THE ROLE OF INTEREST GROUPS ON EDUCATIONAL DECISION MAKING: A CASE STUDY

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THE ROLE OF INTEREST GROUPS IN EDUCATIONAL DECISION MAKING: A CASE STUDY

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of interest groups in educational decision making. The case study approach was used by the researcher and focused on a specific school board's decision to close a neighborhood school.

Data were collected by means of a semi-structured interview. Questions used during the interview were adapted from an instrument used by Presthus in studying elites in the policy-making process. In this case study the population comprised three groups--legislative group, senior officials, and the group impacted upon by the closure decision.

The research found that the interest groups had little influence on the school board's decision to close the school. It did determine that 87.5% of respondents recognized the involvement of interest groups as a necessary and useful one in the decisional process.

As a result of these findings, it is recommended that administrators facilitate interest group participation in decision making. It is also recommended that specific policy, regulations and procedures be developed to deal with school closure.

To complement the literature on interest groups further research is recommended on informal versus formal

groups, their communication patterns and channels of access. As well, a study of leadership in educational interest groups should provide valuable information.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Lasswell (1968) stated that the study of politics is a study of influence and the influential. As a result of influence, strategies which allow for management of distribution of values and decisions about who gets what, when and how are determined. These efforts reflect the struggle of groups to secure the authoritative support of government for limited values which are allocated as a result of a particular group's ability to have its demands raised, considered and accommodated. The selection of the style of interest articulation helps determine which group will or will not influence the decision-making process. This social conflict is apparent not only in the macrosystem of our environment, but also in numerous subsystems reflecting the politics of the larger social foundations.

Education is one such subsystem in one such unit that is constantly reacting to the political, social, cultural and economic influences permeating from the larger system. Whereas once educational governance was viewed as an autonomous and non-political function of government, it is now viewed as a unit interacting with its environment. The consequence of this is that educational governance today is often the result of the management of conflict and consensus in school districts.

In compliance with this theory of the politics of education, it is incumbent on any individual group determined to manage the existing system to acquire the skills of a political strategist. This will not only increase the possibility of an outcome conducive to their situation, but will allow for modification of the system in order to affect future results.

If one examines the major source of influence on government or educational organizations today, it becomes apparent that a new politics of education is emerging (Cistone & Iannacoone, 1979; Iannaccone, 1977; Cistone & Iannaccone, 1974). Where once provincial government, trustees, and administrators wielded power, it is now the demands of community groups--students, teachers and their associations, and parents (Coleman, 1977; Wirt & Kirst, 1972; Cistone & Iannaccone, 1980).

What is the nature of the demands and the structure of influence that characterize these various interest groups in education? Interest groups represent significant actors in the educational policy formation process. Yet, the extent to which this influence is effective is extremely situational. By focusing on the actors, individually and collectively, an attempt can be made to clarify who ultimately decides and why--in the realm of education.

Statement of the Problem

In June, 1978 the doors of a Newfoundland elementary school closed. As with most closures, the effects of this decision were felt by students, teachers, administrators and the community-at-large. In a time of declining enrollments, outward migration and financial restraint, the responsibilities associated with educational governance are immense. Nevertheless, ultimately someone must make the decision: "this school must close." Prior to and immediately following this decision numerous demands impacted on the district organization. Inputs from within the system as well as outside possibly influenced the decisional outcome. The role and effectiveness of interest groups in affecting the board's final decision to close this particular school will be analyzed. More specifically, this study will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. Relative to this particular school closure what was the initial problem defined by the governing school board?
2. What probable solutions were considered to solve the specified problem?
3. Was this decisional outcome an output of (a) the formal organization, or (b) other actors within the system?
4. What operational procedure did the formal organization follow in reaching its decision?

5. What were the demands, functions and resources of the interest groups?
6. Who participated in the various levels of decision making and at what stage?
7. How did the various groups communicate their demands to the school board?

Answers to these questions should permit an understanding of the groups which attempted to influence the decision.

Theoretical Framework

Easton's (cited in Wirt & Kirst, 1972) belief in a system's capacity to persist is substantiated by viewing the interactions of interest groups through the theoretical framework of social exchange relationships. The basis of the exchange perspective is that all interactions, social or political, can be evaluated in terms of inputs and outputs. An analysis of the relationship between these two variables and their actors illustrates the cost-benefit basis of policy making at any organizational level. An examination of Easton's dynamic response model of a political system allows for a clearer understanding of how the exchange theory perpetuates itself.

The Educational System can be labeled in terms of Easton's Model. Environmental effects arise from a variety of forces. These effects become demands and supports articulated through various access channels. Conversion of the educational demands into an output is ultimately the

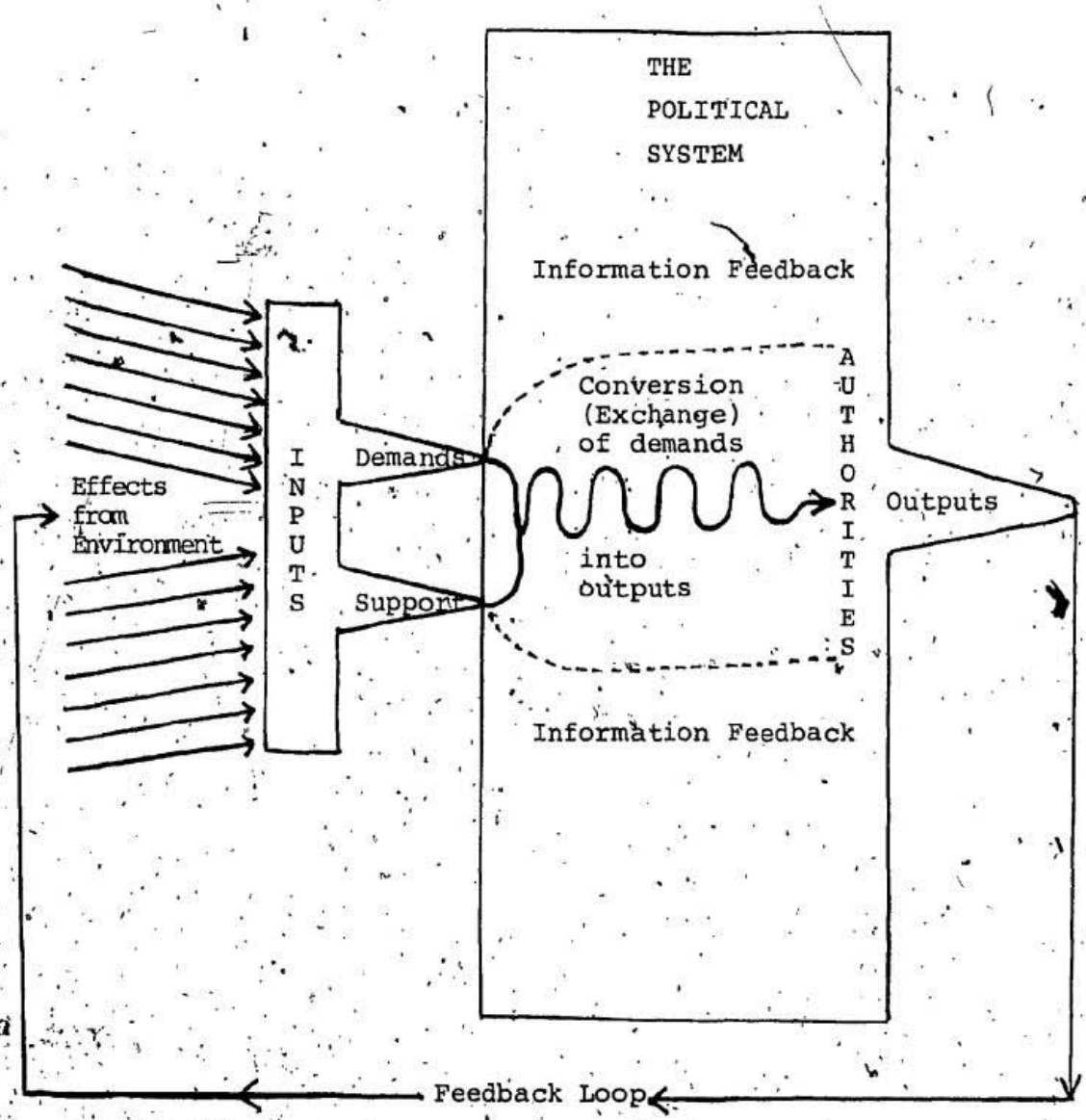


Figure 1:
A Dynamic Response Model of a Political System

Source: David Easton, A System Analysis of Political Life (New York: Wiley, 1965), p. 10.

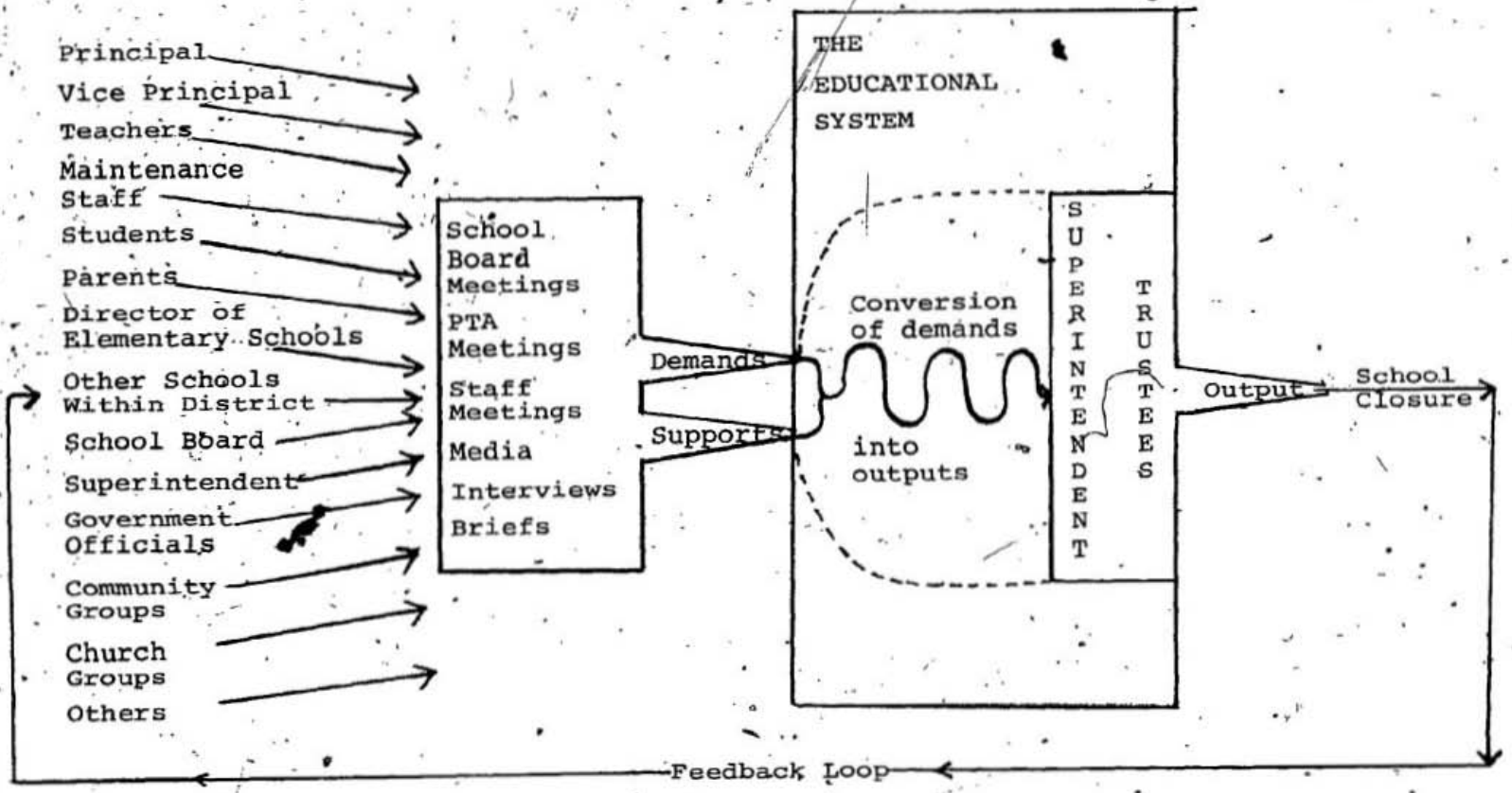


Figure 2: The Educational System Labeled in Terms of Easton's Model

responsibility of the superintendent and trustees.

The exchange relationship between a system and its environments typifies the never-ending flow of interactions as inputs become converted into outputs and they in turn produce new inputs into the environment. The advantage of Easton's model is that it allows for an examination of decisions made by particular groups (Stapleton, 1977). By identifying demands from within a system or its environment, the effectiveness of these groups in influencing the outcome can be examined.

Salisbury (1969) is a strong proponent of the exchange theory. He believed that through analysis of various interest group leaders and the benefits that accrue (albeit autonomy to pursue policies, material or intrinsic rewards), a conceptual understanding of how major educational interest groups have persisted is revealed. Thus, the strength of an interest group is facilitated by favorable exchanges between group members and societal structures.

