 2 shows:

- A total of 31 out of the 47 schools, or 66 percent, had their SBDM authority removed at some time during the PLAs/Priority process.
- Of those 31 schools - as of the KDE's April 2017 open records response with the update regarding Valley High School - Table 2 shows only two schools, Caverna and East Carter high schools, ever got their SBDM authority back.
- Western Middle School (Jefferson Co), actually lost its SBDM authority under an earlier program in November 2008 and has been unable to regain its self-governing authority for nearly a decade.
- Like Western Middle School, most other schools in Table 2 lost their SBDM authority many years ago (most in 2010 and 2011). Over half a decade later, the KDE provides no indication that many will get their SBDM authority back anytime soon.

- In its Open Records response, the Kentucky Department of Education indicated that nine schools *might* get their SBDM authority returned in October 2017, depending upon their performance during the 2016-17 school term. It's currently unknown if any of these schools had their SBDM authority restored. A review of Kentucky Department of Education news releases and advisories for October through December 2017 did not locate any announcement of any school receiving its SBDM authority back.¹³
 - These nine schools plus Valley High School point to an interesting problem. Nine of these schools exited Priority status in October 2015. However, as of September 2017 they still did not have their SBDM authority restored. Based on currently available information, confirmed by telephone with Valley High School staff, this high school also exited Priority status but still has not had its SBDM authority restored, either. This highlights an apparent lack of harmonization and coordination between the Priority Schools program and the SBDM restoration policies, something that needs further investigation. Should a school be allowed to exit Priority Status before it demonstrates its ability to successfully self-govern?
 - Of course, even if all nine schools do get their authority back, only 35 percent of the 31 schools that lost their authority will have ever regained it.
- Among the 31 schools in Table 2, a total of 20 schools that lost their SBDM authority have not gotten it back and apparently are not expected to get it back anytime soon, if ever. Three schools ultimately closed and obviously will never have their SBDM authority returned.

Implications for SBDM Functioning

Table 2 points to important examples of chronic problems with mature SBDM programs in unquestionably very low performing schools. Thanks to the existence of the management reviews for each school, specific deficiencies in the operation of those mature SBDMs can be explored.

Over time, management audits conducted in the PLAs/Priority schools had several different formats and official titles (Note: A web page at the KDE site permits access to these “Leadership Assessments/Diagnostic Reviews”¹⁴).

- Early management audits were titled “School Leadership Assessment Report.”
- By 2013 some reports were titled “Diagnostic Review Report” and were conducted by AdvancED.
- The most recent management audits are titled “Report of the Diagnostic Review Team.”

Management audits were reviewed for 10 of the schools listed in Table 2. Seven were low-performing schools in Jefferson County. Three schools from other districts were

added to provide some insight into what's occurring in other areas of the state. A summary of the findings is shown in Table 3.

Note: Attachment A to this report contains some sample comments from the management audits for each school listed in Table 3.

TABLE 3

SBDM Problem Areas from Management Audits Conducted in 10 Selected Kentucky Persistently Low-Achieving/Priority Schools (A "1" indicates this is a problem area for the school)											
School	District	SBDM Problem Areas									
		Lacks Focus on Students (Sometimes on Adults)	Doesn't Use Data to Inform Plans and Decisions	Uses Issues of Race/Poverty as Excuse/Ignored	Fails to Adopt Needed Policies	Fails to Implement Adopted Policies	Fails to Coordinate with Other Schools/District	Fails to Include All Stakeholders	Poor Use of Resources	Poor Focus on Goals	Curriculum Neglect
Seneca High School	Jefferson County	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
Doss High School	Jefferson County	1				1	1	1	1		1
Maupin Elementary	Jefferson County		1		1	1		1	1	1	1
Knight Middle School	Jefferson County		1		1	1		1	1	1	1
Fairdale High School	Jefferson County	1	1		1	1	1	1	1		1
Iroquois High School	Jefferson County	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
The Academy @Shawnee	Jefferson County	1	1		1	1	1		1	1	1
Caverna High School	Caverna Independent	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Greenup County High School	Greenup County	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Lawrence County High School	Lawrence County	1			1	1			1	1	1
Total Number of Incidences		8	8	2	9	10	7	8	10	8	9

Obviously, the management audits discovered several frequently occurring problems that show the SBDM process - which had been in use for many years prior to the audits in each school listed in Table 3 - wasn't performing well in these PLAs/Priority Schools. In fact, the recommendation for the initial audits conducted in all but one of the Table 3 schools after they went into Persistently Low-Achieving/Priority Status was for the SBDM authority to be removed. That lone exception, Caverna High School, is a special case.

- Caverna High School's initial audit following identification as a Persistently Low-Achieving School in the spring of 2010 found the SBDM was functional. However, in April 2012 that finding was reversed by a follow-on School Leadership Assessment Summary Report dated 4/8/2012 - 4/13/2012.¹⁵ Caverna lost its SBDM authority in the same month.

In four of the 10 cases shown in Table 3, SBDM was so dysfunctional that the management audit specifically recommended that the school council be completely disbanded rather than remain assembled in even an advisory capacity. That demonstrated a major lack of confidence in those school council members on the part of the experts conducting those management audits.

One school in Table 3, Maupin Elementary School, is particularly problematic.

