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*Local school boards with parents in majority
- a new way for school development in Sweden?*

Abstract

The main aim of this study is to describe and analyse what happens in nine compulsory schools which have local school boards where parents are in the majority. The study also places local school boards in context and shows how they are shaped by this context. The focus is limited to a pilot study of local boards with an elected majority of parents. Data were collected through interviews, observations and analysis of documents, eg. school board minutes. Four areas were investigated: 1) The school boards' rights and responsibilities; 2) the participation, democracy and collaboration in school boards; 3) the role of school principals and different group interests in the board; and 4) evaluation and follow-up of this pilot experiment. The results of the study indicate that parents are not clear about their rights and responsibilities. Accordingly, they have not made effective use of these new powers, although board members considered that participation, democracy and collaboration had increased. Board members recognized that many parents outside the board have limited knowledge of its work and that communication to bridge this gap is not easily organised. Respondents also felt that the role of the principal is problematic. Is the principal's role as a servant of the state compromised by the existence of school boards? What is the relationship between the municipal executive board and the board of each school? Should the school board run as a board where the principal has the responsibility to make and execute decisions? Finally, the boards gave little attention to self evaluation and following up decisions that had been agreed. The conclusion of this study is that, in their present form, school boards are weak agencies. Their rights and responsibilities are not clear. And they are unable to represent all parents and other stakeholders. To achieve the aims originally envisaged for local school boards, the system of voting for the local boards should be modified. The different responsibilities of the municipal executive board and the local school board should be clarified and the support and feedback from the local authority in the municipality to the local school board should be improved.

Key words: Local school boards, parents, responsibilities, participation, democracy, collaboration, principals role, evaluation.