In order to narrow down who specifically is involved in influencing a final outcome or decision, Tucker and Zeigler (1980) support the necessity of examining the differentiation of hierarchical levels. This permits an appraisal of formal representation (i.e., the superintendent inclusive to the informal participants). Yet, this alone is not an adequate explanation of how and why some input demands are more productive than others. It is important to realize that it is the nature of the decision itself which

often influences who attempts to have input and who succeeds or fails. Opportunities for direct public participation and indirect public influence are uniquely situational.

Since the focus of this particular study was an analysis of how various interest groups influenced decision making, there is a need to define the role that interest groups play. Research shows that the organizational structure and range of functions of groups are so diverse that it is difficult to generalize how they influence or participate in decision making. Steele et al. (1981) identified three major variables which play a significant role in the way interest groups function and their levels of effectiveness. These three variables are (1) relative permanence, (2) origin, and (3) organizational structure. The interactions between these variables allows for some degree of prediction regarding the potential effect of interest groups.

In this model each variable is dichotomous; therefore, there are eight interactional categories or eight different methods of describing interest groups. Steele further elaborated on this model by making assumptions based on parallels drawn between group characteristics and group effectiveness. (Figure 3)

A case study analysis of the impact of interest groups on decisional outcomes allows for conclusions specific to the issue to be addressed. However, the significance of this technique lies not in the analysis of the issue, but in the evidence that decisions about education are frequently

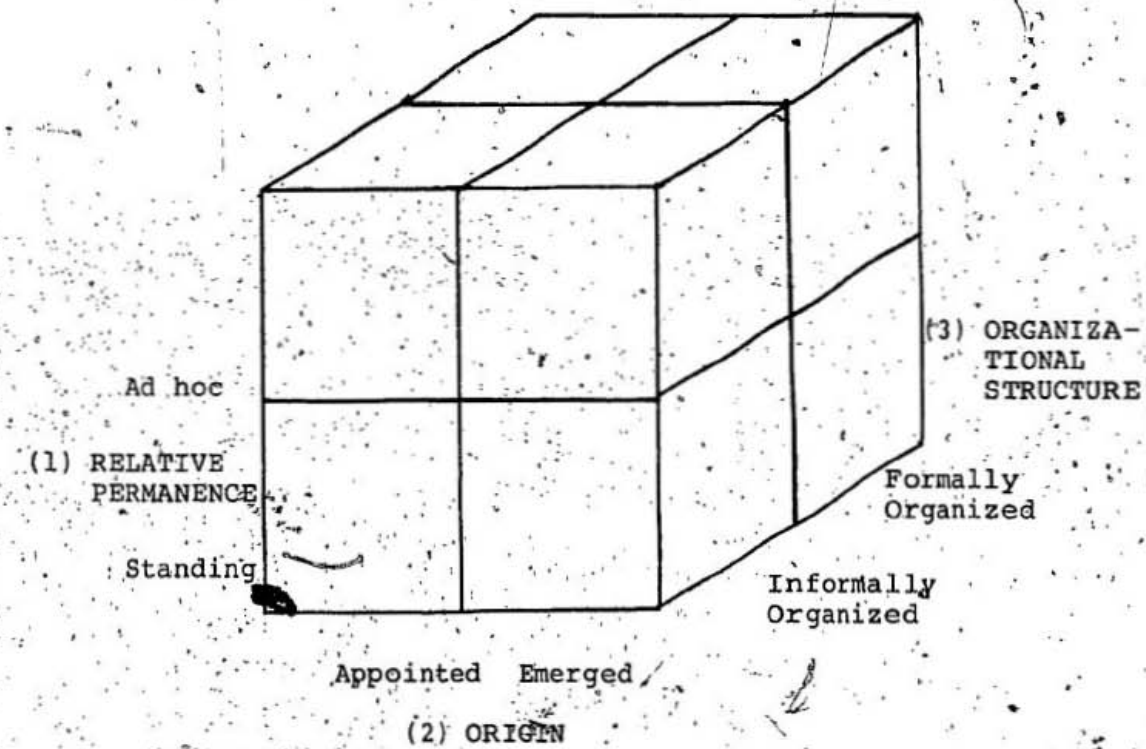


Figure 3: A Three Descriptor Model of Interest Groups

Source: Steele et al. Care and Feeding of Interest Groups. Education and Urban Society, 1980-81, 13 (2), 257-270.

being swayed by forces outside the traditional formal organization. Power and authority have been gradually accumulating in the hands of people who are neither elected nor accountable to anyone who has office (Cohen, 1978). If administrators, trustees and provincial governments are the net losers of power, as Coleman (1977) has stated, then educators have a two-fold responsibility.

First, it is imperative to redefine the characteristics of educational governance. As interest groups become more active, more numerous and better organized, educational administrators will be compelled to listen, support and provide critical leadership. The system no longer reflects the central office as being the ultimate source of power. If the educational organization is to tap interest group potential, then it should facilitate a relationship between the superintendent and interest groups as advocated by Burns (cited in Steele et al., 1981).

> Leadership, in short, is power governed by principle, directed toward raising people to their highest levels of personal motive and social morality and tested by achieving the results measured by the original purpose. Power is different.
>
> Power manipulates people as they are; leadership as they could be. Power manages; leadership mobilizes. Power imparts; leadership engages. Power tends to corrupt; leadership to create.
>
> Great leadership requires great fellowship. Leaders mobilize the best in their followers who in turn demand more from their leaders. (p. 258)

The second responsibility of educators is to learn the skills of a political strategist, particularly in

references to the structure, function, resources and characteristics of pressure groups. In the positive sense, if educators intend to work the system, it is imperative to learn what makes the system work!

Administering these responsibilities is dependent upon an understanding of the types of interest groups and the process of interest articulation employed by each group. Steele's three-descriptor model will facilitate an analysis of the groups which surfaced in the school closure study. The data obtained from the present case study is incorporated into the political system framework proposed by Easton to ascertain why the groups involved were or were not effective in their efforts.

Significance of the Study

This study examines the role and functions of interest groups in educational decision making. Specifically, it should have significance for the following groups:

1. School district administrators and trustees who are ultimately responsible for educational governance.
2. Members within the educational organization who wish to influence decision making.
3. External groups or individuals who wish to affect change or have impact on educational decision making.

Delimitations

This study is delimited to an examination of a specific issue within one Newfoundland school board. The issue of a school closure is used to facilitate a case study of the impact of various groups on an educational policy decision. Althpugh the issue is important to the study, its function is secondary. The major focus is the analysis of the behavior of interest groups and their attempts to influence educational decision making. This study is also delimitated to an analysis of the decision made by the school board concerned. This district is selected because it represents a highly populated area where interest group activity has surfaced in recent years. The district is also at the hub of provincial political activity and this could well have served as a stimulus to interest group formation.

Limitations

The recommendations and conclusions forthcoming from this research should be considered in terms of the following limitations:

1. This study deals with individual interest groups within a specific policy context. Therefore, it is difficult to generalize broadly about group behavior using an empirical and quantitative base.
2. Researcher bias.

3. Subjectivity of the interview respondents.
4. The time elapsed--six years--since the occurrence of the issue could result in a distortion of the facts.

Definition of Terms

Access Channel. An individual or group who provides a direct communication link between decision makers and those interested in the policy issue.

Demands. Inputs into the environment that indicate the way in which environmental influences and conditions modify and shape the operations of the political system.

Environment. The total physical and social factors external to an organization's boundary that are considered by the system's decision makers.

Formal Organization. The network of standardized roles within a system. The rules defining the expected interdependent behavior of incumbents of the system are explicitly formulated and sanctions are employed to enforce the rules.

Gatekeeper. An individual in an organization who is able to control the flow of information through a given communication channel.

Influence. A relation among actors in which one actor induces other actors to behave in some way that they would not have otherwise behaved.

Informal Organization. The informal structure which reflects rules, grouping and sanctioning systems which are

unofficial in character and emerge from the interactions of individuals in the organization.

Impact. Any event external to the system that alters, modifies or affects the system in any way.

Interest Aggregation. The function of converting demands into general policy alternatives.

Interest Articulation. The process by which individuals and groups make demands upon political decision makers.

Interest Group. A group of individuals with a common concern who wish to influence all or specific activities of an organization. They may exist within the internal or external organizational environment.

Lobbying. Any effort on the part of an individual or group to influence political decision makers by direct or indirect persuasion.

Output. The decisions or actions of the authorities.

Political Broker. The administrator who allocates demands in the form of money, personal treatment or expectations.

Policy. A guideline for decision making which arises out of a philosophy.

Political Decision Making. A process involving exchange of influence and power between the leadership and membership of a political group.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

There is an increasing emergence of interest group activity in the educational environment. How effective these groups are in influencing or determining educational policy is an area of major concern for all administrators. An examination of various interest groups illustrates that there are several identifiable characteristics which permit some degree of prediction as to why one group is more effective than another. The consequences of understanding these characteristics is that the administrator can then use the information in facilitating interest group activity to the benefit of educational ideals.

This chapter identifies several areas in education which have addressed interest group involvement in an attempt to develop understanding of how and why they operate. The areas discussed include interest groups, educational governance, decision making as well as school boards and community structure.

Interest Groups

The interest group section will begin with various definitions and follow with a discussion of the variables of legitimacy, structure, function and role as a means to analyze interest group activity.

Truman (1951) proposed that interest groups arise in an effort to establish a new homeostasis whenever the stability of a system has been disturbed. "It is the disturbance that creates the interest group" (p. 156). Presthus (1974) concluded that they are "collectives organized around some explicit value on behalf of which essentially political demands are made vis-à-vis governmental elites, other groups and the general public" (p. 73). When a group is called an interest group, it is implied that it has a purpose which is not met by the mere fact of organizing and becoming. Instead, "the interest group is an instrument for some other purpose . . . it exists to press its claims upon others, typically public officials" (Davies & Zerchykov, 1981, p. 174).

The question of interest group legitimacy is frequently raised. This legitimacy is equated with the translation of power into authority (Katz & Kahn, 1966). In other words, educators must ascertain whether an interest group is representative of their members' concerns and therefore have the authority or right to speak out. Crain's (1968) research showed that superintendents do not assume that interest groups have a right to be heard. It has been further contended that only about one-half of school board members accept the legitimacy of group-originated demands (Jennings & Zeigler, 1971). One group which denies its own legitimacy as a special interest is teachers. Instead, they qualify their participation as that of employees of the school district. Officially, they have the right to be heard but not to participate. If teachers accept the

employee role, Tucker and Zeigler (1980) suggested that their organizational influence will be minimal. It has been argued that legitimacy exists because of the mutuality of the relationship between interest groups and government. Saxe (1981) explained that just as interest groups represent their members' concerns to government, so do they represent government's concern back to citizens.

One might assume that the support and encouragement educators publicly advocate for participation in education is based on their belief of a group's legitimacy. This is far from correct. Steele et al. (1981) contended that despite the advantages and resources of interest groups, educators have viewed them as "negative, disruptive, time-consuming, uninformed, unreasonable, myopic, emotional and otherwise generally antagonistic to the purposes and procedures of the school district" (p. 259). The fact is that legitimacy is often difficult to establish. Yet, the perception of a group's legitimacy by a decision maker has been identified as the most crucial resource it has (Zeigler & Jennings, 1974; Kirst & Sommers, 1981; Saxe, 1981; Papale, 1982). Consideration of the variables affecting group legitimacy illustrates the importance of their gaining access to information. When information is withheld, groups tend to intervene at the wrong places, they tend to make subjective interventions and they often take sides (Papale, 1982). In many cases, it is realized that information about schooling is a necessary condition for the formation of parent interest

groups. Seeking information about school policies and gaining access to school policy making, however, are not seen as necessary and sufficient conditions for interest group formation (Davies & Zerchykov, 1981).

Additional research on the characteristics which establish group legitimacy and consequently their ability to influence include the status and number of group members, the potential within a group for generating support from other individuals or group members, affiliations with community agencies, financial resources, control over jobs or information, solidarity, the rights pertaining to public office and esteem or social standing (Dahl, 1961; Zeigler & Jennings, 1974; Steele et al., 1981; Horlor & Ng, 1982).

In conclusion, it has been substantiated that interest groups can assist public officers in the identification of potential problems and in the implementation of agreed upon policies and solutions. Only if group legitimacy is accepted and their participation facilitated, however, will they contribute to a broader view of decision making, thus making their approach less adversarial (Papale, 1982).

An examination of the structural and functional dimensions of interest groups provides insight as to how and why they operate effectively.

Wirt and Kirst (1972) postulated that several kinds of interest groups exist ranging from limited or informal organization to a formal arrangement with an executive and hierarchy. The discrepancy between formal versus informal

interest groups has resulted in dispute among some superintendents. They considered formal interest groups to have a more enduring structure as distinguished from a pressure group which is more spontaneous and less enduring (Sackney, 1983). This structural diversity results from the impact of two major functions either of which may serve as a basis for formation. In one capacity the group acts as an "imputer" and describes relevant conditions and perspectives within the framework of a particular problem area. In another capacity the group acts as a "critiquer." When a position is taken via board policy or administrative action, the interest group becomes the communicator which makes its interests known to segments in the community. In other words, a linkage function is served by the group between school and community (Steele et al., 1981).

Rather than analyze structural aptitudes only, consideration of interest articulation and involvement patterns provides important distinguishing features of interest groups. Almond and Powell (1978) identified these four types.

Anomic interest groups make demands which are usually unpremeditated and sporadic in nature. They have no specialized roles for promoting concerns but rely on personal interactions and informal communication methods to keep members informed.