- Maupin is a member of the most recent cohort of schools to have their SBDM authority removed.
- Prior to becoming a Priority School and losing its school council authority, Maupin was one of the first two “Schools of Innovation” under the Jefferson County School District’s “District of Innovation” program. The additional assistance Maupin should have been getting because of that designation didn’t prevent the obvious problems found in the management audit.
- It’s clear in the management audit that Maupin’s SBDM and the principal were unable to maintain control and keep the staff focused on curriculum being implemented. The SBDM team also had difficulties with many other important areas of responsibility.
- The management audit recommended that the SBDM should lose its authority, but the principal was not recommended for replacement, possibly under a general policy regarding PLAs/Priority Schools that principals should serve at least three years in a station before it’s fair to remove them.
- A question begging an answer is whether Maupin’s SBDM acted in ways that actually hampered the proper implementation of the reform model chosen for Maupin. At the very least, the chaos in curriculum in different classrooms mentioned in the management audit shows the SBDM failed in this major area of responsibility.

The 10 initial audits referenced in Table 3 were conducted right after each school was identified as a PLAs/Priority School. Thus, the findings fairly represent how each SBDM was operating after about a decade and a half or more of program existence and well before any Priority program assistance could have had impact.

It seems fair to conclude that these long-standing school councils were unlikely to make any significant improvement if left on their own.

- A key point is that these long-established SBDMs were not getting the education mission accomplished for students. Absent the implementation of the PLAs/Priority program, there’s no reason to believe this long-established situation in each school was likely to have changed absent external action.

Valley High School, another problematic case

As mentioned earlier, Valley High School reportedly exited from Priority status in late March 2017. However, this school's exit raises interesting concerns about Priority status exit policies versus SBDM restoration procedures.

One current, regulatory requirement to exit Priority status is posting three years of Adjusted Cohort High School Graduation Rates (ACGR) above 80 percent.¹⁶ The Courier-Journal article announcing the removal of Valley from Priority status indicates the school didn't meet this current criterion for graduation rates. Instead, the KDE apparently applied an older, 70-percent requirement that was based on a very different graduation rate formula.¹⁷ That older, 70-percent criterion was based on the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR) calculation being used in 2010. But, AFGR rates are no longer reported and the AFGR is quite different from the current ACGR. This makes cross-application of new data against the old standards highly problematic and certainly not in compliance with current regulations.

Another issue impacting Priority status is academic performance. As of March 2017, a school could be released from Priority status if its overall Unbridled Learning accountability score ranked above the bottom five percent for just one year. However, when Valley High entered Persistently Low-Achieving Status in the spring of 2010, the academic criterion involved placing in the bottom five percent on state tests among of all schools for the combined average of math and reading proficiency rates. The tests used at that time were the Kentucky Core Content Tests, also no longer in use.

To explore the Priority exit situation for Valley High, the school's 2016 combined average proficiency rates for tests currently used for math and reading accountability on both the state's current KPREP End-of-Course tests and the ACT college entrance tests were ranked against other schools. Compared to all other standard (Class A1) high schools in Kentucky with scores, Valley ranked in the bottom five percent for combined math and reading performance on both the KPREP tests and the ACT, as Tables 4¹⁸ and 5¹⁹ show.

TABLE 4

Ranking for Percentage of All Students Reaching KPREP Proficiency or More for Math and Reading Combined in 2015-16, Lowest 5% of High Schools					
District Name	School Name	Algebra II PERCENT PROFICIENT DISTINGUISHED	English II PERCENT PROFICIENT DISTINGUISHED	Average English/Algebra Percent Proficient Distinguished	Rank for Average Proficiency Rate
Knox County	Lynn Camp Schools	21.3	38.6	30.0	217
Jefferson County	Valley High School	27.1	32.7	29.9	218
Covington Independent	Holmes High School	30.4	29.2	29.8	219
Paris Independent	Paris High School	10.6	46.2	28.4	220
Robertson County	Robertson County School	30.6	25.9	28.3	221
Jefferson County	Southern High School	23.3	29.6	26.5	222
Elliott County	Elliott County High School	11.4	39.8	25.6	223
Jefferson County	Western High School	21.1	29.8	25.5	224
Jefferson County	The Academy @ Shawnee	17.7	28.5	23.1	225
Jefferson County	Iroquois High	24.2	13.0	18.6	226
Caverna Independent	Caverna High School	4.5	28.1	16.3	227

TABLE 5

Ranking for Combined Percentage of Students Reaching ACT Readiness Benchmark Scores for Math and Reading in 2015-16, All Students in School, Bottom 5% of Schools					
District Name	School Name	MATHEMATICS Benchmark Percent	READING Benchmark Percent	Average ACT Benchmark Percent, Math and Reading Combined	Rank for Average
Knox County	Lynn Camp Schools	14.3	32.1	23.2	218
Owsley County	Owsley County High School	20.8	24.5	22.7	219
Jefferson County	Seneca High	14.5	27.2	20.9	220
Jefferson County	Southern High School	16.5	23.8	20.2	221
Robertson County	Robertson County School	16.7	20.8	18.8	222
Jefferson County	The Academy @ Shawnee	17.7	19.5	18.6	223
Jefferson County	Valley High School	13.9	20.9	17.4	224
Jefferson County	Iroquois High	14.4	17.2	15.8	225
Jefferson County	Western High School	11.3	18.5	14.9	226
Jefferson County	Doss High	11.7	15.9	13.8	227
Silver Grove Independent	Silver Grove School	8.3	0	4.2	228

Clearly, if the KDE wants to retroactively apply old criteria to release Valley from Priority status, the school doesn't appear to meet the academic requirement for exit.

However, because both available tests and graduation rate statistics are now quite different from those used in the past, any attempt to employ retroactive criteria is highly problematic. The best approach would be to use the exit criteria harmonized with that

current available data. Under those current rules, Valley High School didn't meet muster for the graduation rate, either.

