


Reimaging Local Control, Local Democracy, and Local Engagement in Education: How Rural Education Policy in a Metro Centric State Alienated Its Residents

Casey Thomas Jakubowski*

* Department of Education Leadership,
University Maryland Eastern Shore,
Princess Anne, MD, United States.
E-mail: casey.t.jakubowski@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines two case studies as examples of how an Urbannormative State policy implementation for education reform in rural areas altered and de established trust in state government reforms. By specifically examining two rural community's efforts to ensure local control in the face of state policy implementation practices, the paper finds that rural areas have over 70 years of concrete evidence that their values are often subjugated to state reform plans which stress efficiency and effectiveness. Using archival evidence, these case studies present under studied, and little-known events which have shaped relationships between the State and its residents. The paper finishes with a re-evaluation of implementation theory and posits an updated theory that includes local stakeholders influences beyond the previous model of focus on government officials.

KEYWORDS

Rural schools; education reform; school reform; local democracy; history; policy implementation.

INTRODUCTION

Rural Americans are unique, and individuals, despite popular media and many research portrayals of a monolithic bloc. As Elizabeth Catte (2018) described in her work on popular and scholarly representations of rural America, there is an inaccurate, and frankly troupe like portraiture of a large, and often forgotten segment of the United States (Corbett, 2014; Sherman, 2021; Thier et al, 2021). Within the United States, rural regions, once viewed as the cradles of American culture, democracy, and ethos, (Theobald, 2018) have been relegated to second tier status as reformers, often based in Neoliberal beliefs (Cervone, 2017) and Urbannormative world views (Thomas & Fulkerson, 2018), create and implement policies which reduce the agency and ability of rural Americans to feel “heard” (Catte, 2018; Cramer, 2016; Jakubowski, 2019; Wurthnow, 2018).

In one policy area, rural education reorganization, championed as “reform” by politicians and metro centric and urban normative reformers have focused on the two “E”s of education: efficiency and effectiveness. To achieve efficiency and effectiveness, state government offices and leaders have promoted the implementation of a highly controversial policy of rural school consolidation. It is the state level administrator’s beliefs that the only way to “improve” the educational outcome for rural residents is consolidation (Jakubowski, 2019). Cervone (2017) found the emphasis on consolidation, with deep roots in United State history (Biddle & Azano, 2016) emerged from a belief by these “reformers” that rural schools were “broken” and did not provide effective or efficient educational opportunities for students who were part of the global world.

History

The history of rural educational reforms via consolidation emerged out of the cults of efficiency from the late 1800s and into the early 1900s. Pro urban reformers such as Cubberly, Andrew Sloan Draper, and others began a crusade to promote educational systems designed to ready these new urban residents into American education (Parkerson & Parkerson, 2015). Simultaneously, as industrialization concentrated the means of production in cities and the farming crisis post-Civil War slammed rural Americans in the Northeast, European immigrant waves were merging with rural migrants from the interior of the United States. State officials, in collaboration with large business interests in the cities, searched for ways to “improve” the human capital from US hinterlands through reform (Parkerson & Parkerson, 2015). Essentially, as Steffes (2011) pointed out, state governments tied changes in rural areas to increased aid.

The promise of additional funds would promote increase time in the school, better facilities and materials, and better training for teachers. State level governments, such as New York, used aid to local schools, to mandate change which led to resistance, especially in consolidate their one room schoolhouses, into centralized districts. (Folts, 1996; Jakubowski, in press). As Osterud (2012) points out in a timeless study of rural New York, before centralized schools, farm residents identified more with their local villages. Once centralized schools

emerged, especially post World War II, and suburbanization developed bedroom communities, the school district became the dominate loci of identity.

Local trustees wanted inexpensive local education and were often in conflict with the State. Lower taxes, and in some cases, neglected buildings led to conflict between trustees and the State Education Department (Heffernan, 2021). The conflicts, as Loveland (1993), and others discussed, led to the State empaneling a major Commission in 1942.