Non-associational interest groups also reflect a lack of specialized organization and irregular articulation patterns. Their interest stems from a perceived commonality

in language, religion, race, occupation or any cultural or economic tie.

Institutional interest groups have a highly differentiated role structure. The group has a formal organization which emphasizes function rather than interest articulation.

Associational interest groups have a specialized structure for interest articulation which exists to represent the goals of particular groups. They are essentially planned around a specific social class or policy interest.

The significance of individuals as articulators of their own interests should not be overlooked. Facilitated by personal resources, albeit position, finance or otherwise, these individuals exert effect in the political process.

Steele et al. (1981) devised a three-descriptor model which enables interest groups to be analyzed in eight ways. These variables were identified: permanence (ad hoc versus standing), origin (appointed versus emerged), and organizational structure (formally versus informally organized). The following assumed parallels are tied to these characteristics:

1. If the interest group is appointed, then the group has the endorsement and support of the administration with the result that resources are more likely to be made to the group to accomplish its work and it is also more likely that the suggestions or recommendations of the group will be given greater consideration by the administration.

2. If the interest group has a standing status then the interest group has a long-term

commitment from the school district, it has time to become well acquainted with the data and/or circumstances which are appropriate to its causes, and it has defined organizational purposes which relate to the purposes of the school system.

3. If the interest group is formally organized then it has created a division of labor, assigned responsibilities, and set a schedule of work to be done. All of this organizational activity would suggest that greater effectiveness could be expected. (p. 264)

Steele's descriptions will be later applied to the groups involved in the school closure issue researched in this thesis.

The function or objective of any interest group is to gain access to the decision maker it seeks to influence. A description of the various channels of access provides insight into Sroufe's (1981) statement that "the strategies and tactics used by interest groups are determined by their understanding of their best opportunities for gaining access" (p. 159). He further contended that successful interest groups must have the skills to select from the possible key decision points, those to which access may be most readily attained. These tactics for gaining access and expressing demands have been identified as "interest articulation" (Sackney, 1983). The term was earlier identified by Almond and Powell (1978) who defined the different access channels as follows.

Personal connections such as informal ties with school, family, as well as local and social ties are one of the most common channels of access. Since personal

connections are often transitory, however, so may be the channel. The connection may be tied to the social structure of the society rather than the more obvious personal bonds. For example, a Protestant teacher is tied to an Integrated Board because of the social structures of the society.

The next access channel is defined as elite representation. This occurs when a group member is also part of the policy-making structure. It can also exist when an independent elite member provides sympathetic representation for an interest group. The benefits ensued here result from the opportunity for direct and continual articulation of demands upon the decision-making structure by the elite representative. An example of this would be a concerned parent who is also a school board member.

Formal and institutional channels are identified by their use of mass media to transmit demands to decision makers and solitit public support. This area also uses the implication of political parties, legislative and/or bureaucratic agencies to gain access.

Less frequented means of access include protest demonstrations and non-violent strikes. Such coercive means of gaining access sometimes, but not often, result in policy change.

As can be seen, the opportunities for seeking access are varied. Because the system is never stagnant it becomes imperative for interest groups to be able to shift their points of access as conditions demand. Thus, strategies and tactics must be flexible enough to accommodate change.

The discussion of interest groups would not be complete if their role in education were not identified. Whether these roles are viewed as beneficial often depends on the viewpoint of the educational leader. It has been shown that interest groups serve as communication links between the school and the public and vice versa. There are times when rather than being a demand generating group, an interest group can act as a buffer or defense mechanism because of the support it espouses for the organization. Hence, it can pacify or unify competing interest groups. Research shows that interest groups have greater influence on the public and consequently are able to maintain community support for an issue, program or cause over a longer period of time. Interest groups can perform within a restricted range of functions because of their singleness of purpose. This is often as a result of limited resources and the inclination to be self-disciplined in the scope of their interests and activities (Tucker & Zeigler, 1980; Steele et al., 1981). One of the most important roles of interest groups is nearly invisible--"the ability to keep issues from arising" (Sroufe, p. 153). As a result, the influence exerted seldom becomes illuminated in the public eye.

The role of "special interests" is dependent upon positive leadership if education is to benefit. This should prevent reaction rather than participation and require administrators to view public participation in a different light. As Bradshaw (1983) stated:

> We need to define our needs and go out and get the information, rather than passively invite those who had the time and interest to come to us. The job that we now realize needs to be done requires us to begin participating in the community, rather than vice-versa. We had erred in expecting the community to learn about what we were all about, a task which only a few could handle, or should be expected to handle. Instead, we are recognizing the expertise of the community: knowledge of itself. (p. 58)

Educational Governance

Educational governance has always been political. During times of economic restraint, however, decisions regarding the "authoritative allocation of values" have become increasingly complex and politicized as groups compete for their share of the educational pie. Economic factors reflect only one of the conditions influencing decisions in education. Administrators are also exposed to changes in population trends, demographic patterns, environmental concerns as well as individual and social values. These societal changes have been manifested in education by a shift in the balance of power as competing forces attempt to influence decision making. The resulting dilemma has been identified by Mosher (1980).

> School officials have found that in trying to satisfy one group they are sure to alienate others. The administrative and political style for dealing with contending groups that was based on ascribed professional expertise and organizational solidarity, was not effective against determined measures by those intent on opening up the system by every available means of political action. (p. 110)

Terms such as "community input", "people power", "parent power", the "third force", "citizen advocate", "direct action", and "grass roots education", become increasingly commonplace as special interests demand the right to participate in decision making (Coombs & Merritt, 1977). Downey's (1977) research identified two major variables influencing the change in educational governance as a result of demands by special interests. They are:

> A shift in emphasis from the more incremental, rational and information based modes of policy making to the more political and influence based modes . . . as well as . . . a shift in power from official leadership (elected representatives and administrators) to teachers and community groups. (p. 135)

The demands of interest groups must be considered in view of the basic premise of educational governance which stems from a belief in representative democracy (Dahl, 1961; Lutz & Iannaccone, 1978). It must be realized, however, that too great a shift to special interest pleading and negotiations can "de-democratize" the policy-making process. This has tremendous import for educational administrators as they must facilitate active competition among various interest groups, to ensure a more democratic control of education. Lack of effort on the part of the school board to encourage political interaction points to an undemocratic influence (Tucker & Zeigler, 1980). The movement away from formal structures of democratic control is further supported by Cistone and Iannaccone (1980) who emphasized that power and authority in education are being accumulated in the hands of people who

are neither elected nor accountable. Understanding the nature of these pluralistic demands permits an examination of how educators must adapt. Coleman (1977) has argued the relevance of this by suggesting that "as governance adapts to social change, factional and pluralistic structures are likely to become the norm" (p. 81). Thus, central office officers should learn to manage conflict rather than work in an atmosphere of cooperation. Their emphasis must be on exerting influence, consultation, policy research and proposal. This is further supported by Ingram (1978) who sees administrators seeking to find a balance between two competing factors. In one respect they must demonstrate an ability to analyze, orchestrate and implement policy while simultaneously attempting to facilitate and negotiate special interest pleading. Because conflict management will occupy a greater role in educational governance, Tucker and Zeigler (1980) believed that superintendents must become skilled in the use of political and technical resources.

Attempts to analyze educational governance can be taken from four different approaches. Mitchell (1980) suggested structuralist, functionalist, symbolic interactionist and exchange perspectives. Since this study addresses the exchange theory, further explanation of this approach only is provided. The theory stresses that political and social activities are transactional in nature and can be examined in terms of inputs and outputs of governmental systems. The exchange is based on the costs and benefits which

participants realize. Yet, what are the conditions which affect the formation and maintenance of consensus by those involved in educational governance? The public and administrators should gain insight from research completed by Bacharach and Mitchell (1981). They identified variables such as:

1. The environmental constraints the district operates under.
2. The degree of mobilization of interest groups.
3. School board unity.
4. Administrative unity.
5. Leadership ability of superintendent--specifically the strategies and tactics employed.
6. Coalition behavior of teachers.
7. Stability of the profile of critical variable values (i.e. stable economic base or social and political diversity).

In summary, research on educational governance confirms the necessity of administrative personnel understanding pluralistic demands. With understanding should come the awareness that management style most adapt if education is to meet the demands of a politicized society.

Decision Making

Political decision making involves the exchange of influence and power between the leadership and the membership of a political group. In the political educational arena

traditional decision making is being challenged.

Coleman's (1977) research indicated a movement away from executive leadership in decision-making; instead administrative decisions are often questioned because some group with an interest in the issue was not consulted. In view of group demands, educators have considered decisions in terms of displeasing the fewest individuals possible or "satisficing" rather than enacting policy that is responsive to "the good of the total district" (Lutz, 1980).

The changing climate in provincial educational decision making is reflective of "an interorganizational pattern, a co-operative or confederative system dependent upon the interaction of officials in the department of education, the teachers and their professional organizations and the school trustees and their associations" (Housego, 1972, p. 17). This may suggest a more open system approach to decision making but as Housego further explained, traditional groups are more acceptable than those trying to establish a power base. These non-traditional groups are often "not allowed to enter into the achievement of compromise and consensus" (p. 21).

The need for increased participation in decision making is not a new concept. Lewin (1947) demonstrated that participation had been associated with decision acceptance. As well, the probable solution is likely to be better if group members are provided with greater amounts of relevant information (Kelley & Thibaut, 1969). A reason why participation is beneficial is suggested by Wood (1973) who believed

when people get involved, it implies they have influence over a decision and influence is a primary mediator of acceptance. White (1977) also advocated the need for a broader base of input for decisions because of the resulting support. By inclusion, one could expect support whereas exclusion of pressure groups promotes negative feedback and agitation. Lack of participation and information not only affects the perception of a decision, but encourages resentment towards the decision locus and guarantees power to the professional (Tucker & Zeigler, 1980; Davies & Zerchykov, 1981; Papale, 1982).

The significant point is that "greater credibility and commitment are generated, and less resistance to change occurs when people are involved in decisions that affect them" (Berger, 1983, p. 151).

What makes any one group effective in decision making is a complex issue. The importance of political, economical and social resources for building access and gaining support have been documented. Yet, because of the diffusion of power in educational arenas, the result of who has influence is extremely situational (Corwin, 1965; Coleman, 1977; Willians, 1977). This is further complicated by the fact that:

> Power may be tied to issues, and issues can be fleeting or persistent, provoking coalitions among interested groups and citizens ranging in their duration from momentary to semi-permanent. (Polsby, 1965, p. 115).

Sroufe (1981) believed one of the skills of a successful interest group was to select from possible key decision points, those to which access might most easily be attained. Thus, influence is directly related to the mode of interest articulation utilized.

Consideration of how and why a particular decision was made becomes fundamental to understanding the role of interest groups in decision making. Stapleton (1977) identified three approaches to the problem, one of which stated the decision was the result of bargaining among different actors within the system. This process of "collective bargaining" (Papale, 1982) effects outcomes as a result of compromise, coalition or competition. Attempts to narrow down who specifically influenced a decision requires an examination of the hierarchical levels (Tucker & Zeigler, 1980) as well as the process of decision making itself. Agger (1966) identified six related areas in the process as follows:

1. Policy formulation occurs when someone thinks that a problem can be alleviated, solved or prevented by a proposed shift in the stand of government.
2. Policy deliberation occurs when proposed policies are expressed through use of various media.
3. Organization of political support occurs when individual groups exercise maximum influence to garner support.

4. Authoritative consideration involves selecting one of the decisional choices resulting in a "decisional outcome."
5. Promulgation of the decisional outcome occurs with the affirmation of an existing or new policy.
6. Policy effectuation involves the official statement that a policy developed will bring about major change.

The process may not always complete the six stages and may only come into effect when the political demand is made.

Parsons (cited in Rocher, 1974) conceptualized four independent levels of decision making, each of which is functionally separate but still interrelated.

1. Policy decision-making level--where decisions which impact on the total structure exist.
2. Allocative decision-making level--where consideration of resources required to implement policy decisions are realized.
3. Operational level--this is the technical or practical level which relates activities to policy decisions.
4. Co-ordination level--this involves complementing the organization's goals and activities with the other levels in the organization.

A necessary procedure in arriving at any decision is to consider the fluctuation of power and influence during the various stages (Wirt & Kirst, 1972). This allows for an examination of the distribution of responsibility during the

process and some understanding as to whether it was a joint, shared or unilateral decision.

School Board and Community Structures

Schools can be viewed as subsystems of the larger community systems. This philosophy, espoused by Agger (1971), is supported by his case that not only are there policies of and in education, and political relations between education and other domains of community, but there are community policies entering into, operating upon and manifested in the local educational political subsystem.

It has been affirmed that communities which undergo substantial social and economic change eventually experience a significant shift in the balance of power (Lutz & Innaccone, 1978). Based on Agger's premise regarding the mutuality of community and educational systems, it can be assumed that community change becomes manifested in the educational system by similar shifts in power bases. Thus the relationship between the school and its environment is one of dynamic interplay between the formal and informal power structures reflected in society.

Community power is based in several areas, most notably politics, finance, education, recreation and religion. Corwin's (1965) research on the power structure of a community formulated a typology of school community power relations which centered around issues arising in the environment. Since Corwin's Type II cell reflects the power environment

relevant to this study, only its characteristics are provided. Note that in this cell type the school is predominately locally oriented and encounters a cosmopolitan community.

