TOWNSHIP BASED SCHOOLS

A Feasibility Study of School District Consolidation of Long Island, N.Y.

ADMINISTRATIVE AND INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Of

THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

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by

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Chapter I

Introduction

Following the Second World War, the growth of the suburban landscape was best exemplified by the population explosion across Long Island, New York. The result of this population explosion was the eventual development of 109 independent, union-free, school districts. While many of those districts have long boasted about the success of their school systems, they have been a costly endeavor. With the 2011 passage of a 2% tax cap by the New York State Legislature, the question of the cost effectiveness and sustainability of Long Island's independent school districts has come into focus.

The following chapter includes five sections. The sections include: The Purpose of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Significance of the Study, Conceptual Framework, and Definition of Terms. Information contained in this chapter offers a framework to the research and guiding principles for the feasibility of township- based school systems on Long Island, New York.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the differences between the current organizational structures across Long Island's 109 school districts and determine the feasibility of 12 township based school districts. This study will focus on five key components of school district organization including: finance, instruction, facilities, enrollment, and demographics.

These components will be used to analyze the current state of Long Island's school districts and use that analysis to employ a model of strategic foresight on the feasibility of township based school systems on Long Island.

Long Island's two counties, Nassau and Suffolk are comprised of twelve town organizations. This study will determine the feasibility of reorganizing Long Island's 109 school districts into 12 larger township based school systems.

Statement of Problem

The ramifications of the 2% tax cap in conjunction with the national economic downturn and rising costs will force the 109 union free, independent school districts across Long Island to confront their economic sustainability. In order to ensure that students across the region continue to receive a meaningful and competitive education, a township based organization may provide the best hope for maintaining the quality of Long Island's schools while ensuring their future survival.

Significance of the Study

This study will inform educational and community leaders throughout Long Island, New York and the Nation. School district consolidation has been a hotly debated topic throughout the Nation. Many states have commissioned internal studies to determine the degree to which school district consolidation is possible. As a result of the economic downturn, rising costs, and a newly enacted 2% tax cap these studies will be most important in the State of New York. Furthermore, given Long Island's prominent traditional educational systems, the question is even more critical.

An effort to understand the feasibility of township based school systems based on current municipal ci) provides a new and unique model of reorganization. Furthermore, the model of strategic foresight used to determine the feasibility of township based systems, utilizing the five key factors of finance, instruction, facilities, enrollment, and demographics can be used by individual school districts to understand their own growth patterns and emerging needs.

Definition of Terms

Strategic foresight – As defined by Hines and Bishop (2006), the ability to create and sustain a variety of high quality forward views and to apply emerging insights in organizationally useful ways.

Union-free school district- As defined by the New York State Education Department, is a local school district which operates a High School and is governed by a Board of Education.

Two Percent Tax Cap- As defined by New York State, is the law enacted by the NYS legislature in 2011 ensuring that property taxes would not rise above two percent unless approved by a super majority of local voters.

Finance- As defined by Hughes (2010) are all factors related to school district finances including tax levies, property values, and costs.

Instruction- As defined by Hughes (2010) are all factors related to school district instruction including student-teacher ratio, teacher experience, and administrative organization.

Facilities- As defined by Hughes (2010) are all factors related to school district facilities including physical plants.