Furthermore, as Tables 4 and 5 show, as of 2016 testing – the latest data available when the school was exited from Priority status – Valley High's math and reading performance remained very problematic.

Still more disconcerting, the Bluegrass Institute examined Valley's combined math and reading ranking in the recently released 2017 KPREP report. The school still ranks in the bottom five percent among Kentucky's high schools, as Table 6 shows.²⁰

TABLE 6

Ranking for Percentage of All Students Reaching KPREP Proficiency or More for Math and Reading Combined in 2016-17, Lowest 5% of High Schools					
District Name	School Name	Algebra II Percent Proficient Plus Distinguished	English II Percent Proficient Plus Distinguished	Average Score for Algebra II and English II Proficiency (Sort Column)	Rank for Average
Trigg County	Trigg County High School	20.1	33.6	26.9	217
Jefferson County	Valley High	25.4	23.9	24.7	218
Fulton Independent	Fulton Independent School	15.6	33.3	24.5	219
Jefferson County	Marion C. Moore School	19.7	27.0	23.4	220
Caverna Independent	Caverna High School	7.5	38.3	22.9	221
Jefferson County	Southern High	15.8	28.3	22.1	222
Jefferson County	The Academy @ Shawnee	11.9	28.4	20.2	223
Jefferson County	Doss High	10.9	28.2	19.6	224
Jefferson County	Western High	8.1	29.9	19.0	225
Perry County	Buckhorn School	5.6	29.3	17.5	226
Jefferson County	Iroquois High	12.1	13.6	12.9	227

Even worse, a comparison of the scores for Valley in Table 6 to those in Table 4 shows that this high school's performance fell on both Algebra II and English II between 2015-16 and 2016-17. Thus, Valley was let out of Priority status and promptly saw a further performance decline in these crucial academic areas.

Furthermore, and most pertinent to this paper's focus, it must be recalled that Valley High School has not – so far – demonstrated it can function effectively under its own school council. It seems like the policies for exiting Priority status and regaining SBDM authority need a careful review.

Certainly, exiting Valley High from Priority status doesn't appear to be in the best interests of this high school's students.

SBDM Problems Not Restricted to Low-Performing Schools

The Kentucky Office of Education Accountability (OEA) recently released three reports concerning SBDM-related issues in the highly regarded Boone County Public School System. One OEA “SBDM Final Report,” was addressed to Boone County Schools superintendent Randolph Poe, Ed.D.²¹ while two others were addressed to James Brewer, principal at the Conner Middle School,²² and Stephanie Hagerty, principal at Camp Ernst Middle School.²³

These reports show that many issues related to SBDM operations went awry in the Boone County system.

- The principals entered into contracts OEA says only the local school board could legally negotiate.

The OEA’s comments highlight the fact that serious confusion about contracting in an SBDM environment continues to exist today even in this highly regarded school system and elsewhere.

The principals were clearly confused about whether they actually were entering into contracts, something a person properly trained to execute contracts would understand. OEA strongly affirms in its reports that the signed agreements were indeed contracts.

- At least one of the school reports indicates the principal failed to obtain a copy of the participation contract after signing it, a major mistake that trained contract writers would be highly unlikely to make.

To be sure, Kentucky’s current contracting laws seem at odds with the idea that the SBDMs control curriculum. This creates a very unsatisfactory situation where the SBDM might indeed control the curriculum selection while under state law, the local school board still must negotiate contracts to support that curriculum. This obviously can create serious conflicts of interest if local board members strongly disagree with a school’s curriculum choice. Are local board members forced to contract for materials they honestly don’t believe are in the best interests of both students and the citizens who voted these board members into office to protect those students and tax dollars?

- At least one of the schools adopted a digitally-based curriculum without any approval from its SBDM. Clearly, members of the SBDM had to be aware of this action but did not challenge it.

There was confusion about whether the chosen Summit Learning system was indeed a curriculum, but the OEA points out that even Summit Learning’s own website describes the program as such. Regardless, even if the program was just

considered supporting material, OEA points to language in Kentucky's law that clearly requires SBDM action to select that sort of material, as well.

- Because the curriculum was adopted without SBDM involvement, there was no prior review of that curriculum for alignment to the Kentucky Academic Standards.

In fact, testimony provided to the OEA from numerous individuals indicate the chosen digital curriculum adopted by the schools was not aligned with the Kentucky Academic Standards in many areas, unsurprising since Summit was developed for use in California's school system. It wasn't until well into the first school year of use of this curriculum before Boone County finally assembled its teachers to review it in detail and make adjustments needed to align the curriculum to Kentucky's requirements.

- The OEA's reports further indicate there might be some student data privacy issues regarding the participation agreements the schools signed with Summit Learning. OEA's reports indicate this potential Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) violation issue is being referred to the Family Policy Compliance Office at the Department of Education.

To briefly summarize, the recent situation in Boone County, which, again, is a highly regarded school system in Kentucky, shows that more than 27 years after the passage of KERA with its SBDM requirements, there remains serious confusion about how this policy actually works and impacts our school leaders. Clearly, when school leaders of the caliber involved are still making serious mistakes in this area, SBDM laws need clarification at the very least.

Are Kentucky's school councils really generating parent participation in schools?

A major goal of KERA was getting parents more involved in their children's schools. But do parents really care that much about school councils? One way to gain insight into that question is to investigate how many parents are at least interested enough to vote for the parent members of their school's council.