There is a potentially explosive relationship which develops whenever rapid changes in the community occur independently of changes among school personnel. Rapid transitions within the central city may leave a tradition-directed, middle-class school district with a locally oriented staff in the middle of new slums or apartment houses with high mobility rates. The cell type itself tends to be transitional since community changes will eventually be reflected in school board composition, and the increased demand for teachers will limit the selection of homeguard personnel.

Previous arguments (see literature review on decision making) have supported the belief that power is often as fleeting as issues which because of their transitory nature create various group affiliations. This issue of the transactional character of political and social activities is reflective of the concept "social exchange relationships. This perspective assumes that all actions within a system can be analyzed and predicted from the costs and benefits which they produce for participants" (Mitchell, 1980). Thus, the interactions that occur between the power and decision modes reflects the process of "collective bargaining" in governance as participants will use whatever power resources they can to influence the decision locus and the decisional outcome.

The exercise of power itself can be described as social exchange. Through various interactions, influence moves in multiple directions. By arranging contingencies which contain incentives for others to act in a desired way, power is exercised.

Discussions of power on school boards suggest "that the same interests and cleavages which divide the community divide the school board as well. . . . School board members are undoubtedly directly tied in with the informal community power structures" (Corwin, 1965, pp. 379-380).

In addressing the effect of change on educational policies, Boyd (1979) stated, "it is - or should be - a platitude that policies (educational or otherwise) are heavily influenced by social change" (p. 275). This is rarely the case, however, as Perlman and Gurin (1972) clarified:

> In an attempt to stabilize and control their environments, agencies will recruit powerful citizens into the leadership or policy-making structure as a means of averting threats to its stability or existence. Community influentials minimize the possibility of any arbitrary community actions or decisions detrimental to the needs of the agency and protect the agencies considerable resources in times of crisis. (p. 163)

The study of school board structure has revealed that its members represent a select minority of the community (Male, 1977; Lutz, 1980; Tucker & Zeigler, 1980). The effect this has on decision making is varied. Lutz (1980) offered the following arguments regarding the "culture of school boards":

- They honestly strive to do what is best for the total community within their class value system.
- They spend large amounts of time in pursuit of excellence in education, as they view it.
- They tend to reject being influenced by "special interest" groups - particularly those whose values are different from their own.
- The vast majority respect - even revere - the superintendent as the professional expert; looking to the superintendent almost exclusively, for recommendations and information and for the implementation of the policies they exact upon his or her recommendation. (p. 459)

It is further contested that the superintendent dominates proposal development. The basic resource of the superintendent is his/her expertise rather than more traditional political skills and this is not accepted as negotiable. This is why the issue of school closure which cannot be resolved by technical skills, causes so much trouble for the superintendent. Interestingly enough, "the educational expert is accorded greater deference than perhaps any other professional in public life" (Tucker & Zeigler, 1980, p. 13).

Particular reference to community reaction when school boards decide a school should close support that the problem is not one of autonomous behavior of school officials. Instead, the difficulty in acting decisively is rooted in value conflicts between responsiveness and efficiency as well as competing role interests between board members and administrators. These conflicts have been intensified in recent years by the growing strength of educational interest groups (Berger, 1983).

In conclusion, the changing climate of educational systems reflects the turmoil in the larger social system. The ability to adapt to a changing environment and the amount of environmental support which the organization (school) can secure, spell the difference between effective and ineffective organization. "One of the fundamental administrative dilemmas concerns precisely how much organizational autonomy must be sacrificed in order to gain environmental support" (Corwin, 1965, p. 415).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Population Sample

The population sample of this study was confined to a specific Newfoundland school board and the interest groups which attempted to influence a school closure decision. The sample was subdivided into three groups: (a) legislative decision makers, (b) senior officials, and (c) impacted group.

The legislative group comprised five interviewees--the chairperson of the school board, the vice-chairperson, the secretary, chairperson of facilities, and chairperson of property.

The senior officials' group comprised five interviewees--the superintendent, the assistant superintendent, the business manager, the director of elementary schools, and the principal of the closing school.

The impacted group included eight interviewees--full-time staff members of the closing school, the vice-principal, the school chaplain, and the president of the Home and School Association.

Instrument

In 1974, Presthus documented a comparative study of interest group involvement in Canada and the United States. In this study entitled Elites in the Policy Process, Presthus

used three schedules to analyze the legitimacy and behavior of interest groups in a cross-national perspective. Since the focus of this study was on interest group involvement in a specific school board issue, the original instrument used by Presthus was modified. This permitted an examination of interest groups in a case study situation rather than in a sample based research.

To facilitate comprehensive documentation of the case, the researcher focused on one of the techniques utilized by Presthus--the semi-structured interview. This increased the accessibility to pertinent data and allowed for later generalizations arising from viewing the process in its totality rather than as isolated incidents.

Instrument Validation and Pilot Study

Face and content validity were assumed to be present in the original format of the instrument as used by Presthus in the 1974 study. However, to ensure face and content validity of the present instrument appropriate steps were taken. The instrument was submitted to graduate students and professors in the Faculty of Education at Memorial University for their comments regarding additions and/or deletions. As well, a thorough perusal of literature related to interest group involvement in decision making was undertaken by the researcher. Finally, a pilot study was administered to one school board in the province with respondents being asked to comment on the instrument's clarity, preciseness and appropriateness. The school board

participating in the pilot study was selected on the basis of similar geographic and denominational characteristics.

Administration of the Questionnaire and Interview

The superintendent of the Avalon Consolidated School Board District was formally requested to grant approval for (a) the case study, (b) the inclusion of school board personnel as research participants, and (c) access to school board documents related to the case study. When permission was granted, arrangements regarding the date and time of interviewing was finalized. At the completion of the interview period, the researcher analyzed and interpreted all recorded information.

Data Analysis

Because of the nature of the study, qualitative analysis rather than statistical analysis was employed. This technique permitted a more holistic approach to analysis of data in that the subjectivity of the participant is seen as a legitimate variable influencing the issue being examined. Therefore, rather than analyze the closure as an issue onto itself, it was necessary to examine the processes and personalities which influenced and were influenced by the school closure.

Reliability Measures

A number of measures were undertaken to increase the reliability of the results of this study. The researcher

delineated a number of specific questions for the study which were addressed in the instrument designed by Presthus. The researcher employed systematic recording procedures so as to ensure the appropriate documentation of the interviewee's response. All interviews were taped with the consent of the subjects and later transcribed verbatim. The interview period took place over a four-month duration with each interview lasting between 45 minutes to 90 minutes. Each respondent was interviewed once. Several reports were obtained and used to substantiate the findings. These reports included a brief which had been presented to the school board by the Home and School Association, the public opinion survey report which had been authorized by the school board, a copy of the annual general report of the school board for 1977-1978, and a verbal report of specific information related to the school closure decision as contained in the school board minutes. Direct access to school board minutes was not permitted. The researcher constantly strived to maintain objectivity and minimize bias in interpreting the data.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA AND STATEMENT OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to analyze the role of interest groups on educational decision making. A specific school closure was examined including the interactions of several groups in that issue. The groups were selected because of the positions they held in the decision-making hierarchy. For example, the legislative group, or school board in this instance, is usually responsible for policy ratification. In education, this is where ultimate responsibility for a decision lies. The second group was based on representatives of senior administrators. This is where recommendations for decisions culminate before being passed to the school board. These recommendations are based on the advice of professional administrative staff or can originate with the superintendent. The third group consisted of those individuals who were affected by the decision. In other words, the decision in this issue would affect their involvement with the school.

The legislative group consisted of the school board chairperson, the vice-chairperson, the secretary, the chairperson of facilities, and the chairperson of property. These were the key participants in the closure decision. The senior officials group includes the superintendent, the assistant superintendent, the business manager, the director

of elementary schools, and the principal of the closing school. The impacted group of eight included full-time staff members of the closed school, the vice-principal, the school chaplain, and the president of the Home and School Association.

Two members of the senior officials excluded themselves from the study during the interviewing process because they were not involved in the school closure decision. These included the business manager and the director of elementary schools.

A fourth group which the study attempted to involve was the parents of the closing school. Unfortunately, registers containing pertinent data necessary for locating these parents were mislaid at the time of closure. Therefore, the parent questionnaire had to be abandoned.

The approach used to gather data from the remaining 16 subjects was a semi-structured interview. These interviews were recorded and later used to elaborate on notes compiled by the researcher during the interviewing process. The interviews ranged in length from 45 minutes to 2 hours. Questions used in the semi-structured interview were stated in such a way as to provide indepth answers to the seven specific questions addressed in the statement of the problem. The interview responses are written so that each group's opinions are recorded separately under five separate headings. They are as follows:

- Time and Circumstances of Decision to Close.
- Interest Group Participation.
- Interest Group's Effect in Decisional Procedure.
- Influence Methods Used by Interest Groups.

- Respondents' Views on the Specific Questions Addressed in the Study.

Time and Circumstances of Decision to Close

Attempts to identify the time and circumstances surrounding the school closure decision usually required clarification in that respondents initially gave the date the school doors closed rather than the time of the decision. Table 1 provides an overview of responses to this point.

Legislative Group

All members identified an approximate period of one year prior to the closure as the time the decision was made. No reference to a formal date was provided--even upon request. Instead, the decision was seen as extending over a period of time and being more or less understood when Kindergarten registration had not taken place the year prior. As one respondent put it, "parents may not have received formal notice of closure, but news of this nature travels quickly. If somebody opposes they jump on the bandwagon." Because of pressure group involvement the decision became a long and drawn out issue. "It was a situation where the board should have provided the facts and the figures and explained that they were sorry but this was the way it had to be. Instead," the legislative member stated, "I really and truly believe the board probably pussy-footed around for a month or two."

Table 1

Time and Circumstances of Decision

Respondent	Time of Decision	Reasons for Decision: Enrollment Decline	Staff for new school	Extension of central office
	Legislative			
1	1 yr.	x	x	
2	1 yr.	x		
3	1 yr.	x		
4	1 yr.	x		
5	1 yr. (Kdg.)	x	x	x
	Total	5/5	2/5	1/5
	Senior Officials			
1	1 yr. (Kdg.)	x	x	
2	1 yr. (Kdg.)	x		x
3	1 yr.	x		x
	Total	3/3	1/3	2/3
	Impacted Group			
1	1 yr. (Kdg.)	x		x
2	1 yr. (Kdg.)	x	x	x
3	1 yr. (Kdg.)	x	x	x
4	1 yr. (Kdg.)	x		
5	1 yr. (Kdg.)	x		x
6	1 yr. (Kdg.)	x		x
7	1 yr. (Kdg.)	x	x	
8	1 yr. (Kdg.)	x	x	x
	Total	8/8	4/8	6/8
		16/16 agreed	7/16 agreed	9/16 agreed

*Kdg.: This indicates that the time of decision was related to closure of kindergarten class.

An alternative point of view proposed that teachers received formal notice when the decision was made (however, no specific date was given). He elaborated that you don't inform anybody until a decision is made. This would be silly because what you decide today may be vastly changed tomorrow by some other activity. Consequently, you wait, get objectives lined up, make sure your perspective is clear and then you make a decision. Simultaneously, you inform all those concerned and give them the right to rebuttal.

Respondents addressed three possible reasons related to the board's position on closure. The reason frequently cited was a consistently declining enrollment. Insufficient students meant fewer teachers and fewer programs. A comparable educational program was available from a school operated by the same board and located on the same block so students would not be adversely affected by transfer. A second reason proposed that staff was required at a newer facility and closure at this school would create the needed positions. This argument was denied as being a primary consideration by the majority of respondents although it was pointed out that teacher reassignment is a practical reality in declining enrollment situations. The third reason was denied by most of the group. It advocated that the school board required additional central office space and the closing school could alleviate this problem. Four of the five respondents acknowledged that this argument was raised and discussed during school board meetings but only in response to public

demand rather than as a possibility for action on their part. It was emphasized several times that "at no time" had this ever been considered as a reason for closure.

The decision was arrived at after several alternatives had been examined. Transferring students from a two-stream school to offset the decline was not seen as a viable solution. A questionnaire was authorized by the board to determine the feasibility of bussing children from peripheral areas of the district to the center of the city, thus counteracting mobility trends. The questionnaire did not provide a solution to the problem. Two reports on pupil population shift were initiated--one by the board and the other conducted by the University. These reports attempted to project which schools would be most adversely affected in the future and how existing schools could be best organized to take care of anticipated population changes. The possibility of the University assuming a role in developing a student teacher program was advocated. It was suggested that this would be an ideal practical offshoot of the teacher education program. This was not followed up as an alternative. One member advocated that a more creative approach to school utilization be considered. For example, the need for adequate day-care centers, facilities for children with special needs or community centers were possible routes to explore. With economic realities a prime factor, the board concluded the best decision was to close the school in question.

Senior Officials

Respondents all concluded that the decision to close the school was made one year prior to actual closure. As with the legislative group, it was difficult to exact the specific date when the decision was made. It was reiterated that the decision extended over a period of time and was often correlated with the closing out of the kindergarten class. One senior official recalled that "a lot of people said by closing our kindergarten, you're telling people that the school is going to close." Although board officials told the kindergarten teacher her job would be redundant, there was never formal notification to the other teachers or to the Home and School Association.