The Rapp-Coudert Commission in 1942 sought reform rural education with the assumption that each school district must have a grade 1-12 program. An additional point was a minimum number of pupils and implement a minimum expenditure of 1500 dollars at the elementary level and 1800 at the secondary level. The Commission then proceeded to describe a series of newly enacted, proposed boundaries across the State. Voters in the proposed districts would start the process with a petition the State Education Department for enactment. The localities would vote, and if enough voters supported the decision, the newly centralized school district would begin operations July 1 of that year. Overwhelmingly, the process was extraordinarily successful, with almost all Common School Districts, or rural one room schools centralized. Commissioner Francis Trow Spaulding, of Post-World War II, believed that the atomic age required better schooling, more science, and improved rural education, as the rural areas served as recruitment points for college students, workers, and urban teachers (Spaulding, 1967). Rural areas had to improve in this metrocentric worldview.

In the 20th century, government reform commissions such as The Suozzi, Lundine, and New York advised capping local school taxing, and spending levels. One route was merging smaller districts across the State. A commonly called the 2% tax cap became law as a reform effort. Central state government promoted surrendering local agency and implement metro centered policy and practice for greater efficiency and effectiveness.

Current Governance

The 2016 presidential election and Covid 19 pandemic highlighted major divides between rural and urban areas in the State. What was taught in schools became a major issue, as Critical Race Theory emerged as an area of conflict. Infrastructure in many of the rural areas lacked broadband access for the internet. Most students were reliant on deliveries for their work, including photocopied papers. Some teachers went so far as to drive around to student's homes and teach outside of windows mini lessons. The infrastructure went further, and most of the buildings had inadequate heating and ventilation systems for the air born illness nature of COVID 19. The buildings, many of which were constructed during the 1930s, and renovated in the 70s had old heating and ventilation systems without proper filtration. The infrastructure needs went further, as schools needed to deliver food to children who are dependent on breakfast and lunch. Rural poverty in some New York districts is close to 50%, and families are stretched very precariously without the school food program (Schmit & Severson, 2021). Many

of these concerns echo what past reform attempts have cited as the weaknesses of rural schools (Wiles, 1994).

Protests and inquisitions into Critical Race Theory in schooling led to significant debate concerning what, exactly should be taught to students In New York State, school board of education candidates, and groups protesting CRT made appearances at local Board meetings and at the ballot. New York's upstate and western New York region is conservative, and except for the large urban areas, and college communities, is often a sea of red. As one teacher in a rural school district in the state reported to me, "we never talk about the real issues in history, we comply with the accepted narrative, we are afraid..." (Personal Conversation with author).

Staffing issues create a record number of vacancies in New York's schools. As one assistant superintendent pointed out "now is a great time to enter the profession! Many schools need someone who is breathing in the classrooms...We have serious substitute shortages..." (Presentation to college course). Teachers are leaving in significant numbers, and industries who previously shied away from hiring candidates with degrees and experience in education now see the transferable skills. New York's policies have, for the past forty years, coupled with the chaos created by Covid-19, have created a cascade of problems in the rural areas of the state.

RESEARCH STUDY

This paper examines how New York's education policy since the 1930s has alienated its rural residents and created a series of subtle rebellions in rural areas through citizens rejection of state supported reform policies. Through a brief case study (Stake, 1995) this paper will demonstrate that a specific area of rural New York fundamentally opposes state education policy and exercises their agency at the local level since their views are often ignored in Albany and New York City.

Stafford 2 (Morganville)

In between Rochester and Buffalo New York, is Morganville, located in the town of Stafford New York, Genesee County. A rural farming community with a pottery industry tradition, the two-room schoolhouse was established in the mid-1800s and was the center of the community. The area, with water powered pottery industry, and rich farming land, created an area of yeomen farmers with industrial influences that is unique for a rural area.

With the release of the Master Plan of 1947, Morganville was slated to join a newly centralized South Byron Central School District. Yet the residents did not want to lose their independence and preferred to keep their school. The legislature placed Morganville into a proposed centralized district focused on South Byron. The proposed district would allow the students grades 7-12 to attend a secondary program and allow the district to explore a new Kindergarten program. As Balducci (2003) reported, in rural areas a significant opposition to centralization emerged. Usually, the local objectives to reorganization centered around the loss of local control of governance and the rising tax rates which many communities faced after

centralization. The community members within the area were perfectly satisfied with the school as it existed and could not support a deficit narrative (Spaulding, 1967).