Data for each regular school's student enrollment (called "Membership" in Kentucky reports) and the number of parents voting in that school's council elections in the 2016-17 school year are available in the Kentucky School Report Cards website. This information is in the LEARNING_ENVIRONMENT_STUDENTS-TEACHERS Excel spreadsheet for 2016-17 school year found in the "Data Sets" section of the website.²⁴ Full details about this voting analysis, including the spreadsheet, can be accessed in a Bluegrass Policy Blog, "Do parents really care about Kentucky's school councils?"²⁵

To summarize, results of the analysis of parent voting in SBDM council elections point to a dramatic lack of parental interest in school councils throughout Kentucky.

A total of 1,124 schools had data listed in the school report card for both school student membership and number of parents who voted for the SBDM parent representatives in that school. If most parents are participating enthusiastically, those numbers should agree well. However, reasonable agreement is a rare occurrence.

For example, the department's data show Laurel County's Hazel Green Elementary School's student membership in 2016-17 was 314 and the number of parents voting in the SBDM election was 280. That works out to a voter to student membership ratio of 89.2 percent, which is quite good.

But, there weren't many cases like Hazel Green. Only 15 schools among the 1,124 schools had an SBDM voter to student membership ratio of at least 50 percent.

At the other end of the parental-interest spectrum, 818 schools – 72.8 percent of all the schools – had only single-digit ratios of parents voting in the SBDM election compared to the total student enrollment. The ratio of voting parents to school membership in 101 schools was less than one percent.

This provides disturbing evidence that in the typical Kentucky school, the vast majority of parents probably don't get involved with SBDMs much, if at all. The fact that almost three out of four Kentucky public schools have only single-digit ratios of parent SBDM voting numbers compared to student enrollment after more than a quarter-century indicates this school-management model falls woefully short of its stated goal of increasing and retaining parental interest in engaging in the governance of their children's schools.

We acknowledge the limitations of this simple analysis.

For one, student enrollment is not equal to the total number of parents in the school. On the one hand, many students still come from two-parent families (both parents can vote for the SBDM representatives in this case). In some cases, a family may have more than one child registered in a school. Thus, it would be unreasonable to expect exact agreement in the SBDM voter and student membership numbers.

There are also concerns about the general accuracy of the Kentucky School Report Cards data. Much of the information is self-reported by the schools. While the student membership data is likely fairly accurate, the parent-vote data isn't being audited and elections are conducted by the largest parent organization in the school, not the school itself. So, there could be notable errors in voting counts reported for some schools.

Still, the large number of schools across the state with very low ratios of voting parents to student membership looks highly problematic. When only about one in 10 students or even less is likely represented in the vast majority of SBDM parent member elections,

parent interest in SBDM activities in the vast majority of Kentucky's schools is obviously problematic.

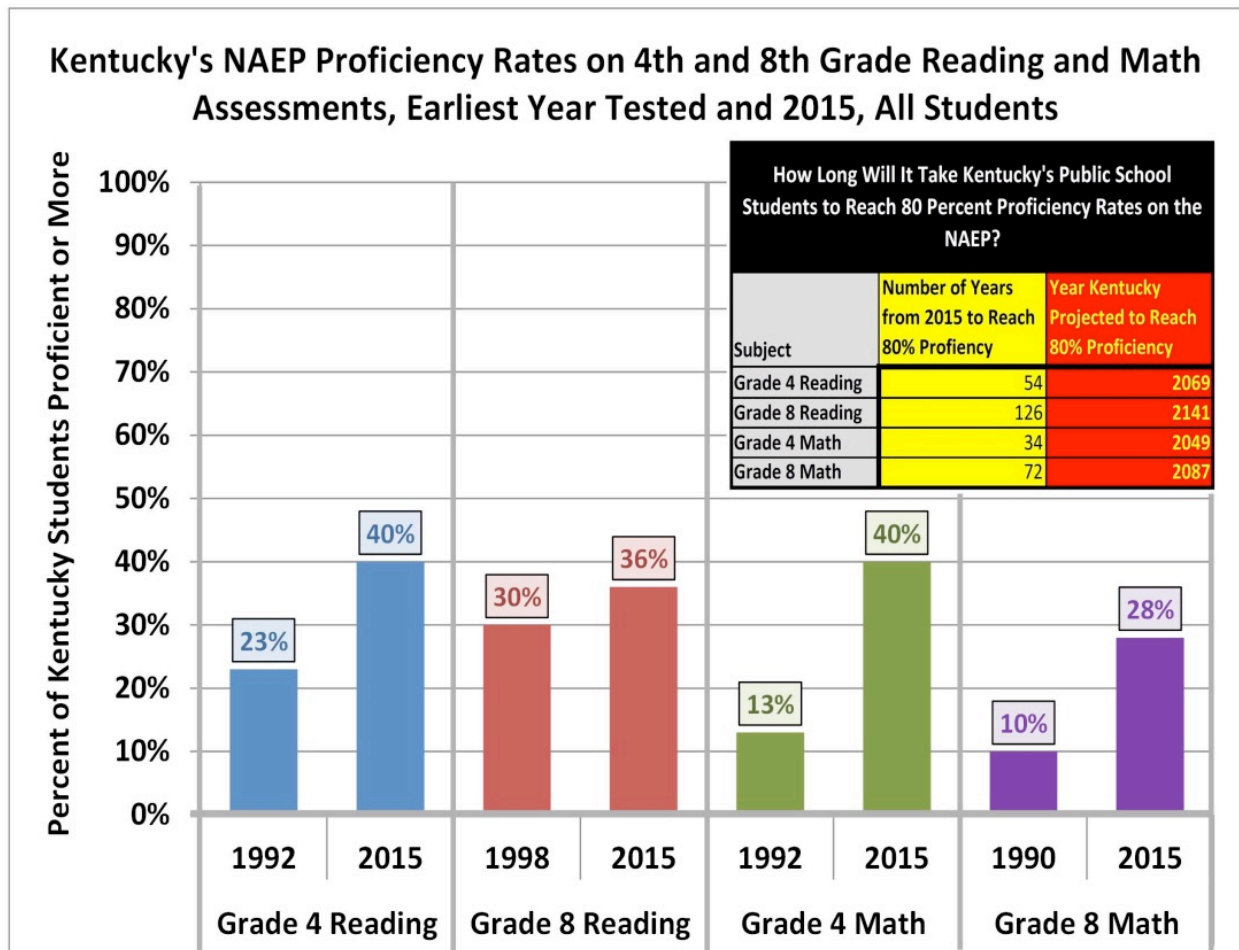
Kentucky's educational performance in the SBDM era