Enrollment- As defined by Hughes (2010) are all factors related to pupils including average class size.
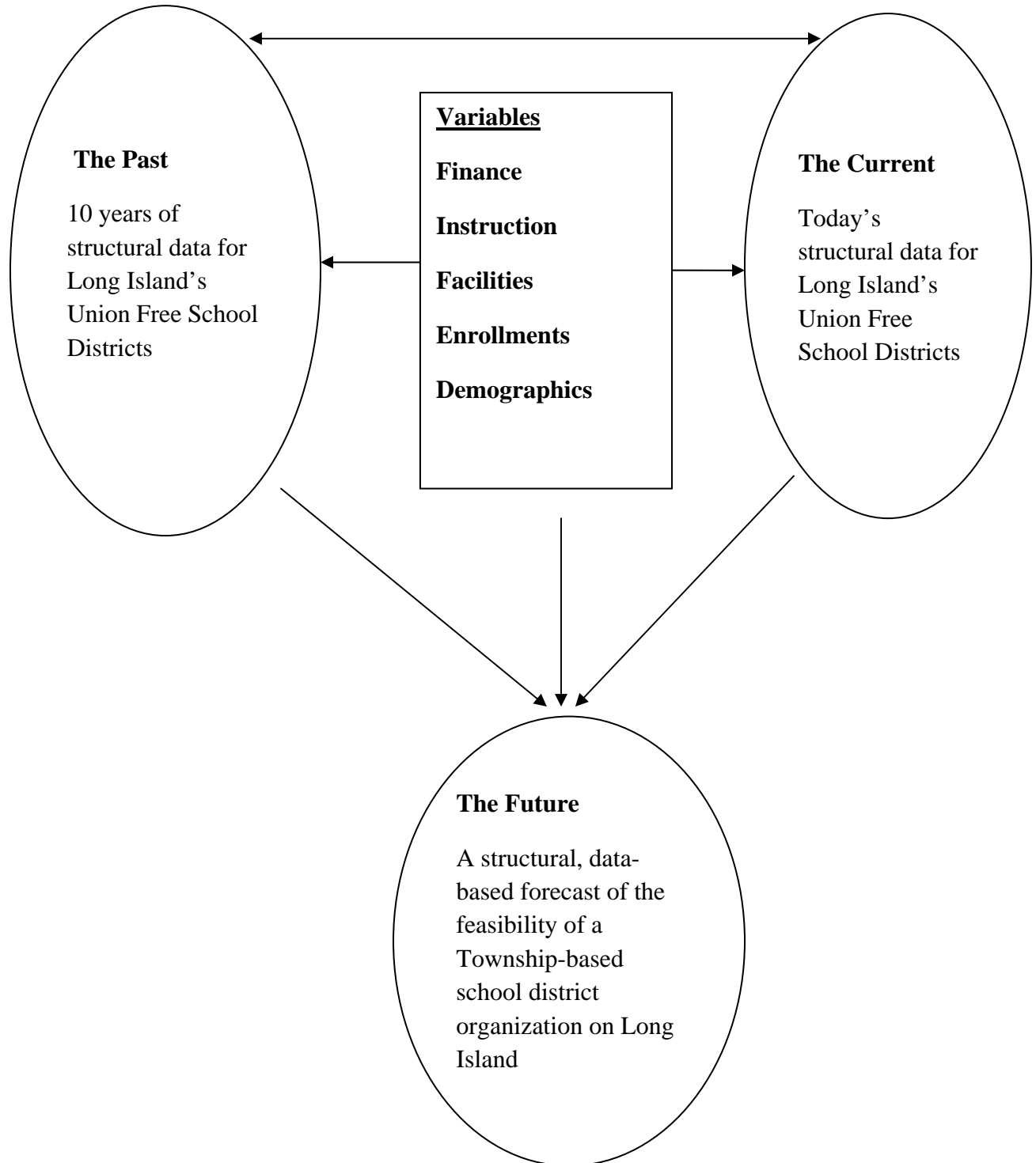
Demographics- As defined by Hughes (2010) are all factors related to the communities served by school districts.

<div align="center">Conceptual Framework</div>

In order to create a conceptual rationale, the researchers apply the work of Andy Hines and Peter Bishop. According to Hines and Bishop (2006), any future study should be rooted in an understanding of history and the present environment. "Given that facts are always present-or past-based, it makes sense that strategic foresight entails good use of historical data (Hines and Bishop, 2006)." Additionally, the researchers use the work of Jonathan Hughes (2010), for the variables chosen to be studied and the empirical data related to them. The variables chosen for analysis are finance, instruction, facilities, enrollment, demographics. A visual model for this framework is represented below:

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1.0

The Past

10 years of structural data for Long Island's Union Free School Districts

Variables

Finance

Instruction

Facilities

Enrollments

Demographics

The Current

Today's structural data for Long Island's Union Free School Districts

The Future

A structural, data-based forecast of the feasibility of a Township-based school district organization on Long Island