Since at least 1930, the District of Stafford #2 had been educating students in grades 1-6, and then tuitioning the grades 7-8 and high school aged pupils to the South Byron High School (Uphill to Wilson, 23 April 1951. MS NYS Archives BO472-83 Box 36, Folder 9). As early as 1946, the State Education Department was receiving information that the area surrounding South Byron, which includes the Morganville community, were “in strong opposition to centralization (Harris memo to Griffin. 18 October 1946. MS NYS Archives BO472-83 Box 36, Folder 10) One surviving petition that was circulated among the residents of the Common Schools in the area to formally request a centralization study included several “no” signatures with comments such as “leave as is. Costs too much.” (MS NYS Archives BO472-83 Box 36, Folder 11).

By June of 1949, the District Superintendent of Genesee County, J.L.M. Uphill, was noticing Morganville’s overwhelming opposition (24 June 1949. Letter from Uphill to Griffin. MS NYS Archives BO472-83 Box 36, Folder 10). Parshall (2019) found many villagers in New York State will not disestablish their village because of the psychology of empty buildings within their communities. As Renyolds, (1999); and Tieken (2014) found, a rural school is a symbol of hope, because if the school is there, then maybe the community can return to previous “glory days.” Once the school is gone, the community begins to fade away, as Thomas (2012) found in Hartwick NY when the school consolidated in the 1970s with neighboring Oneonta.

In a letter addressed to the State Education Department in December of 1950, the committee leadership reported that no representatives from Stafford #2 were on the Centralization Committee. The people of Stafford #2 were boycotting the process to seek redress to their grievance, and refused a forced centralization (7 July, 1937. Letter from Snyder to Wigton. MS NYS Archives BO472-83 Box 36, Folder 34). The local resistance to urban normative reforms, and the agency by the local community demonstrated a clear dissonance in thinking between state reformers and local implementors.

As Scribner (2018) has argued, local became the key rallying cry to oppose centralization. Research into education policy clearly identifies local control, local governance as a clear, and critical bright line for ensuring that any successive agreement on the new school will enshrine the rights of the smaller district to fair representation on a new Board of Education.

Debate in Morganville and Albany

In March of 1951, an alternative solution emerged. In a note included within the archival file, dated 3/2/51, a State Education department official recorded “Stafford 2 would move to Leroy if no centralization occurred.” Later that March, the State Education Department committee on rural school centralizations thought about dividing the troublesome proposed district between four other centralized schools. In April 1951, District Superintendent Uphill wrote a memo to Commissioner of Education Lewis Wilson describing a poll of the voter’s preferences in

Morganville concerning centralization. In his report, Uphill found that of the 77 voters in the community, 38 wished to remain as they were. Their status at the time was as a 1-6 grade Common school that tuitioned their 7-12 graders to South Byron High School. He further reported that 27 of the 77 voters were in favor of the Byron-Bergen Consolidation. Only two of the 77 voters preferred Batavia or LeRoy as a potential Centralization partner. Two important factors for a successful school under the Master Plan were adequate money and pupils. Unfortunately, Morganville was too small according to the minimums established by the Master Plan for School Reorganization. With almost \$366,236 of assessed value in 1950, the district had fiscal means to tax itself to support a grades 1-6 program. The district was the “fourth richest of the seventeen.” Uphill proposed to leave Stafford #2 (Morganville) out of the Byron Bergen centralization process. (23 April 1951. Letter from Uphill to Wilson. MS NYS Archives BO472-83 Box 36, Folder 9).

On April 25, 1951, District Superintendent Uphill again wrote to SED leadership, specifically to Griffin that Stafford #2 should be left outside of the proposed centralization with Byron - Bergen and be allowed to continue contracting with districts for 7-12 education. This is the second time the local educational leadership recommended the district remain in status quo. Yet, despite the State Education Department’s internal committee recommending the Byron-Bergen merger stop, and District Superintendent Uphill’s support for Stafford #2 (Morganville) remaining independent, the proposal that the common school districts centralize into a Byron-Bergen school district continued (25 April 1951. Uphill to Griffin. MS NYS Archives BO472-83 Box 36, Folder 9).