Individuals defending school councils cite the education system's progress since passage of KERA as evidence SBDM is working.²⁶ However, there's highly disturbing evidence from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) that the actual rate of progress in key subjects has been far too slow overall and is unacceptable for Kentucky's leading racial minority group. Since this performance issue has been made part of the SBDM discussion, let's explore the evidence.

The Bluegrass Institute used the NAEP Data Explorer Web tool²⁷ to examine the progress Kentucky has made over time in both fourth- and eighth-grade math and reading between the earliest and most recent administrations of those NAEP state assessments. The Institute used that data to determine Kentucky's demonstrated rate of progress for those grades and subjects over time and then used the demonstrated progress rate to project how many additional years are required before the state's students can be expected to reach a level of 80 percent proficiency (a reasonable target as the current proportion of students identified with learning disabilities is considerably less than 20 percent).

The bar graphs in *Figure 1* show Kentucky's overall average NAEP Grades 4 and 8 reading and math proficiency rates for the earliest available year of data and the most recently available results from 2015. There's been some progress, more in the fourth grade than in Grade 8. However, even as of the latest NAEP testing in 2015, far fewer than one in two fourth-graders scored at or above NAEP Proficient and the state's eighth-grade results were even worse.

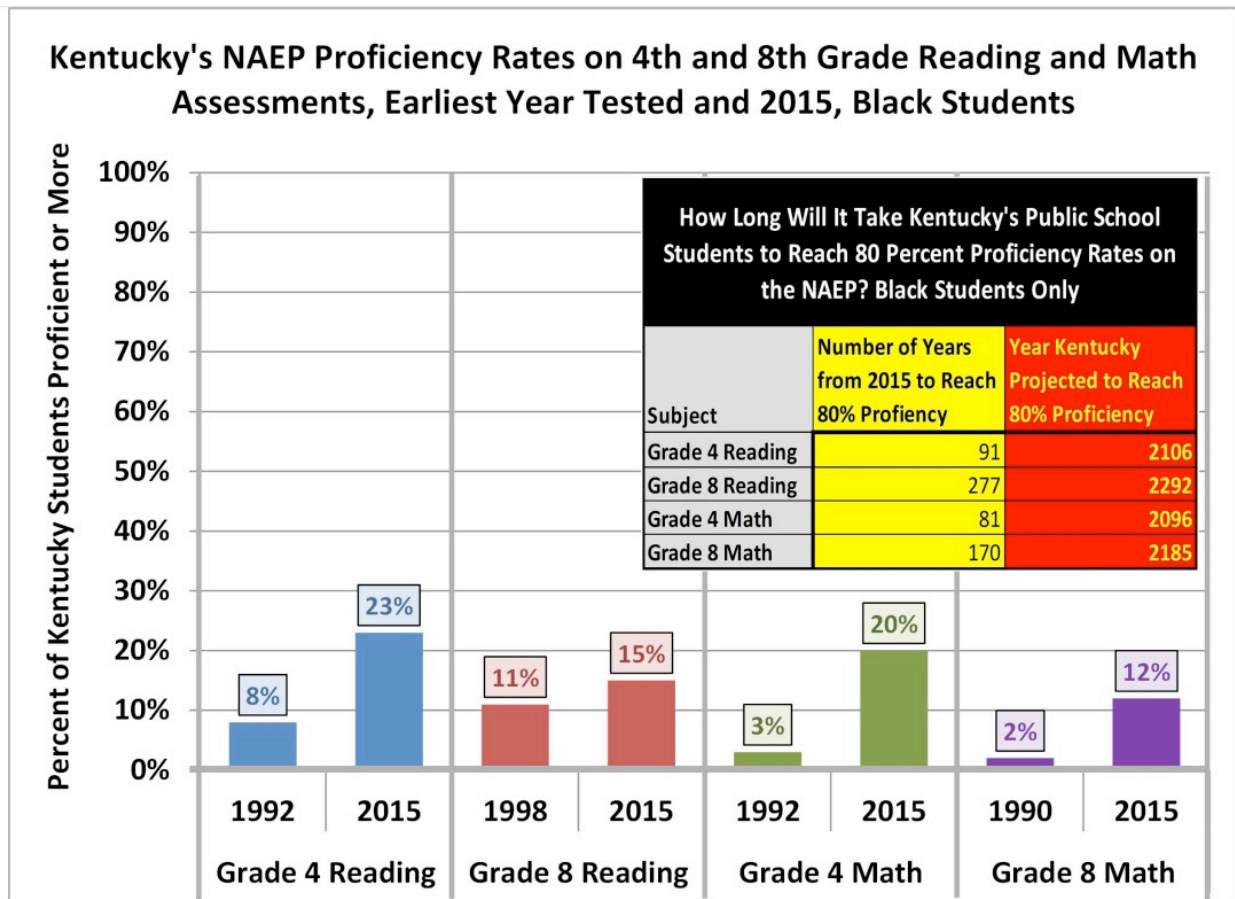
FIGURE 1



Based on the rates of progress calculated from the data in *Figure 1*, the Bluegrass Institute projected the number of years remaining before Kentuckians can anticipate that at least 80 percent of their state's students will score proficient or above on the NAEP. The estimates, shown in the inset table in *Figure 1*, range from at least 34 more years required in Grade 4 math to an astonishing 126 more years for Grade 8 reading.