Research Questions

The overarching question used to guide the research was:

1. How would a township based model provide an efficient model of school district organization

Additional research questions that emanate from the overarching question and shape the study include:

    A. If schools in Nassau/Suffolk county were organized by town what would they look like in terms of:

- Finance including all complex variables
- Instruction
- Facilities
- Enrollment
- Demographics

    B. How can an understanding of the above variables above over the last ten years impact an understanding / strategic foresight of what a town-based model would include

Chapter II

Introduction

This chapter will review the related literature for the topic of feasibility of township-based school reorganization in two Long Island, New York, counties. The purpose of the study is to inform school and district leaders of the feasibility of township-based school systems in Nassau and Suffolk counties on Long Island in New York. The chapter includes a review of the literature and ends with a summary.

Review of the Literature

The current economic downturn throughout the nation has caused communities throughout the country to rethink public expenditures. This, in conjunction with rising labor costs in New York State in the face of a two percent tax cap, has brought the issue of school district consolidation as a tangible solution for remedying economic concerns while maximizing services to students. For educational leaders this would necessitate a deep analysis of structural variables that impact on the ability of school district organizations to maximize educational programs.

This issue is especially critical in Nassau and Suffolk counties on Long Island, in New York. These counties, known for their public schools, have the some of the highest property taxes in the State (Hughes 2010). Additionally, their professional educators are some of the highest compensated as well (Hughes 2010).

Creighton (1994) outlines a consolidation process for school district restructuring. This model includes data collection as a means to forecast. Redistricting technical studies should be undertaken using a pre-defined, systematic, methodical process (Creighton, 1994). Approached in this fashion, the conduct of redistricting study can be managed efficiently and in a timely manner (Creighton, 1994).

Additionally, Creighton notes the importance of making a re-districting process public. Importantly, the confidence of the public will be increased if it can be shown that an orderly process has been followed, each of whose steps clearly has a productive, functional relationship to the next (Creighton, 1994).

In order to best forecast the feasibility of township- based schools it is critical to review the past and present conditions. Before launching into the future, therefore, recognize that the facts are uniformly from the past and the present (Hines and Bishop, 2006). Beyond an understanding of the past it is essential to understand the present to forecast the future. A key skill for analysts is scanning the external environment for information useful to the organization (Hines and Bishop, 2006).

In states throughout the nation, including, Illinois, Pennsylvania, California, and New York, many school districts have sought to use consolidation as a means of alleviating high costs As noted by Duncombe and Yinger, 2005; although scholars do not agree on the cost impacts of consolidation, it is likely to remain on the education policy agenda in many states, particularly when school districts are under pressure to cut costs and raise student performance.

Summary

As the nation continues to experience an economic downturn, states and localities will continue to look for ways to cut costs to public education. One option that will be considered is school district consolidation. In order to best understand the feasibility of school district consolidation, the past and present must be analyzed in an effort to inform future structural decision- making.

Chapter III

Introduction

The following chapter will describe the methodology of the study. The chapter will include the purpose of the study; research questions; data collection techniques; data analysis technique; and summary.

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Data Collection Technique

The research utilizes school district data, as related to finance, instruction, facilities, enrollment, and demographics for Nassau and Suffolk counties. These variables will be

ascertained through public records. This data encompasses these variables for the previous ten years.

Data Analysis Technique

The research analyzes ten years of school district data for Nassau and Suffolk counties. The historical analysis is used in conjunction with an analysis of the current status of the districts. These studies of the past and present are used to inform a future strategic forecast of the structural variables of school districts. Ultimately, the future strategic forecast will be used to determine the feasibility of a township-based school organization for Nassau and Suffolk counties.

Summary

This quantitative study is designed, based on the processes described by Hines and Bishop. They suggest, given that facts are always present- or past- based, it makes sense that strategic foresight entails good use of historical data. Therefore, the research utilizes ten years of past data to inform a feasibility study of township-based, school district consolidation in Nassau and Suffolk Counties.

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