In May 1951, a survey of residents in the potential Byron- Bergen Centralized school revealed divided voices among the different community's residents. Investigating the Stafford #2(Morganville) deeply to understand the opposition, the State Education Department official found that “...it is the only Common School running its own school...” (18 May 1951. Langworthy to Griffin. MS NYS Archives BO472-83 Box 36, Folder 9). This is a significant finding, as the concept of local agency was crucial to the people in the area and marked them apart from surrounding districts.

The survey also indicated the community was divided on the idea of centralization. One parent claimed the residents “are not well informed on the proposal and do not wish to be.” The parent goes on to claim that resistance to the centralization is due to “older residents with no children resist change...” Another member interviewed believed that Stafford #2 (Morganville) should be included in the centralization because “kids go to school there.” A different parent echoed the sentiment and indicated “...By natural affiliation, this district certainly belongs with Byron-Bergen. What these quotes indicate is a deep division in a community over school consolidation. (18 May 1951. Langworthy to Griffin. MS NYS Archives BO472-83 Box 36, Folder 9). Research into school consolidations shows communities are deeply divided over the process, and the rift can last for generations (Tieken, 2014).

Escalating the Situation

In June 1951, residents of Stafford #2 (Morganville) began to address their concerns directly to the Commissioner of Education. One such resident wrote to the Commissioner of Education and informed him “Mr. Uphill told me at one meeting that when a district didn’t care to centralize, they could be left out.” Included in the letter was a petition which included 59 names against centralization (7 June 1951. Letter from Wight to the Commission of Education. MS NYS Archives BO472-83 Box 36, Folder 9). One of the abilities of the citizens in the State is petitioning for redress of grievances. In the Department’s response to the resident, Francis Griffin, Bureau leader of the Rural Schools Office of State Education department acknowledges the letter, and the petition from the residents. Further, Griffin reassures the resident that “the school is open for grades 1-6 until the Board of Education votes to close the school.” Griffin then writes to the resident that:

Today, parents expect their children to attend High School and graduate. There is much more satisfaction...when parents are part of the district which provides the high school training...In this light, the high school pupils of your district have attended South Byron high school for a number of years and expecting to continue there, it seems only reasonable to make this long term affiliation permanent... It has been the policy of the Board of Regents to consider those districts which have been closely associated as logical districts for cooperation in considering the organization of a new central school. (12 June 1951. Letter from Griffin to Wight. MS NYS Archives BO472-83 Box 36, Folder 9)

The State Education Department officially endorsed, on the record, the idea that Steffes (2012) described as the shift from parental direction of a child’s education for family needs to the state’s direction of education for state needs. The students of Stafford #2 (Morganville) needed an education to benefit the State, and this education could only be achieved by graduating from high school. This fight continues into the present, and pitches local views against state views of what is best for children. The fights for standards and accountability have pitted education departments at the federal and state level against local boards of education and parents. Accountability via testing has resulted in a boycott of the state test counter movement among many parents in rural New York, suburban New York, and other states who do not want their children tested by the State for accountability purposes. This is again a demonstration of local and personal agency pitted against the state reform efforts.

In June 1951, following the conclusion of the centralization vote for Byron-Bergen Centralized School District, District Superintendent Uphill again reiterated to SED leader Griffin the situation in local Stafford #2 (Morganville) had resulted in the local people becoming “very unhappy” (emphasis in original letter. One of the trustees of Stanford #2 Blaine Wright, wrote to Griffin later that June to emphasize the unhappiness of the voters in his school district.

We of Stafford #2 find it hard to agree with your line of thinking about our connection with South Byron High School. At Byron Grange Hall, June 20th, we were outvoted and

expected to be. 76 voters from this district got there to vote. We tried persistently to get a man from our district on the new school board, but we realized that we had no rights. (MS NYS Archives BO472-83 Box 36, Folder 9)

Trustee Wright goes on further to reinforce the voter's anger at the idea the community now has "no rights or anything to say about it" now that Stafford #2 (Morganville) was incorporated into the newly created Byron-Bergen Centralized school district. With the concern the trustees formally expressed to the State Education Department coupled with District Superintendent Uphill's observation that "... To have a fringe district included in a central school district with this much opposition in it as this one will be a new experience for me" expresses the level of frustration sent to Uphill. The issue of local control and local rights, as evidenced in the appeals from the local school district continue to be a theme in consolidation conversations across the United States. (Scribner, 2016).