A different view given by another senior official stated that people were asked to have input before the decision was made, but parents were told the decision was imminent. He recalled board officials, professional staff and the superintendent providing reasons why the school was proposed to be closed and parents being given the opportunity to comment.

Discussion regarding the board's position and major objective in closing the school, resulted in the same reasons being cited as those identified by the legislative group. Declining enrollment was an obvious reason but officials supported the transfer of students to the alternate facility on the same block. They also said the quality of education would not be affected. The demand for positions to be

filled at a new school on the outskirts of the city, was not relevant to the closure of the given school in the opinion of two respondents. The third member, however, felt this was a mitigating factor which permitted the board to resolve the dilemma of staffing the new school. The need to use the school as an extra facility for central office was supported by the majority of interviewees. However, because of public outcry it was believed the board's motive would be misunderstood. One member adamantly denied this was the case. The idea that it could be used to complement school board offices was "kicked around" but there was never any proof to substantiate this was a motive for closure.

Many of the alternatives stated by the legislative group were reiterated by senior officials. Consideration of juggling enrollments from more densely populated schools in the district to those with declining populations was not seen as a general solution to the district's downward trend in student numbers. Problems with bussing children into the city was complicated by the fact that the city's bus system had the exclusive franchise for transportation. Therefore, the alternative of moving students from the outlying areas of the district was not feasible. Based on these considerations, the recommendation was made to the school board to close out the school in question.

Impacted Group

The eight respondents in this category also found difficulty in expressing a specific time for the decision to close the school. All members referred to the kindergarten closure as a significant point in the decision and thus used the time frame of one year prior to closure as a reference. It was stated that teachers were kept in the dark. The school board made the decision and left it until the last minute to decide what would happen to the staff. One member recalled how the issue was heard through the grapevine; yet, when central office staff were approached and asked to qualify the rumor it denied the school was going to close.

Another respondent who was also a school board member, stated he became formally aware of the closure after attending a Home and School meeting. The majority emphasized they had never received formal notification, however one teacher recalled a visit from a school board official. This visit occurred shortly before the deadline specified in the collective agreement for teachers to be informed of redundancy. "Maybe there was a defeatist attitude," one teacher said, "we felt very helpless, everything was futile because all the decisions had been made."

It was also thought that the Home and School, as a group representing teachers and parents, had a right to be given the courtesy of knowing what was going on. Instead, one member stated they were completely ignored. No

respondent in this category presented an alternate view of the decision although one member did address the dilemma from the board's perspective as they perceived it. "The decision was based on financial reasons. It wasn't the board's intention to hurt anyone, make anyone feel bad or put anyone out in the cold. It was a decision they were forced to make and maybe if we were in that situation, we'd do it the same way."

Information supplied by the impacted group regarding the board's position and objective in closing out the school followed the profile of the first two groups. All supported the view that declining enrollment had been a major reason for the board's decision. Reference was made to the fact that declining numbers in kindergarten registration had been aggravated by central office. This was due to new parents being rerouted to neighboring schools in the district before the decision to close had been made public. One-half of the respondents agreed that the second proposal of teachers being needed for the new school was indeed a consideration for closure; the other members disagreed. The belief that the school board hoped to use the school to extend central office space was supported by six of the eight respondents. It was argued that not only had city council been approached about renovations, but a school board member as well as the superintendent had unintentionally substantiated the fact a year earlier. The issue became a heated and emotional one, according to several

respondents. "There was no doubt about it," concluded one member, "this was the school board's intention but we thwarted the idea by going public." Several alternatives were proposed by this group. These included an active program of solicitation of enrollment; use of the school for research and development into various aspects of elementary education by the University, and involvement of the Home and School to increase financial resources--in particular the salary unit of the kindergarten teacher. It was stated that the school board should stop chasing the population and give more consideration to the effects such decisions have on children. The decision to close the school remained however, and the alternative proposed by the impacted group were never considered in their opinion.

Interest Groups' Participation

This section reports on member and group positions regarding the school closure decision. It also lists the various interest groups that each member identified as participating in the process. The hierarchical level where groups tried to exert influence and the level in the decisional process where input was attempted is clarified. Concluding remarks describe the relationship between the school board and the interest group.

Legislative Group

Within this group, four of the five members supported the board's motion to close the school. The fifth

member stated that although she chose not to support the decision, it was obviously expected that each member would support the board over the parents.

Identification of those participating in the decision resulted in six interest groups in addition to the school board being identified. Table 2 illustrates these findings.

Table 2

Interest Groups Identified by Legislators

Respondent	Home and School	CBC	Chaplain	MHA	Teachers	School Board Member
1	x	x	-	-	-	-
2	x	-	x	-	-	x
3	x	-	x	x	x	-
4	x	-	x	x	x	-
5	x	-	x	-	x	-
Total	5	1	4	2	3	1

The legislative members stated that interest group reaction surfaced in several ways; some of which were different from the usual means by which legislators become aware of pressure demands. Table 3 depicts these views. The table shows that four out of five respondents felt the usual means by which they became aware of interest group demands was at school board meetings. One member identified the home and school meeting as the usual source of awareness. In this issue, however, only two respondents became aware during the

school board meeting. One identified the source of awareness as "rumor" and the remaining two were informed at the home and school meetings.

Table 3

Legislative Group Awareness of Interest Group Demands

Respondent	School Board Meeting		Home and School Meeting		Other	
	This Issue	Usual Means	This Issue	Usual Means	This Issue	Usual Means
1	x	x				
2		x			x rumor	
3	x	x				
4		x	x			
5			x	x		

The relationship that existed between board and interest groups varied. Parents were recognized as being justly concerned by four of the five legislative members. Their right to participate in the decision making was repeatedly qualified. As one member stated: "Although parents have a right to be heard, whether or not they are is a different matter . . . it depends on the evening's agenda, time limits and the particular circumstances." The effect of these controls on interest involvement was clarified by another member who stated: "The board recognizes the group as legitimate but it is done with a so-called reluctance as so many of our democratic institutions do. They give lip service to involving people in their decisions."

Not all members supported parent reaction in this case. The Home and School's involvement was believed to be based on selfish interests and personal concerns rather than on student welfare. They were also seen as exerting considerable influence on teachers who occupied a very precarious position in the issue. Although teachers were rigorously opposed to the closure in the opinions of the legislative member, it was very difficult for them to get up and question the board's stand. This was contradicted by another legislative person who felt the purported fear of teachers speaking out was not well-founded.

The involvement of a school board member as an interest faction outside of the board was based on the support and representation the member provided for the Home and School Association. This support was seen as a radical element within the school board structure. Demands arising from the chaplain were considered to be reflective of the affinity between the church and the school and a natural consequence of the particular individual's philosophy.

All of the interest groups attempted to influence the decision by impacting at the school board level. Four of the five legislative members believed that influence was exerted before the final decision was made and the fifth member could not recall whether it was before or after the closure decision.

Accommodation of interest group input in decision making was referred to by one member as similar to opening Pandora's box. She stated:

> When you involve people, they start caring and making demands; this means a lot more meetings and a lot more headaches. Democracy is a very difficult, unwielding and painful process. To ensure power, you deny information and this is why we have so few people running and voting in school board elections.

It was affirmed by another legislator that people do not generally like to make decisions. Yet, when the board decided the school had to be closed, the decision was based on the best information available. This information had been provided by the board's paid professional staff whom he felt were better able to inform the board than the 'guy in the street'. His attitude towards decision making is depicted in the following remark:

> I'm one of those individuals, I don't care what happens, I just do what I consider correct. I abide by the rules. I may be straightforward and blunt but you know where you are and groups know where they stand. This is one of the paramount qualities for a successful manager--having people know where they stand.

It was emphasized by a different legislator that the best way to deal with decisions was to make them as quickly and quietly as possible. Thus, the groups which frequently express opposition would not have an opportunity to bother the decision maker. This approach was not supported entirely by the legislative group. An alternative view suggested that people who make arbitrary decisions often do so in such a way that they are never held to task for their action. If someone does start asking questions, the decision maker becomes very threatened. The threatening influence was indirectly supported by another member who advocated not yielding to all the little pressure groups.

He remembered that at that particular time there were more pressure groups coming out of the woodwork than "Kellogg had cornflakes."

> Every time the board wanted to do something it had to check with this group, that group or another group. You're an organization that's put in place by government and you're getting caught between them, the board and the public. Suddenly everything was narrowing in on the school board . . . the big, black, ugly old school board was doing all these dirty old things but it had no choice in a lot of instances. I resigned subsequent to this fiasco!

Senior Officials

Within this group, all three members supported the board's decision to close the school. One member stated that he had taken the recommendation to the board for their approval. As indicated in Table 4, all three senior officials identified the Home and School Association and the school chaplain as interest groups. The teachers and the school board member were each identified as an interest group by only one official. No one identified the CBC or the MHA as an interest group.

Table 4

Interest Groups as Identified by Senior Officials

Respondent	Home and School	Chaplain	Teachers	School Board Member
1	x	x		
2	x	x		x
3	x	x	x	
Total	3/3	3/3	1/3	1/3

This group's awareness of interest reaction surfaced in similar ways to the legislative members. Table 5 shows that two of the three senior officials felt the usual means by which they become aware of interest group demands is at school board meetings. The remaining official usually became aware at Home and School meetings. In this issue all three became aware of interest group demands at the Home and School meeting.

Table 5

Senior Officials' Awareness of Interest Group Demands

Respondent	School Board Meetings		Home and School Meetings		Other	
	This Issue	Usual Means	This Issue	Usual Means	This Issue	Usual Means
1		x	x			
2		x	x			
3			x	x		

The relationship between the school board and the interest groups again reflected a mixed view. Parents' concerns were realized but practical concerns took preference. Although there was no personal animosity, things did not always go quietly in the school board. Some members were upset and supported the parents' view, but the majority felt it was the right decision. One senior official saw the closure as an emotional issue for special interest groups. He believed they demonstrated no firm foundation for disputing the board's logic.

The role of teachers as an interest group was questioned by one respondent. If teachers became an organized

pressure group they would constitute a pressure against an employer. Therefore, teachers were advised by the official not to become visible in the issue as it would not reflect a positive employee-employer relationship. Another member believed that teachers supported the board's decision because they realized that enrollment was on the decline and this would result in teacher and program cutbacks. The school board member's involvement as an interest outside of the board was recognized by one senior official. This involvement was seen as contradictory to the expected role of a board member. Another respondent emphasized that no school board has the right to deny involvement to any individual. Since the closure was a mutual problem, the board and interest groups needed to work together.

The chaplain's role was again justified because of school/church relationships. The agreement on consolidation of school boards had also provided for the church to have continued access to school facilities. It was agreed that in this particular situation, the chaplain was seeking to protect church programs which had frequently been held in the school. Because the individual tended to be very vocal and addressed the issue in church, all senior officials identified him as an interest faction.

All senior officials identified interest group influence impacting at the school board level. This supported the view expressed by legislative members. There was also unanimous agreement that influence was exerted before the final decision was made.

The attitude toward interest group participation in the decision was discussed by one official. He reported that by making an early decision, it facilitated group involvement. Then if groups had good points to make they had a long time in which to prove their points. In this particular issue, groups did not have a true knowledge of the situation; however, they were given a time limit to respond even though they were not formally asked. Since the decision was based on the superintendent's recommendation, the board could have accepted or overturned it, but if they overturned it the official felt no alternative course of action was feasible.

One senior official believed initiative for following due process in the school closure was taken from the board by interest groups. This meant the board could not go through a logical route when closing the school. They did not have an opportunity to ease into the situation and make parents aware of good solid reasons for their decision. Instead, information which should have remained confidential did not, and people were reacting to things that the board did not have an opportunity to tell them.

Impacted Group

All respondents in this group opposed the decision to close the school. This response contradicted both legislative and senior official positions but demonstrated the unanimity of the impacted members.

In identifying the various groups which had participated in the decision, four interests other than the school board were acknowledged. Table 6 lists that 8/8 respondents identified the Home and School as an interest group; 8/8 identified the chaplain's participation as an interest group; 7/8 identified the teachers' involvement; and 7/8 identified the school board member.

Table 6

Interest Groups as Identified by Impacted Group

Respondent	Home and School	Chaplain	Teachers	School Board Member
1	x	x	x	x
2	x	x	x	x
3	x	x	x	x
4	x	x	x	x
5	x	x		x
6	x	x	x	
7	x	x	x	x
8	x	x	x	x
Total	8/8	8/8	7/8	7/8

Members of the impacted group became aware of a reactionary response to the closure decision mainly as a result of their relationship with the Home and School Association. One member became informed through 'elite' representation on the school board. Table 7 shows that 7/8 respondents usually became aware of interest group demands at school board meetings. The member was usually informed through an elite representative. In this issue, 6/8 were made aware at a school board meeting and the remaining 2/8 at a Home and School meeting.

Table 7

Impacted Group Awareness of Interest Group Demands

Respondent	School Board Meetings		Home and School Meetings		Other	
	This Issue	Usual Means	This Issue	Usual Means	This Issue	Usual Means
1		x	x			
2	x	x				
3	x	x				
4	x				x (elite representative)	
5	x	x				
6	x	x				
7	x	x				
8	—	x	x			

The relationship that existed between board and interest groups was perceived by teachers, clergy, and Home and School Association as follows: The Home and School Association was treated with almost contempt in the opinion of one member. Their involvement was considered as one of complete interference. "When the Association became vocal the board got their backs up. We fought them, so they dug in . . . but regardless of the closing the board's decision was not unanimous." It was also indicated by one member that the principal had no use for the Home and School Association and considered them a waste of time. Older group members used terms such as antagonistic, controversial, belligerent, strained,

uncooperative and hostile to describe their assessment of the board's relationship with pressure groups.