The progress situation looks much worse when we examine the performance of Kentucky's black students. As *Figure 2* shows, even as of the latest, 2015 NAEP results, only very low percentages of Kentucky's black students score proficient or above on the NAEP in both fourth- and eighth-grade reading and mathematics.

FIGURE 2



NAEP tells us Kentucky at its current rate of improvement is the better part of a century away from seeing a desirable math proficiency rate for its black fourth-grade students, and that's the best part of the story. In the case of eighth-grade reading, the goal is centuries away! This is simply unacceptable.

The story told in *Figures 1 and 2* is certainly troubling, but the problem remains that – absent missing research – no one can say with confidence how much responsibility for this very slow rate of educational progress is due to Kentucky's use of SBDM policies instead of other factors. However, it's clear that something must change if even a majority of children are to get the education they need in any kind of realistic time frame.

Given the lack of research on SBDMs, decisions will have to be made in the absence of much desirable, but unavailable, information. Still, it's clear that decisions need to be made, and soon.

Other Issues

There are many SBDM-related issues that available management audits and the other available data cannot address:

- We don't know how SBDMs operate in nearly as low-performing schools not in the Priority Schools program. Recent research is lacking in this area. Do schools in the bottom six to 10 percent range in the state's accountability system have the same problems as those highlighted in Table 3? Since Lindle's 2001 paper, it seems no one knows nor has been paying any real attention. No management audits exist to provide answers.
- Parents are stakeholders in SBDM schools, and as Table 3 notes, stakeholder involvement is a consistently observed problem in the 10 Priority Schools examined. Not mentioned in the management audits is the fact that under KERA, parents only comprise a minority vote on the SBDM councils and really don't have control over what happens in their children's schools. Essentially, the schools are directly under the control of the principal and teachers on the SBDM.
- While SBDMs can function well if the school has a strong principal and solidly trained and educated staff, when those very important attributes are not present, the SBDM can act to shield a bad culture in a school from effective accountability. By law in Kentucky, neither the locally elected school board nor its superintendent has any control over key areas like staffing, curriculum and actual expenditure of dollars at the school level.
- Several key questions related to the responsibility placed on SBDMs need answers:
 - Do Kentucky's education schools provide sufficient instruction in SBDM operations to prepare teachers and principals to make key decisions regarding complex issues of staff selection, fund allocation and curriculum?
 - Is training for SBDM members adequate considering the complex decisions they must make regarding curriculum, expenditures and staffing?
 - Do schools have enough staffing to support the SBDM program with sufficient time and talent? Consider the time involved just to review available digital learning programs and make appropriate selections. Could such decisions be better managed at the district level? Are small schools at more of a disadvantage?
 - Can a high school that doesn't offer high school physics have the staff expertise required to develop an adequate science program?

Note: When contacted several years ago, college faculty at several Kentucky four-year universities reported that about 30 districts in Kentucky didn't offer physics. The Kentucky Department of Education had no information about this course offering situation at the time.

- Can a school without a certified art teacher develop good programs in this area?
- Can a school that lacks staffing for world languages provide this education to students?

- Do SBDMs create sound professional development programs? Are voices from all teachers in all departments heard during the development of professional development programs?
- Does it make sense to lock out locally elected school boards from the final funding process in schools? Does this protect taxpayers' interests appropriately?
- Are teachers largely just rubber-stamping policies the principal wants?

These questions and more need answers. At present, no research exists to provide the answers.

A CLOSING THOUGHT

A key question is: Do SBDMs lead in every case to good school cultures that create better learning for students? Regarding that point, the available data examined in this paper indicate the answer – at least in Kentucky's very lowest performing schools – is “no.”

WHAT COULD BE DONE?

It's time for Kentucky's policymakers to revisit the SBDM concept currently in use. If a program doesn't provide uniform opportunity for improved student learning, and indeed might stand in the way of preventing that from happening, clearly it's time to try another approach.

One current suggestion is to return authority currently held by the SBDM councils to the locally elected school board and their education professional, the local district superintendent. This could help reduce the workload demands on school staff while enabling a more robust program in areas such as selection of curriculum and wise expenditure of funding. This would also reassign appropriate authority to locally elected officials, authority currently denied to these citizens' representatives who are closest to the scene for each local school.

Certainly, the continuing problems highlighted in Boone County with interpretation of the laws and regulations regarding SBDM operations need a thoughtful review.

Another obvious need if SBDMs are to continue in Kentucky is for renewed research on how the model is functioning in schools. At the very least, a randomized group of schools should be examined using the management audit process to discover if the SBDM problems found in the PLAs/Priority Schools are more widespread. This information could be very beneficial even if SBDMs are retained only in an advisory capacity.

- ***Richard G. Innes is Staff Education Analyst for the Bluegrass Institute, Kentucky's free-market think tank. January 2018***

ATTACHMENT A

Example Comments from PLAs/Priority Schools Management Audits Related to General SBDM Problem Areas

SBDM problem areas examined in Table 3 in the main report are shown below in bulleted, boldface type. Each bullet item is followed by an example quoted from one of the management audits.