In July 1951, the letters from Uphill to Albany began to take on a tone of exasperation. "I have more callers from Stafford 2 than I care to see." (26 July 1951. Uphill to Griffin). State officials began receiving visitors in Albany from Stafford #2 (Morganville) pleading their case against inclusion in the Centralization. In a letter to the Byron Bergen CSD's Board of Education president, Francis Griffin, leader of the State's Rural School Bureau, asks the local Board to "...study the subject..." because ..." We do not expect the boundary of the central district, as laid out by the Commissioner of Education, shall be inflexible and not subject to change if some alteration appears to have merit and is desirable." (9 July 1951 Letter from Griffin to Wilcox. MS NYS Archives BO472-83 Box 36, Folder 9).

The second phase in resisting the centralization process began as residents of Stafford #2 begin to threaten legal action. Uphill states that "...I know that Byron Bergen needs the wealth and pupils more than Leroy, they do not need the notoriety from the State on litigation." (26 July 1951 Uphill to Griffin.) The citizens of Stafford #2 (Morganville) were exerting their agency by seeking a legal settlement to their grievances. The fact that Uphill makes mention of the threat of legal action by visitors from the school district indicates the depths that the community members were unhappy with the centralization process that absorbed their school. In a letter from H. Langworthy to Uphill, members of the State Education Department staff dismiss Uphill's concerns about Stafford #2(Morganville) opposition..."I also feel that the opponents are to some extent pulling your leg in keeping their dissatisfaction in this matter." (MS NYS Archives BO472-83 Box 36, Folder 9). The use of the phrase "pulling your leg" has connotations of a joke, or prank. This use of phrase and its connotation of arrogance about the local situation by a centralized bureaucrat concerning the opinions expressed by rural populations has been well documented in other studies (see Jakubowski, 2019 for a bibliography). While the local state education department official (Uphill) is growing increasingly concerned about the situation, the Albany based officials are reacting by describing the situation as a joke.

The joke, however, would be on Albany. In August of 1951, the citizens reached even higher into the State's bureaucracy, and enlisted the help of the media in implementing their third stage of agency. The local media became involved in the story. District Superintendent Uphill writes to Commissioner of Education Wright asking him to change the boundaries of Byron Bergen and to send Stafford #2 (Morganville) to Leroy Central School District. Additionally, the District Superintendent of Schools Uphill recommends that the State Education Department Commissioner should "send a representative to the area and study the situation." Furthermore, any discussion by the Byron-Bergen Board of Education would cause more flares of anger by the Stafford 2 community.

At the same point in time, fall was approaching, students needed to attend school. Uphill's recommendations to the Commissioner that "Byron-Bergen BOE hire a teacher for Morganville...[and]...Principal Legg interviews children's parents for Grades 9-12..." to determine where they would attend school in the fall. Later that August, Albany based state education department official Langworthy wrote back to Uphill that his schedule will not permit a visit to the area. Uphill again writes to Griffin, this time to share the news that "It is reported to me that all of the pupils of former District 2 will go to Leroy." He further explains that "if children of compulsory age go to school and pay their own way, I will ask attendance officers to make no arrest until after Leroy schools have opened." (MS NYS Archives BO472-83 Box 36, Folder 8) Almost simultaneously, Myra Flemming of Stafford, NY wrote to John Jehu, another senior State Education Department official, to describe the situation in her home district. In her letter, Flemming states quite clearly, "... we as a district have been opposed to centralization.... However, we have decided that...we are willing to go along with a centralization, but believe we should have some voice in where we choose to go." (21 August 1951. Letter from Flemming to Jehu, MS NYS Archives BO472-83 Box 36, Folder 8).

As the summer of 1951 waned, and the school year grew closer, Francis Griffin wrote a memo to Mr. Nelson Murbach, another State Education Department official. In it, he describes the situation in Morganville as one of "Hysteria." He further goes on to recognize the voters in the surrounding areas are "resentful that Morganville is trying to get out because they have always availed themselves of the educational services within the newly centralized district. To now go to Leroy is an innovation." (17 August 1951. MS NYS Archives BO472-83 Box 36, Folder 9). It is not often members of the State Bureaucracy would use a word such as hysteria to describe a situation.