The impact of the perceived relationship between board and teachers was referred to by four members. As one teacher stated: "We felt pressure because no one was prepared to stand up and say something at a Home and School meeting with school board representatives present . . . everyone was in fear of their jobs." Another teacher reiterated similar thoughts that as school board employees they could not take a stand. A different teacher told how teachers had been given the understanding that if they wanted to keep their jobs they should not take a stand against the board. Although several staff members would have become verbal they were advised by a senior official to "step aside as far as speaking out as it could hurt your position." These teachers made reference to being similarly advised by an administrator. There was one teacher who did not recall being advised to not get involved, although she retired as a result of the school closure.

All of the impacted members attempted to influence the closure decision by focusing on the school board-level of the hierarchy. The group unanimously stated their impact came after the decision was finalized.

Efforts to become active in the decisional process met with different results. One member mentioned how the board invited them to come to a meeting and hear why the

school was being closed but when they showed up, they could not say a word. It was also stressed that the board should have passed out information related to closure sooner and in a different way, thereby allowing teachers to have impact on the meeting. "As it was; no one seemed to have a say, only the board."

Another person believed the whole decision was "cut and dried" because it was convenient for the board. They stated that no one was asked for input. Instead, they were told by the board that it knew what was best so this is what it had decided to do.

A comment from an impacted member mentioned how difficult it was for them to go to meetings, hear their group being lambasted and not have the right to reply. He elaborated that details regarding meetings had to be pried out of the school board and senior officials.

The closure decision could have been handled properly if the board had taken the interest groups in their confidence and indicated there was a problem which both groups needed to take a look at. This would have given the Home and School Association the chance it wanted according to one individual, "an opportunity to become part of the decision-making process."

Interest Groups' Effect in Decision Procedures

This section will focus on procedures involved in the closure decision and whom the various groups held responsible for the outcome. The effect and success of

interest group involvement will also be reported.

Legislative Group

The school board's attitude concerning its role in decision making was discussed by one respondent who believed the school board ethic implied board members were put in place because of a special ability to deal with matters; therefore, they dealt with them quickly and made snap decisions believing everything would be fine. Issues were always dealt with behind closed doors however, and there was real panic when parents came to meetings. One such meeting was remembered where table officers were called out to discuss coping strategies. Word was passed around to other members not to talk, look at or have anything to do with them (interest groups). It was a public meeting and public input was prevented. "The situation was, we were not permitted to be responsible to the public . . . we were saying you've got nothing to do with our decisions and don't get in our way."

Another member stated that public meetings were never refused. Although the public could not participate in debates, they were able to listen and come back with written questions next meeting.

Lack of public participation was due to the fact that meetings were not as spectacular as expected, according to a legislative member. "It was a reason considered meeting--no nonsense was allowed and we didn't consider

things that had no bearing whatsoever. . . . I was accused of being tough but that toughness kept the meeting in order." When a representative of the Home and School wanted to speak, it depended upon full consent being given by the board, as well as agenda and time priorities.

As far as the closure decision was concerned, one member emphasized that the board had people working full time looking into its needs and requirements. Although the board did not always abide by recommendations and decisions of central office staff, a lot of decisions were based on their recommendations. Thus, as one member stated, "in operational decisions the superintendent is kingpin, but in policy decisions he is only an advisor."

The fact that interest groups which are not organized are accommodated by the board was supported by three legislative members. Two believed the board is accessible to all people. The third person referred to the significance of being representative of power structure or being an individual who already holds power. "If they had come together in a group, I've no doubt they would have been received very respectfully." The other two members felt the group would have to be representative of a body of people in order for the board to recognize its right to speak.

The effect and success of interest group involvement was interpreted differently by legislative members. If success was associated with closure than obviously they

did not succeed. However, as one member elaborated, "they made the board aware of the need to make provisions for these people to come to board meetings and do what they have to do . . . the interest groups are out there and we're not going to be able to sit back the way we want!"

This argument was supported by another member who stated interest groups had "won the battle but lost the war." The remaining legislative members felt that no success or effect had come out of pressure group interaction in the school closure decision. The member believed that interest groups were funny in that they raise a storm, go to meetings and hear discussions and then they are never heard of again. He said, "this leads you to believe your decisions were good ones."

The question of whether groups played a useful role was denied by two legislative members. One member used an analogy to describe his opinion: "It's like putting your hand in a bucket of water . . . you can shake it like crazy and stir up a storm, but moments after you take your hand out no change is evident." The other member believed that interest groups did not represent unbiased views. Instead of coming with ideas they chose to bring protest. That was what made the difference in his mind. Two other legislators believed there was a time and a place for interest group involvement if used correctly. The remaining individual believed that it was totally essential to have groups involved in education.

"Their challenge is to become involved in studying education and searching for better methods of educating children. They need to participate in philosophical discussions and be introduced to all kinds of material information so they can become a vital imaginative part of the whole evolution." The need for an infusion of ideas was reported. Yet, because people are appointed from the same groups, it has resulted in everything becoming perpetuated in standard procedure.

This change in attitude towards interest groups was identified by the present board chairman who served in a lesser capacity at the time of closure. There may not have been a change in general philosophy as a consequence of the closure issue, but there was a change in the way groups are handled. The board sends "good" people to small groups and informs them a decision will be made at a later date. They are then given a time period to react and make recommendations. If after several meetings recommendations are seen not to be viable and the board decision is supported by the groups, they can return to other members and recommend support. When a formal letter containing the decision is later received, the public is more prepared. The member concluded by stating, "there's nothing that affects society any more than change."

Senior Officials

In discussing the process of decision making within school boards, one senior official stated, "the superintendent and the board chairman are seen as two thrones of power in decision making, the superintendent as a continuing one and the chairman as a revolving one." This complies with the legislative members' interpretation of administrative roles.

The three senior officials supported the accessability to the board to all groups irrespective of whether they are formally or informally organized.

The effect and success of pressure group participation were again related to the fact that the school had closed. Thus, success was questionable. One member responded to the query of whether the interest group had achieved its ends by asking what indeed the ends were? It was also agreed that as a result of the activities of interest groups in this instance, the board now recognized the legitimacy of the public's involvement in education. If the interest groups intended to make the closing of the school a political issue with the board, then this had been accomplished. If they intended to elect a school board member to represent their concerns, this had also succeeded. However, the member felt these groups never did portray exactly what they wanted.

The other official recounted that interest groups may not have kept the school open but they did exert a concentrated and concerted attempt to influence school

board decisions. This was probably the first time such an effort had been made and it had grave repercussions and a psychological effect on the board making it more cautious.

It was reported that in this particular instance, the groups had an opportunity but misused it. They took the wrong tactic by using material they obtained through questionable means. As well, in this official's view, publicity became too important to the individual members.

The belief in democracy and the need for individuals to have meaningful input into decision making was reported. The official who espoused this belief admitted that in his position as senior administrator the groups had a derogatory effect on him. He sympathized with them, however, and felt that without a democracy people could do what they liked and that would be wrong.

Impacted Group

The discussion of decision making evoked a comment from a teacher who stated, "I think the school board is a law unto itself." Another teacher explained that the board should not have gotten away with closing the school without any say on anyone else's part. A different individual saw the decision as one made "unilaterally, entirely absolutely 100% by the board." Since this person's position was two-fold in that he also served as a board member, it is particularly relevant that he saw the decision being made without any reference whatsoever to the parents and staff.

He further concluded that it was "cut and dried, a foregone conclusion that no matter what arguments anybody might have offered the decision was irrevocable . . . the school was going to close."

It was indicated that teachers saw themselves getting more support from the Home and School Association than from the school board. The board meeting agenda was determined by the central office staff in conjunction with suggestions from the board. Even this measure was seen as prohibitive of public involvement. The principal was concerned about students being drawn into confrontations so he made sure the issue stayed out of school and teachers did not get involved. He stated, "I wouldn't let my teachers, PTA or parents discuss this openly in the corridor while waiting to pick up their children."

Members responded to a question of whether informal interest groups get heard by the school board. One-half of the group felt that neither formal nor informal groups are accommodated. Two members disagreed, but felt the formal groups would get priority over those less organized. The other two members chose not to respond.

The effect and success of interest group participation in this issue again met with a variety of responses. Success was still equated with preventing school closure so in this sense, success was not realized. Five of the eight members reported effects resulting from the

interactions. One member pointed out that the school was not sold after closure as everyone had expected. This was due to interest group intervention. Another member mentioned that an appeals committee was later set up for parents thus giving them access to express their concerns. The group also made the public more aware of the importance of small schools, in one individual's opinion. It was also reported that a greater awareness of group reaction was realized by the board making them now stop and think twice before making a decision. A final comment by a teacher concluded "at least next time they allowed parents to believe they had input--whether or not they did is another concern."

The role of interest groups was seen as useful and necessary by all impacted group members. The reason justifying their roles was accounted for by a member who felt that interest groups are closer to the situation and consequently have a better understanding of decisional impact. School boards are removed away from what's really happening in education. It was stated that when a member of the impacted group was elected to the school board the following year, this distance between the board and school decreased. The member set up a church-school relations committee so that if a similar situation to this closure occurred, he could immediately get in touch with the chaplain and make sure his opinions were expressed through the committee at a board meeting.

Influence Methods Used by Interest Groups

This section reports on the methods employed by interest groups in attempting to influence the school closure decision. Respondents identified the tactics which were most successful and the reasons why. Each interviewee recounted the methods of communication utilized in addressing the closing.

Legislative Group

In responding to the question regarding influence methods employed by interest groups in this issue, one legislative member reported that he was not much concerned with this factor. He felt the way in which groups were working was not in the best interest of education in Newfoundland. Some of the group members had not lived here and were not familiar with the general educational setup. The legislator believed a lot of things they were doing caused animosity and hurt rather than helped the groups. Table 8 indicates legislative members' responses regarding the methods used by interest groups.

The chief tactic reportedly used by interest groups was perceived differently by each legislative member. One individual indicated the main thrust was providing misleading information to the media. A different response proposed groups used their relative position in society to exert a lot of weight and influence. Another individual believed the chief tactic used involved working

through one or two school board members. The remaining legislators reported that confrontation, publicity and attempts to embarrass the board by accusing them of downgrading the facility were the chief means used to influence the board's decision..

Table 8

Influence Methods Employed by Interest Groups: Legislative Views

Respondents	Publicity campaign	Getting membership behind group	Approaching politicians and officials	Combining with other interest groups	Direct approach to school board members	Direct approach to superintendent or senior administrators	Formal submissions to school board	Other
1	x							
2	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
3								
4	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
5	x	x	x		x	x	x	
Total	4/5	3/5	3/5	2/5	3/5	3/5	3/5	

Four of the five members of the legislative group said publicity proved to be the most effective means of addressing the issue. The direct impact of publicity on one member was described as follows:

> One board meeting was crammed with people and hot TV cameras. I wasn't pleased with it. I looked at the situation as - what am I doing-

> here getting involved in all this political [fuss]. I got involved from a volunteer point of view. I wanted to be able to do something for education. All of a sudden, the stuff you see you have to do - you almost become a quasi political organization with everyone taking potshots at you.

Another legislator believed that as an elected or appointed board member the power was there. It gave the board the right to make arbitrary decisions and withhold information. This they could do privately, quickly or whatever way the member liked. Things were set up with that power and power was seen as everything. School boards were credited with paying lip service to involving people in decisions but then they denied them the necessary information to be truly involved. Many decisions made around the table would affect people for years to come, but nobody knows the decisions are being made because it is never reported anywhere. Even letters which are sent to the school board are assumed by the public to reach all members. Yet, one respondent claimed correspondence may stop at the point first received.

The legislative group reported the methods of communication they used to address school closure. Two members chose to respond generally. One member stated that none of the given methods were used. Instead he considered all the facts and when the decision was made parents were informed. Another member indicated the most important method used was sharing school board and parent-teacher information, and then making it public knowledge.

The possible communication methods and members' choices are shown in Table 9.

Table 9

Legislators' Choices of Communication Methods

Respondent	Formal committee meetings	Informal group meetings	Telephone calls	Chance meetings with lobbyists/ school board members	Meetings by appointment	Meetings at social affairs	Letters reports	Other
1	x							
2	made comment							
3	x							
4	made comment							
5		x	x	x				

Senior Offfcials

Two senior officials indicated that all methods detailed in the semi-structure interview had been used by groups to influence the closure decision. The third member remembered only two methods. Table 10 reflects their choices.

In addressing the chief tactic used by groups in their relations with the board, two members reported the effect of interest groups going public and the resulting pressure of public opinion on school board members. One

member described how, when the interest groups initially got involved, it was only concerned about a specific school. After they got so far in the argument, however, and other groups started to react, groups saw the issue as a whole and responded accordingly. This became apparent, in one official's opinion, when the board started to play one parent's group against another.