- **LACKS FOCUS ON STUDENTS (SOMETIMES ON ADULTS)**

“Student academic performance has not always been the focus of the school council. School council agendas and minutes reflect discussions often tabled or postponed.”

“Lawrence County, Lawrence County High School, School Leadership Assessment Report, 02/28/2010 - 03/05/2010,” Page 36. Online here:
<http://education.ky.gov/school/Documents/Lawrence%20County%20High%20School%20LA%20Report.pdf>

- **DOESN'T USE DATA TO INFORM PLANS AND DECISIONS**

“The principal and school council should establish a systematic process for collecting and using data to assist staff in making decisions regarding teaching and learning.” Page 4

Greenup County, Greenup County High School, School Leadership Assessment Report, 01/09/2011 - 01/14/2011, Page 4. Online here:
<http://education.ky.gov/school/Documents/Greenup%20County%20HS%20LA%20Report.pdf>

- **ISSUES OF RACE/POVERTY USED AS EXCUSE/IGNORED**

“The principal has not fostered a culture and climate that is conducive for instruction and closing the achievement gap of targeted populations.” Page 4

Jefferson County Public Schools, Iroquois High School Leadership Assessment Report, 01/23/2011 - 01/28/2011, Page 4. Online here:
<http://education.ky.gov/school/Documents/Iroquois%20High%20School%20LA%20Report.pdf>

“The principal and staff view demographics as the primary barrier to students learning.”

Jefferson County Public Schools, Seneca High School Leadership Assessment Report, 12/05/2010 - 12/10/2010, Page 3. Online here:

<http://education.ky.gov/school/Documents/Seneca%20HS%20LA%20Report.pdf>

- **FAILS TO ADOPT NEEDED POLICIES**

“The school council has not adopted a required technology use policy (KRS160.345.) to define the effective use of instructional technology strategies in teaching and learning.” Page 20

Jefferson County Public Schools, Iroquois High School Leadership Assessment Report, 01/23/2011 - 01/28/2011, Page 20. Online here:

<http://education.ky.gov/school/Documents/Iroquois%20High%20School%20LA%20Report.pdf>

- **FAILS TO IMPLEMENT ADOPTED POLICIES**

“The school council has adopted a Discipline, Classroom Management, School Safety policy that establishes rules and consequences for misbehavior. Implementation of this policy by both teachers and administrators is somewhat inconsistent.”

Jefferson County Public Schools, The Academy @ Shawnee School Leadership Assessment Report, 03/07/2010 - 03/12/2010, Page 38. Online here:

<http://education.ky.gov/school/Documents/The%20Academy%20@%20Shawnee%20LA%20Report.pdf>

- **FAILS TO COORDINATE WITH OTHER SCHOOLS AND/OR THE SCHOOL DISTRICT**

“The principal and the instructional leadership team do not have a formal process to facilitate conversations among and between feeder middle and high schools to ensure key critical curriculum transition points, gaps and overlaps are addressed.”

Jefferson County Public Schools, FAIRDALE HIGH SCHOOL MCA, School Leadership Assessment Report, 12/05/2010 - 12/10/2010, Page 10. Online here:

<http://education.ky.gov/school/Documents/Fairdale%20HS%20LA%20Report.pdf>

- **FAILS TO INCLUDE ALL STAKEHOLDERS**

“The principal and school council have not demonstrated leadership that provides guidance and engages stakeholders within the school to meet challenges of struggling students in reading and math that address goals of No Child Left Behind.” Page 2

Jefferson County Public Schools, Knight Middle School, School Leadership Assessment Report, 05/08/2011 - 05/13/2011, Page 2. Online here:
<http://education.ky.gov/school/Documents/Knight%20MS%20LA%20Report.pdf>

- **POOR USE OF RESOURCES**

“The school council has not adopted policies and the principal has not developed procedures to systematically evaluate the effective use of all allocated resources.”
Page 39

Jefferson County Public Schools, Seneca High School Leadership Assessment Report, 12/05/2010 - 12/10/2010, Page 39. Online here:
<http://education.ky.gov/school/Documents/Seneca%20HS%20LA%20Report.pdf>

- **POOR FOCUS ON GOALS**

“There is a divisiveness in culture and climate around best teaching practices in the school.”

Report of the Diagnostic Review Team for Maupin Elementary, January 22, 2017 - January 25, 2017, Page 33. Online here:
<https://education.ky.gov/school/prischedrecov/Documents/Maupin%20Elementary%20Diagnostic%20Review%20Report%20FINAL.PDF>

- **CURRICULUM NEGLECT**

“The principal does not ensure that regular discussions to identify curricular gaps and overlaps or key curriculum transition points within or between Doss High School Magnet Career Academy and the feeder middle schools occur.”

Jefferson County Public Schools, DOSS HIGH School, Leadership Assessment Report, 12/05/2010 - 12/10/2010, Page 10. Online here:
<http://education.ky.gov/school/Documents/Doss%20HS%20LA%20Report.pdf>