Ms. Flemming reiterates her concern in another letter to John Jehu dated 31 August 1951. "...I was frankly very worried about this situation which was getting nearly as explosive as a keg of dynamite...Feelings and tempers have been getting pretty tense, as the new school year approaches, without a solution in sight." (MS NYS Archives BO472-83 Box 36, Folder 8). As seen in almost every school district consolidation attempt, hostility, and anger emerge between pro and anti-consolidation advocates. These feelings, seen across Scribner (2016) and other

research studies clearly indicate school district politics can insight passionate responses between participants.

At the same time of Ms. Flemming's letters that summer of 1951, a series of telegrams arrived at the State Education Department. In it, quotes such as "Action on relief from Bergen Buron (sic) District is urgent" and "we want action on release from Byron Bergen School" reveal the level and intensity of the state of residents in a smaller village in Western New York about their school. The State promised that a decision would be "made within 2 weeks." A letter written to Griffin by a Stafford resident contained an ominous warning about just how sincere the residents of the community were about their school: "The parents of this district are ready to take action themselves." (30 August 1951. Letter from Burton to Griffin. MS NYS Archives BO472-83 Box 36, Folder 9). Francis Griffin tried to assuage the residents, this time by advising them the process was long, and hard. In a letter to Mr. Raymond Branton of Stafford, NY, Griffin writes "...Creating a new school system out of a group of districts which have had separate identities for so many years is not an easy undertaking. People must be patient and give school authorities opportunities to develop the school program as anticipated under centralization." Further down the letter, Griffin tries to explain a shift to Leroy would not be possible due to "not keeping with general practice and with your history of the situation...certainly you voice will be stronger in Byron-Bergen District than it ever will be in a district such as Leroy where village population very greatly outnumber the farm group. (7 September 1951 Griffin to Raymond Branton. MS NYS Archives BO472-83 Box 36, Folder 9)

Sensing that words alone would not express their frustration, the trustees of the Stafford #2 (Morganville) school "refused to turn the key over to the newly formed central board of education to prepare to open the school." Furthermore, the Leroy superintendent of schools was offering students from Stafford #2 (Morganville) "free tuition and transportation from the District Line. The first offer was transportation from homes." (20 August 1951. Franklin to Griffin. MS NYS Archives BO472-83 Box 36, Folder 9). The trustees of Stafford #2 risked escalating the situation to the point where the Genesee County Sheriff's office would need to take possession of the building. The Stafford #2 trustees were not going to give up unless a State Education Department official, from Albany, met with the petitioners, and redressed their grievances. The demand was simple: "In exchange for an investigation from SED, Mrs. Flemming would have the Trustees turn the key over to the Board." As the local population continued to express displeasure, appealing to the state for relief, their actions created one of the largest headaches for bureaucracies. By implementing civil disobedience, the media became involved.

In late August and early September of 1951, local media began to report about the Stafford #2 (Morganville) fights with the State Education Department. The local newspaper, the Batavia News wrote an editorial that chastised the State, stating "It is hard to excuse such a delay...The State should have acted to grant Morganville the option of going to school in Leroy." (31 August 1951. Batavia News. MS NYS Archives BO472-83 Box 36, Folder 9). The fight escalated even further, as the parents in Stafford #2 (Morganville) decided to boycott the school. As many

researchers, historians, and pundits have found, the media loves conflict. And local school conflict, into the 20th century, creates media coverage across state lines (Scribner, 2018).

By mid-September of 1951, news of Morganville's conflict with the State went regional, as the Rochester Times Union and Rochester Democrat and Chronicle were writing about the story. For context, the Rochester metro region is the third largest in New York State, behind New York City and Buffalo. Rochester is also the home of powerful state education officials, usually with one of the leading members of the Board of Regents, the advisory and policy making body for New York's education system, from the Rochester metro. The Rochester metro is also home to leading lights of a number of social reformers and has a history of favorable attitudes towards people who oppose trampling of rights by bureaucracies. Within their articles, the papers indicated the residents within the Stafford #2 (Morganville) communities were concerned that they had never been given a say as to which district they could join during the centralization process. One parent stated bluntly "We don't want to be in Byron-Bergen district and we're not going to send our children to any of their schools." Another parent echoed the same sentiment by stating "...we were never given the opportunity to choose whether we wanted to join the Byron Bergen district or Leroy district. Leroy is closer to us and that is the district we want." Mrs. Flemming, one of the leading voices of the Morganville Community also added "...last spring the state told us we had to vote for or against centralization with Bryon Bergen. We voted in opposition but were out voted 10-1 by the Byron Bergen residents." As these quotes illustrate, and have been echoed through consolidation opposition, members of smaller school communities are in fear that they will lose a say in their children's education. The Morganville case aligns closely with what Tieken (2014) found in Arkansas, and Scribner (2018) found in records of resistance to consolidation. Into the 21st century, the New York State School Boards Association (2014) and my own dissertation (Jakubowski, 2020) found opponents to consolidation worried that their voices would be drowned out by the larger community.