Table 10

Influence Methods Employed by Interest Groups: Senior Officials' Views

Respondent	Publicity campaign	Getting membership behind group.	Approaching politicians and officials	Combining with other interest groups	Direct approach to school board members	Direct approach to superintendent or senior officials	Formal submission	Other
1						x	x	
2	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
3	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	

Two members agreed that the most effective method used by groups in this issue was the pressure exerted at the school board meetings. This was facilitated by the ability of the Home and School Association to become aware of issues before they became public knowledge. One official believed this information was acquired through covert and underhanded means. Whether the Home and School allowed the proper route to be followed or whether they

just wanted to circumvent the process was questioned by the members.

The remaining official reported how one interest group leader was very flamboyant, outspoken and capable of getting people emotionally involved in issues. He used the media extensively and thus publicity became a primary method of working towards his objective. The official also referred to the benefit accrued to the interest group in having a group member hold a position as school board member. This gave them direct representation to the decision-making arena. The methods of communication employed by senior officials is documented in Table 11.

Table 11

Senior Officials' Choices of Communication Methods

Respondent	Formal committee meetings	Informal group meetings	Telephone calls	Chance meetings with lobbyists or school board members	Meetings by appointment	Meetings at social affairs	Letters reports	Other
1	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
2		x	x	x				
3		x	x	x				

Impacted Group

The methods used by interest groups in achieving their objective regarding the school closure reflects a difference between impacted groups and those perceived by legislators and senior officials. Table 12 reports this difference.

Table 12

Influence Methods Employed by Interest Groups: Impacted Groups' Views

Respondent	Publicity campaign	Getting membership behind group	Approaching politicians and officials	Combining with other interest groups	Direct approach to school board members	Direct approach to superintendent or senior officers	Formal submissions	Other
1	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
2	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
3	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
4	x			x	x	x	x	
5	x	x			x	x	x	
6	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
7	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
8	x	x	x		x	x	x	

One member elaborated that several 'talk shows' had addressed the school closure issue although each group's representative spoke at a different time. The Home and School challenged the school board to a public debate but

the respondent recalled being informed that the board did not take part in such radical procedures. An attempt was also made to encourage all Home and School Associations in the district to unite as well, the member reported how reaction was received from the Canadian Home and School Association.

It was stated that tactics were often vague, because information was withheld from interest groups. It was also a poor time of the year since when school closed for summer vacation it was difficult to get people mobilized.

In discussing which communication method(s) proved most effective, four members referred to publicly focusing on the quality of education and student success in a small school setting. The remaining members agreed that publicity was the most effective measure but they did not associate it directly with the value of education available. The methods of communication used by members of the impacted group are recorded in Table 13.

A member referred to the fact that when they became aware school closure was imminent they asked the board to come to a meeting. However, the board refused because they had not had a chance to discuss interest group reaction and the meeting was felt to be premature. It was reported that the Minister of Education, who was also Member of the House of Assembly for the district, was approached by the groups. He did go to one board meeting and suggested that

the decision to close be postponed for a year. This suggestion met with little support. Finally, a brief was prepared by the Home and School Association and submitted to the board. Copies were forwarded to all radio stations in St. John's, the Minister of Education, the Student Teaching Division of Memorial University of Newfoundland, and the Denominational Education Committee. In the response given by the impacted group members, it was stated that no reply was ever received from the board.

Table 13

Impacted Group's Choices of Communication Methods

Respondent	Formal committee hearings	Informal group meetings	Telephone calls	Chance meeting with lobbyists/ school board members	Meetings by appointment	Meeting at social affairs	Letters reports	Other
1	x	x	x	x			x	
2		x						
3								
4		x	x					
5	x	x		x				
6		x	x	x				
7		x	x	x	x		x	
8		x	x	x				

Respondents' Views on the Specific Questions Addressed in the Study

This section responds to the seven specific questions addressed in the research.

1. Relative to this particular school closure, what was the initial problem defined by the governing school board?

The problem defined by the school board was declining enrollment and the resulting effects it had on programs and teacher positions. In a time of economic restraint the board was faced with finding a solution and the alternative chosen was to close a school. All 16 respondents in the study identified this reason as the school board problem.

Two other reasons for closing were cited. The need to extend central office space was identified by nine of the 16 respondents, however the majority stressed this was rumor only. Two persons did state there was proof this was the board's intention but public outcry prevented the board from following up the proposal.

The issue of closing one school to provide staff positions for a new facility was acknowledged by seven of the 16 respondents. Rather than this being a reason for closure in itself however, most individuals believed it was an extension of the problem with declining enrollments.

2. What probable solutions were considered to solve the specified problem?

Many solutions were examined in an attempt to provide an alternative course of action to school closure. The proposed solutions included:

(a) transferring students from a two-stream school to offset the decline;

(b) bussing children from peripheral areas of the district where demands for new schools were originating to schools with declining enrollments in the city center;

(c) examining population shifts through two different studies so that projections could be made about which schools would be most adversely affected in the future and how existing schools could be best organized to take care of anticipated population changes.

Several solutions proposed by the impacted group included:

(a) initiating a program to solicit enrollment;

(b) using the school for research and development into various aspects of education in conjunction with the University;

(c) using the Home and School Association as a source for increasing financial resources.

Whether these solutions were considered by the board was not determined.

3. Was this decisional outcome an output of (a) the formal organization, or (b) other actors within the system?

The decisional outcome was based on a recommendation from the superintendent. His recommendations came as a result of research completed by the professional staff into the needs and requirements of the district. The board accepted the advice of the superintendent and made the decision to close the school. Although legislators and senior officials felt an opportunity was provided for the interest groups to address the decision to close, all impacted members stated they did not support the decision and they were not part of the decisional process. To quote one respondent: "It was a decision that the board made unilaterally, entirely 100% without any reference to the parents or teachers who went there."

4. What operational procedure did the formal organization follow in reaching its decision?

Research indicates that the operational procedure followed by the board was to examine the recommendations from central office staff. The recommendations and/or decisions were not always accepted by the school board but many decisions were based on their recommendations. Although six of eight respondents felt interest groups got involved in the decision before it became finalized by the board, these six were all legislators or senior officials.

All eight members of the impacted group stated the decision had been finalized when they became aware the school was closed. A chronological report based on a school board member's verbal report of the board minutes is provided. This report was obtained after the legislative and senior official groups had been interviewed:

February 24, 1977

The superintendent submitted a report to the school board. This report contained information related to the declining numbers at the school in question. In September, 1976 the school enrollment was 199 students--by September, 1977 the numbers had declined to 132. However, there had been no kindergarten registration permitted that year.

March 3, 1977

Word was received by the Home and School Association that their school would close. The president of the Home and School forwarded a letter to the superintendent requesting school board members to attend a Home and School meeting to be held on March 23 to discuss the school closing. This letter was acknowledged by the superintendent but because the request had not been discussed by the board, the Association was told there would not be representation from board office at the Home and School meeting.

The same month the superintendent met with the staff and principal of the school and advised them the

board would be looking for a principal for a one-year term as the present principal was retiring. It was also recommended that due to declining enrollment, the kindergarten class scheduled for next year would be consolidated with another kindergarten class at a nearby school. Therefore, there would be no kindergarten registration that year. It was documented that this matter would be held in abeyance until the board had made a decision. In the interim, statistical information would be tabulated and a special meeting would then be convened to discuss the matter.

April 19, 1977

The superintendent advised the kindergarten class had been closed and the school would contain grades one to six for the coming year. The superintendent read a reply to the brief submitted by the Home and School Association to the board.

March 2, 1978

Following a lengthy discussion, a motion was made recommending that the board close the school but retain the building for one year allowing the local parish to continue use of the facility. One member voted against the motion and two members abstained.

April 27, 1978

Two requests for use of the school were submitted by the superintendent. The board referred these requests to the superintendent of works.

May 25, 1978

A government request for use of the school to accommodate children with special needs was noted.

5. What were the demands, functions and resources of interest groups?

The demands of the interest groups were related to two specific concerns. The primary concern was to prevent their school from closing, and the secondary concern was to become part of the decision-making process.

In this particular case the interest groups most frequently identified included the Home and School Association, teachers, chaplain, and an individual school board member. The Home and School's function was to lobby the internal and external environment. It also acted as an informal information source for teachers in the school and reflected their concerns back to the board.

The teachers' function was to maintain equilibrium in the educational environment. Because of the believed restrictions of employee-employer relationships, it was difficult to fulfill any other function.

The function of the chaplain was to influence board decisions and exert pressure based on the philosophy of

church-school relationships. He was also able to mobilize support because many of his congregation were parents or students of the school.

The function of the school board member was to provide representation to both board and public. This role was facilitated by sharing information and acting as an intermediary between opposing forces.

The resources of interest group members included having elite representation on the school board in the person of the chaplain and an individual school board member. The Home and School president was also a resource in that he was recognized as being vocal, flamboyant, able to get people emotionally involved in the issue and a good articulator of their demands. The fact that two staff members had spouses who held positions of influence was another significant resource. This provided the interest group members with elite access to decision-making arenas and information. Because the minister's congregation comprised many parents and students of the closing school, this was a resource that could be mobilized to involve other church members and broaden the interest group's support base.

6. Who participated in the various levels of decision making and at what stage?

In this response, Agger's decision-making model was used to analyze the series of related acts which resulted in the decision to close the school.

(i) Policy formulation

This stage occurs when someone thinks a problem can be alleviated, solved, or prevented by a shift in the scope of government. In this particular study the policy formulation stage occurred when the superintendent decided that changes in population trends were going to impact on school closures in the future.

(ii) Policy deliberation

This stage takes on the political action form of talking, writing, listening, or reading, and may be open or secret. In this study it involved the superintendent inviting the professional staff to investigate the needs and requirements of the board in regards to changes in population trends.

(iii) Organization of political support

This stage involves holding and attending meetings to plan political strategy, producing and distributing information or otherwise mobilizing support for or against the perceived changes. This stage was implemented by the superintendent but only with a select group of school board members. Comments from the respondents in the study suggest it was at this stage that rumor of the possible closure surfaced informally. Although it was denied by central office, the decisional process had now become a political issue with opposing sides seeking to solicit a

a support base capable of influencing the potential closure.

(iv) Authoritative consideration

This is where a variety of techniques are used to make decisional choices. This may involve formal voting, informal selection procedures, or acting as an independent lawmaker. The superintendent did bring the recommendation to close the school to the board meeting. A legislative member stated, "the submission was made from the superintendent and professional staff to the board as a whole. It was not finalized, it has not been voted on, but for all practical purposes the decision had been made because of declining enrollments." The vagueness surrounding the actual decision was reflected by all 16 respondents in the study. Based on their comments, the decision to close was seen as synonomous with the closure of the kindergarten class the year prior.

(v) Event: decisional outcome

This involves purposeful behavior by participants but does not require particular forms of choice making. In other words, the participants select one or two ways to act. In the closing of the school, the legislators and senior officials chose to initiate the decision, whereas the groups being affected chose to consolidate their efforts to influence the board.

(vi) Promulgation of the decisional outcome

This is the stage where the existing policy is affirmed or quietly and covertly changed. In this instance, the board decided to keep the school closed to regular students regardless of demands from outside groups.

(vii) Policy effectuation

This is the stage which generates new policy formulations. In this specific case it was reported that the board would use the closing facility for central office space. Instead, however, the facility was rented to government and used as a school for children with special needs. One impacted group member felt this was an unanticipated move by the board and the direct consequence of public pressure. Instead of using the school themselves or selling it commercially, the board effected a new policy based on governmental rental.

7. How did the various groups communicate their demands to the board?

In order to facilitate interest articulation, the interest groups used a variety of measures. Publicity was the chief means and was directly credited with increasing public pressure, according to one respondent. More than one-half of respondents felt that use of publicity proved to be the most effective tactic in creating awareness of

interest group demands. Table 14 provides an overview of the methods used by interest groups as perceived by legislators, senior officials and the impacted group..

Table 14

How Interest Groups Communicated Their Demands to the School Board

Respondents	Publicity campaign	Getting membership behind group	Approaching officials and politicians	Combining with other interest groups	Direct approach to school board members	Direct approach to superintendent or senior administrators	Formal submission to school board	Other
1	x							
2	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
3	comment							
4	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
5	x	x	x		x	x	x	
Legislative Totals	4/8	3/5	3/5	2/5	3/5	3/5	3/5	0
6						x	x	
7	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
8	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Senior Official Totals	2/3	2/3	2/3	2/3	2/3	3/3	3/3	0
9	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
10	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
11	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
12	x			x	x	x	x	
13	x	x			x	x	x	
14	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
15	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
16	x	x	x		x	x	x	
Impacted Group Totals	8/8	7/8	6/8	6/8	8/8	8/8	8/8	0
Grand Totals	14/16	12/16	11/16	10/16	13/16	14/16	14/16	-

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of interest groups in educational decision making. The case study approach was used by the researcher and focused on a specific school board decision to close a neighborhood school. A deliberate effort was made to concentrate on a closure decision since this issue reflects a politically volatile environment which often gives rise to interest group formation. The timing of the study is particularly important as school boards and public are immersed in meeting the demands of declining enrollments which frequently result in school closure.

The semi-structured interview technique was used. This provided the researcher an opportunity to probe for information and elicit specific detailed opinions which may have otherwise been withheld, especially since such issues often have great emotional impact.

The questions comprising the semi-structure interview were adapted from an instrument used by Presthus (1974) in studying elites in the policy-making process. It contained 20 questions, each chosen to provide indepth data pertinent to the seven specific questions addressed in the thesis. The revised instrument was given to graduate students and staff in educational administration for

evaluation as to clarity and conciseness. It was also examined by another school board for applicability. Minor editorial changes were made.