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Endnotes

- ¹ Walker, Reagan, "Lawmakers in Ky. Approve Landmark School-Reform Bill" (April 4, 1990). Education Week, Bethesda MD. Online here: <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/1990/04/04/09330031.h09.html?qs=Lawmakers+in+Ky.+Approve+Landmark+School-Reform+Bill>.
- ² The full Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) is available from this Western Kentucky University Library link: <http://libguides.wku.edu/c.php?g=271544&p=1812340>. Section 14 of KERA, which begins on Page 1219 of the WKU Library publication, primarily deals with school based decision making and is available from this link: <http://www.wku.edu/library/dlps/documents/keralaw01.pdf>.
- ³ KERA Section 14, Page 1220, available here: <http://www.wku.edu/library/dlps/documents/keralaw01.pdf>
- ⁴ KERA Section 14, Pages 1220 to 1221, available here: <http://www.wku.edu/library/dlps/documents/keralaw01.pdf>
- ⁵ Lindle, Jane Clark, "School Based Decision Making," (2001). Clemson University Tiger Prints, Page 3. Online here: http://tigerprints.clemson.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1055&context=eugene_pubs.
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- ¹¹ KRS 160.346. Online here: <http://www.lrc.ky.gov/Statutes/statute.aspx?id=40246>.
- ¹² Ross, Alison, "Valley High wins appeal, sheds 'priority' label," Louisville Courier-Journal, March 31, 2017. Online here: <http://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/education/2017/03/31/valley-high-wins-appeal-sheds-priority-label/98518972/>.
- ¹³ The Kentucky Department of Education's News Releases and Advisories for 2017 can be accessed online here: <https://education.ky.gov/comm/news/Pages/2017-News-Releases-and-Advisories.aspx>.
- ¹⁴ Find access to all the management audits online here: <http://education.ky.gov/school/prischedrecov/Pages/Leadership-Assessments.aspx>.
- ¹⁵ Kentucky Department of Education, "Caverna Independent, Caverna High School, School Leadership Assessment Report, 04/08/2012 - 04/13/2012," Page 69. Online here: <http://education.ky.gov/school/Documents/CavernaHighSchoolLeadershipAssessmentreport.pdf>.
- ¹⁶ See Section 7, Paragraph (c) in Kentucky Administrative Regulation 703 KAR 5:225. Online here: <http://www.lrc.ky.gov/kar/703/005/225.htm>.
- ¹⁷ Konz, Antoinette, "It's official: Valley High exits priority school status after seven years," WDRB.com, March 31, 2017. Online here: <http://www.wdrb.com/story/35041518/its-official-valley-high-exits-priority-school-status-after-seven-years>.
- ¹⁸ Table 4 was developed from math and reading proficiency rates posted in the 2015-2016 Kentucky School Report Card Excel spreadsheet for KPREP End-of-Course scores for all subjects by school level. The math and reading proficiency rates for each of the 227 Kentucky A1 type (standard) high schools that had data reported for Algebra II (the accountable high school subject used for math testing) and English II (the accountable high school subject also used for reading score reporting) were averaged together. The schools were rank ordered by that combined average proficiency rate. The bottom 11 schools, which represent five percent of the total number of high schools and include Valley High School, are listed in Table 4. The Excel spreadsheet is found in the "Data Sets" section of the Kentucky School Report Cards website. Once in the Data Sets area, select the proper year (2015-2016) and click on the "KPREP End-of-Course" link in the Assessments section. Online here: <https://applications.education.ky.gov/src/>
- ¹⁹ Table 5 was developed from another Excel spreadsheet from the Kentucky School Report Cards website that shows the percentage of students in each high school that met or exceeded the college readiness benchmark score for math and reading. In this case, 228 Kentucky A1 type (standard) high schools had ACT data. The schools were rank ordered by that combined average proficiency rate. The bottom 11 schools, which, again, represent five percent of the total number of high schools and include Valley High School, are listed in Table 4. The Excel spreadsheet is found in the "Data Sets" section of the Kentucky School Report Cards website. Once in the Data Sets area, select the proper year (2015-2016) and click on the "ACT" link under the Assessment section. Online here: <https://applications.education.ky.gov/src/>.
- ²⁰ Table 6 was assembled in a similar manner to Table 4, but using 2016-17 data from the Kentucky School Report Card's Data Sets. Online here: <https://applications.education.ky.gov/src/>.
- ²¹ Wickersham, David, "Memorandum to Dr. Randolph Poe, Superintendent, Boone County School District, SBDM Final Report," Kentucky Office of Education Accountability, Frankfort, KY, August 18, 2017. Online here: <http://www.bipps.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Boone-081817-Final-from-Open-Recs.pdf>.
- ²² Wickersham, David, "Memorandum to James Brewer, Principal, Conner Middle School, Boone County School District, SBDM Final Report," Kentucky Office of Education Accountability, Frankfort, KY, August 18, 2017. Online here: <http://www.bipps.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Boone-081817-Finalcems-from-Open-Recs.pdf>.
- ²³ Wickersham, David, "Memorandum to Stephanie Hagerty, Principal, Camp Ernst Middle School, Boone County School District, SBDM Final Report," Kentucky Office of Education Accountability, Frankfort, KY, August 18, 2017. Online here: <http://www.bipps.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Boone-081817-Finalcems-from-Open-Recs.pdf>.
- ²⁴ The data on membership and parent voting counts comes from the LEARNING_ENVIRONMENT, STUDENTS-TEACHERS Excel spreadsheet for the 2016-17 school year. Both the membership and SBDM Vote information is found on the "Student - Teacher Summary" tab. This Excel spreadsheet is found in the "Data Sets" section of the Kentucky School Report Cards website. Online here: <https://applications.education.ky.gov/src/>.
- ²⁵ Innes, Richard, "Do parents really care about Kentucky's school councils?" Bluegrass Policy Blog, November 7, 2017. Online at: <http://www.bipps.org/parents-really-care-kentuckys-school-councils/>.
- ²⁶ Harmon, Rhonda, "School councils are vital for educational improvement in Ky.," Kentucky Today, September 12, 2017. Online here: <http://kentuckytoday.com/stories/school-councils-are-vital-for-educational-improvement-in-ky.9042>.
- ²⁷ The Main NAEP Data Explorer is online here: <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/>.