At the same time as the media was reporting on the situation in the region, the State Education Department was looking for a way out of the media controversy. With the Board of Education of Byron-Bergen refusing to release Stafford #2 (Morganville) to Leroy, the state began behind the scenes discussions with the New York State Thruway authority (6 September 1951. Benedict to Mulligan. MS NYS Archives BO472-83 Box 36, Folder 9) The construction of the Thruway would travel along the northern boundary of the Stafford #2 (Morganville) boundary. Traveling to the newly centralized Byron-Bergen school campus from Morganville would prove difficult. In a telegram from Francis Griffin to J.L Uphill, on September 13, 1951 the sentence that Stafford #2 (Morganville) advocates had been waiting to hear was transmitted to Batavia, NY: "Department Indorses (sic) Boundary adjustment of Bergen-Byron district whereby most or all of former district 2 Stafford will be transferred to Le Roy District." (MS NYS Archives BO472-83 Box 36, Folder 9)

Morganville Wins

The State Education Department, on numerous occasions, indicated to concerned members of the Stafford #2 (Morganville) school district that the policy adopted under the 1947 Master Plan for school district reorganization dictated that no change could occur to the reorganization plans for rural schools in New York State had changed their minds. The State Education Department cited “transportation difficulties which may arise due to the construction of the New York State Thruway.” (14 September 1951 Letter from Griffin to Uphill. MS NYS Archives BO472-83 Box 36, Folder 9). In public statements to the press, Uphill indicated ...”there was no question about the Commissioner’s authority to lay out a central school district...What was not generally appreciated was the fact that legal procedures are slow procedures...” (14 September, 1951 Batavia News. MS NYS Archives BO472-83 Box 36, Folder 9). Further on in the article, a quote from Mr. Uphill reveals the depth that the State has about trying not to lose face on the situation: “Mr. Uphill regrets that so much publicity should be given to so little difference of opinion and so little to the fine educational programs in our great central schools...”

The representative of the Commissioner of Education locally, Mr. Uphill, who had warned that Stafford 2 (Morganville) should not be included in the Byron-Bergen Centralization, and who reported on the trouble which was brewing in the area for almost a year, stated to the press it was a “little difference of opinion.” The policy stood; the State was not forced to make the changes. Rather, the logistics of traveling from Morganville to Byron-Bergen during the Thruway’s construction was the deciding factor.

In October of 1951, the leaders of the Stafford #2 (Morganville) resistance were honored at a party held by their neighbors. (29 October 1951 Batavia news.) The clip is included in the archival files of the Office of School reorganization at the State Education Department. While not the initial win of remaining independent from any centralization, the Morganville community were able to exercise a bit of control and send their children to the Leroy Central School District instead of the Byron-Bergen Central school. Included in the Master Plan for School Reorganization’s revised edition (1958), a footnote exists on the bottom of page 301, under the plan for the Centralization of Byron Central School District #1 (Byron-Bergen School District. It reads:

By alteration of boundary, effective Sept. 17, 1951, all of the property in the Town of Stafford, formerly C2 Stafford, was transferred from CS 1 Byron to CS 1 Le Roy.

On page 304 of the Master Plan, describing the Leroy Central School District #1, the same exact footnote exists. In another footnote to the story, the Board of Education for Leroy CSD voted to close Stafford #2 (Morganville) schoolhouse. Like other smaller community schools in other areas, once the centralization was complete, or the consolidation aid ran out, the smaller community’s initial fears came to pass they lost their school in their community.