The research was carried out in a cosmopolitan district located within the provincial capital. Literature has shown that communities close to the hub of government activity frequently give rise to interest group interactions, so this was identified as a prime location to examine reaction to school closure.

All 16 participants originally identified in the study were interviewed. It was often necessary to establish some rapport before the actual interview, as the decision to close this particular school had brought about extremely emotional and heated dispute. Several respondents expressed fear of reprisal even though considerable time had elapsed since the decision. All eventually agreed their interview could be taped, but several stressed confidentiality and anonymity.

Although the findings may suggest occasional discrepancies in the responses of the subjects, it is imperative to remember that each individual described the closure from his or her perspective. Thus as Bogdan and Taylor (1975) elaborated, "both may be telling the truth according to their own perspectives: their own interpretations, rationalizations, fabrications, prejudices, and exaggerations" (p. 9).

Summary and Conclusions

It is quite predictable that school closings will stimulate community protest regardless of whether a school board acts responsibly and with good intentions. This community protest will surface in a variety of ways including media, rumor, or blatant confrontations. Coalitions will form and individuals will rise to initiate interest group opposition to a government's decision. The stability of any system is maintained by balancing internal and external forces which impact upon it. An examination of the school board decision to close a school and the ensuing reactionary demands can be examined through Easton's framework of systems analysis. This provides an understanding of the allocative process and the conditions which allow it to persist as it copes with environmental stresses.

The decline in student numbers provided statistical fact that changes were taking place in the internal environment as a consequence of changes in the community. Population shifts and mobility trends in the external environment resulted in demands for new schools in the peripheral areas of the district where few had previously been needed. Yet, the superintendent realized that smaller, neighborhood schools in the city centers could not continue to operate effectively if student numbers did not exist to justify teacher and program allocation. Two legitimate demands, both competed for scarce resources and someone had to decide. In this case, the superintendent initiated action by the

professional office staff to research the needs and requirements of the board with reference to student population. Input from this group supported the need for peripheral schools and reaffirmed the problem with declining enrollments in the inner city areas. The superintendent, acting as political broker, considered the stress impinging on the internal environment and recommended that the board close the inner city school. The support from the school board, however, was being affected by input from pressure groups who now realized their school was in jeopardy. Within-puts from a board member were also surfacing as she attempted to represent the concerns of the parents and her personal philosophy regarding small schools. The school chaplain, who also served as board member, was converting outputs from his congregation into inputs in the form of demands on the school board. Because of his elite position, he became a boundary spanner inputing and critiquing to parents, teachers and school board. The president of the Home and School Association used various access channels to articulate additional demands on the school board. One legislative respondent identified this leader's ability to aggregate support as a prime reason the school closure became such a political issue. In his capacity as gatekeeper, the Home and School president served as a liaison between teachers and school board. Much of the teacher's information related to the closure was credited with coming from this source. The conversion process extended over a period

of time as a result of complex interrelationships within and among the group members involved. The eventual output of the system was a closure decision which as Easton (cited in Wirt & Kirst) defined "mirrored the structure of power and privilege" (p. 17).

The process did not end with closure, however, as additional input from the intrasocietal environment now articulated demands for use of the empty facility. This demand resulted in the school being rented rather than sold commercially or converted into central office space. As one respondent so aptly put it, however, "don't worry the process hasn't ended yet."

It now becomes necessary to examine why any one group was more effective than another in influencing the decisional outcome.

Using Steele's model of interest group interactions, a comparison of group characteristics will be attempted, thereby allowing some degree of prediction regarding the group's success. Three variables were identified, each of which is dichotomous; this provides for a total of eight possible methods of describing interest groups as follows:

1. ad hoc-appointed
2. ad hoc-emerged
3. standing-appointed
4. standing-emerged
5. formally organized-appointed
6. formally organized-emerged
7. informally organized-appointed
8. informally organized-emerged

Consideration of the characteristics evident in the Home and School Association show that as a formally

organized group, there were assigned responsibilities and a division of labor. According to Steele this would suggest greater effectiveness. However, the Association emerged as a result of parent initiative rather than being formally appointed by school board or government. Consequently, it did not always have the endorsement and support of the administration, nor the resources to influence the more powerful school board.

In examining the involvement of the anomic interest--the chaplain--it is necessary to consider it from two views. In one respect he was appointed member of a formally organized board. He therefore should have had the endorsement and support of the administration. As well, greater consideration should have been given to his recommendations. On the other hand, in his capacity as a special interest, he would have to be described as the less powerful and effective emerged force. Whether the school board recognized his participation as school board member first, or special interest first was not determined in this study.

The individual school board member whom many identified as a member of an interest group falls into a similar dilemma. Although an appointed member of a formally organized body, the characteristics normally attributed would be questionable in this instance. Whether the governing structure, the school board, saw her role as board member or interest group member is difficult to assess. As an appointed member she was given the endorsement to distribute a questionnaire.

Yet, the motive behind the endorsement was eluded to by a legislative member in such a way as to raise doubt.

Steele's model, while extremely valuable, had limitations for the groups already identified because of the dual capacities in which they served.

If one analyzed the school board's role as that of an interest group, the assumptions regarding perceived effectiveness becomes pronounced.

As an appointed group the school board has the endorsement and support of the administration. Therefore, resources were readily made available to the board to use as it saw fit. Suggestions and recommendations from this group also carried considerable weight in the decisional process.

As a formally organized group, it did have a division of labor, assigned responsibilities and a set schedule of work to be done. These factors all contributed to greater effectiveness and the eventual success of the board in realizing its initial decision to close the school.

In conclusion, the impact of interest groups on the school board's decision to close the school did not bring specific change. Nevertheless, 14 of the 16 respondents, or 87.5%, agreed that the role of interest groups in this decision was a useful and necessary one. It would seem that the legislative member who quoted "they won the battle but lost the war" was not too far off in her assessment of

the public's right to participate in educational decision making.

Recommendations for Action

It was originally affirmed that the case study technique does not facilitate broad generalizations based on conclusions. It is reasonable to conclude, however, that the role of interest group involvement in educational decision making was substantiated. Based on this conclusion the following recommendations for action are presented.

1. It is suggested that the process of public participation in education be changed to facilitate true participation rather than reaction. This may require replacing the formal, structured technique of public meetings and rules of order which often serve as invisible controls of input, with a more informal approach.
2. It is suggested that the school board ensure that interest groups expected to implement a decision be actively involved in the decisional process and the administrative role should be to assist groups in identifying adequate places of intervention.
3. It is suggested that administrators recognize the initial mistrust surrounding interest group demands and seek to alleviate this mistrust by identifying the nature of the interest, assuring the representative character of the group and facilitating the organization of the interest group.

4. It is suggested that administrators accept the legitimacy of interest groups, because attempts to discourage their participation often produce the opposite effect. The best approach in negotiating, therefore, is to accept their right of involvement.
5. It is suggested that administrators provide interest groups with valid and timely information, technical and clerical support and other needed resources which will facilitate their contribution to education.
6. It is suggested that administrators recognize and fulfill their leadership role in education by providing interest groups with access to their knowledge and expertise in education in return for the interest group's expertise and knowledge of the community.
7. It is suggested that the University recognize the pluralistic nature of the educational environment and offer specific courses addressing interest group involvement in policy making. This topic should also be referred to in courses dealing with the principalship, educational finance, and the social context of educational institutions.
8. It is suggested that the board establish appropriate written policies, regulations and procedures with respect to school closure.

Recommendations for Further Study

It is suggested that research on the following topics might contribute significantly to the literature on interest groups on education:

1. The study of leadership in educational interest groups.
2. The role of formal interest groups in Newfoundland education. Who wields the power?
3. The role of informal interest groups in decision making.
4. An examination of interest group articulation channels and means of access.

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APPENDIX A

Semi-Structured Interview

1. Could you specify the time and circumstances of the decision to close the Elementary School?

2. Regarding this issue, what was the school board's position (i.e., policy rationale) and major single objective?

3. What was your position in this issue?

4. What group or groups participated in this decision?

5. How did you first become aware that an interest group was interested in the problem that you described?

6. Is this the usual manner in which you become aware that an interest group is interested in a problem affecting education? If no, how?

7. What was the particular relationship of the school board with these interest groups?

8. At which level did these groups make their appearance? With respect to (a) hierarchy
   (b) decisional process

9. What was the outcome of this issue?

10. Did the interest group in question achieve its ends?

11. Does the school board have the means or methods of assuring that interest groups that are not organized will be heard?

12. To what degree do you believe these interest groups had an effect while they were involved with the school board? Why or why not?

13. Do you believe that the interest groups played a useful and necessary role in this decision? Explain.

14. In your opinion what was the chief tactic used by these interest groups in their relations with the school board?

15. Please indicate the methods used in working toward this objective.

Examples:

1. publicity campaign
2. getting the whole membership behind the group
3. approaching officials and politicians
4. combining with other interest groups
5. direct approach to School Board members
6. direct approach to Superintendent or senior administrators
7. formal submissions to school board
8. other

16. Which of the various methods proved most effective in this issue? Why?

17. Was the help of any public officials (such as local government officials or Cabinet members enlisted? If so, explain.

18. What individuals did your organization have the most occupational contact with? How well did you know them?

Example:

Position	Name	Departmental Committee
Board Chairperson		
Superintendent		
Assistant Superintendent		
Business Manager		
School Board Member		
Interest Group Leader		

19. In this issue upon which two of the following bodies did you focus your main attention? Why?

( ) 1. School Board Chairperson

( ) 2. School Board Member

( ) 3. Superintendent

( ) 4. Senior Administrators

( ) 5. Principals

( ) 6. Other _____

20. What methods of communication did you employ in addressing the school closure issue and which proved to be the most important?

( ) 1. formal committee hearings

( ) 2. informal group meetings

( ) 3. telephone calls

( ) 4. chance meetings with lobbyists and/or school board members

( ) 5. meetings by appointments

( ) 6. meetings at social affairs

( ) 7. letters, reports, etc.

( ) 8. other _____

APPENDIX B

P.O. Box 369
Manuels, Newfoundland
A0A 2V0

October 28, 1983

Mr. Newman Kelland, Superintendent
Avalon Consolidated School Board
LeMarchant Road
St. John's, Newfoundland

Dear Mr. Kelland:

This letter is in reference to my thesis which I am presently in the initial stages of writing. Recent trends in educational research verify that the field of educational governance is experiencing tremendous pressure for change. As society becomes increasingly complex, school boards are expected to respond appropriately to diverse demands arising from a variety of sources.

The politics of education is not a well researched area in Newfoundland. However, it is reasonable to assume that the interdependency of the educational system and the political system is as evident here as in other areas of Canada. The educational administrator is required to cope with numerous political problems including allocation of limited resources, program priorities and the future direction of education. A prevalent influence surfacing in most educational decisions today is that of interest group pleading. These political groups may be either internal or external to the school district and are often reflective of community or district power structures.

Whether administrators view these interest groups as legitimate, often depends on the following realization: On one hand we have cried for increased public participation in education and on the other hand, we have neglected to develop the necessary skills to facilitate their involvement to the benefit of education. Yet, the reality is that interest groups are becoming increasingly sophisticated in their attempts to influence the educational system.

.../2

The role of interest groups in educational decision making has become the focus of my thesis. This interest is based on the philosophy that administrators need to become politically astute if they intend to tap interest group potential. This involves providing effective leadership to these groups and promoting their commitment to valid educational concerns.

Use of the case study technique should facilitate an analysis of several variables which should provide a degree of prediction regarding the potential effect of interest groups. The significance of this technique lies not in the examination of the issue, but in the evidence that decisions about education are frequently being swayed by interest group pleading.

The benefits of this study should include:

1) evidence of the necessity of facilitating interest group involvement in educational decision making.

2) support for the belief that senior officials need to acquire the skills of a political strategist - particularly in reference to understanding the structure, function, resources and characteristics of pressure groups.

The purpose of this letter is to request your support and approval to undertake a research project in the Avalon Consolidated School Board. The specific issue which I wish to examine is the closure of Blackall School.

If you require additional information regarding this study, I would be more than pleased to discuss any aspect with you.

Yours truly,

Beverley A. LeMoine
Researcher

Dr. Dennis L. Treslan
Thesis Supervisor

BAL/DLT/mk

The Avalon Consolidated School Board

P.O. BOX 1980
ST. JOHN'S, NEWFOUNDLAND
A1C 5R5

Chairman: B. S. LAKE
Vice-Chairman: REV. E. B. CHEESEMAN
Secretary: MS. D. DUGGAN
Treasurer: S. NORRIS, C.A.

Superintendent: N. KELLAND, B.A. (Ed.), M.Ed.
Deputy Superintendent: J. J. PARSONS, M.A., M.Ed.
Business Administrator: F. P. FOLLETT

May 15, 1984

Mrs. Beverley LeMoine,
P.O. Box 369,
Manuels, Conception Bay,
Newfoundland
A0A 2V0

Dear Mrs. LeMoine,

I am writing at the request of the Superintendent to inform you that your request to conduct research on the closure of School is approved. This approval is, of course, subject to the various people outlined in your letter agreeing to participate.

Yours sincerely,

Wayne Oakley,
Assistant Superintendent.

WO/rt

c.c. Mr. N. Kelland