In the early 21st century, the former Stafford #2 Morganville school building is situated next to the United Methodist Church in the center of Morganville, NY. In the town’s historical

society and museum, down the road in the Town of Stafford's office building, a globe from old School #2 is displayed as an homage to the other towns of Stafford Common School Districts, which were split up and consolidated into surrounding Centralized School districts.

The story of Stafford #2 (Morganville) Common School District could be told as a "David versus Goliath" tale. The story may be used as an example of the continued narrative of distant state reformers ignoring the wishes of its rural people. Rather, the story should be told as one of action and changing goals by the residents of the community. The residents used a process of step-by-step opposition to an action by the government which they believed violated their rights as citizens. The members of the community did not do it alone. The community had help from the local State Education Department's representative in the field, the District Superintendent J. Underhill. They also had help from the New York State Thruway authority, who by building the highway had disrupted normal transportation routes between Morganville and Byron, NY. The story should also be told of the power of local media coverage causing the state's bureaucracy to shy away from controversy, and its use of another state agency action to "save face."

The Morganville question ended with a simple answer. The policy of centralization and consolidation would stay, but local communities had, in the ballot box, and through political action and media coverage, some level to try and find a "right fit" with a different partner.

Reconceptualizing Implementation Theory

Trying to understand why policy implementation failed at the local level, Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) proposed a framework to explain how the ideal solutions proposed in the capitol were mis administered locally. Four parts of analysis emerged out of their study of the problems which emerged in the Oakland Economic Development Agency's work. First, who must act identifies the players in the policy process, at the different levels of government. Second, who must consent, identifies the power brokers and the official, governmental stakeholders, directly impacted by the policy. Third, who must participate in the policy process identifies the key officials who should be part of the process. Fourth, for how long does the process take, identifies the time frame that emerges from proposal to implementation. I posit (Jakubowski, 2019) that the focus on local bureaucrats and policy implementors completely ignores local population's agency. Therefore, I posit a fifth analysis point: what local agency actions should be examined? In the research case studies presented above, rural school centralization, the harmonious alignment through official agreement at each level, from state to local, was thwarted at the local level by community member's agency on referendums. Into the present twenty first century, New York State still holds school consolidation as the approved state policy for improving the condition of rural education. Yet almost 95% of consolidations since the initial wave between the Great Depression (1920s) and the finales in the suburbanization of the 1960s have resulted in failed attempts. Why? Because the local population vote in referendums to implement consolidation reject the proposed actions.

While official state policy supports consolidation of local schools, and Commissions, Commissioners, and elected officials support the metrocentric and urban normative reforms, local people were reticent to, in binding referendums, approve the actions. Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) neglected one crucial part of their policy implementation framework. When local population have an opportunity to weigh in on a policy, through a binding vote, they prefer the status quo, unless the change is obviously a significant improvement over the status quo. With the Policy Implementation theory of Pressman and Wildavsky (1973), the missing link is the local population in the form of their agency, and specifically the people's will in the form of a referendum to implement locally a state policy.

State residents who vote against state level reforms are demonstrating a powerful voice, in the form of their franchise and agency, during referendums locally on state level policies. We see this in how school elections for Board of Education, or school budgets are defeated. These actions speak less of what the local teachers are doing, but rather, mostly against policies implemented at the state level and forced down on local school districts. The urbannormative reform efforts from the past 50 years have demonstrated a true bifurcation on thinking about rural. The State continues to utilize urbannormative and metrocentric ideas (Fulkerson & Thomas, 2019) while local communities are trying to assert agency in the control of their schools, even with the shift to schools as creatures of state reforms.

FURTHER STUDIES

This paper, born out of a dissertation (Jakubowski, 2019) examined how two local rural district residents opposed state level school district reorganization policies. The paper also explained how Pressman and Wildavsky's (1973) implementation policy theory failed to account for local stakeholder agency in the implementation of state level policies. The paper proposes a new theory which includes local stakeholder agency as a centralized part of the policy implementation theory considering the referendums citizens use the franchise to express their acceptance or rejection of these higher-level government policies.

The research would have broader implications if additional case studies beyond New York were included. As increasing referendum use is utilized at the local levels concerning state and national policy proposals, additional studies of direct voting on issue propositions, and voting for candidates (in direct voting) would be helpful to determine how voters react, especially with increasing number of incumbent officials losing in primaries or withdrawing from elections due to local opposition.

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