Title: "Decision Making in a Small School District: A Case Study Employing Principles of Systems Thinking and ithink®" (an unpublished doctoral dissertation at the University of Vermont, 1995)

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The Case:
A small New England community with one school (grades K-8)
- population: 1,400
- 1990 median income: $36,894 (well above state average)
- 1990 per capita income: $17,047 (well above state average)
- 1990 average home value: $143,400 (well above state average)
- resort vacation community (summer visitors/residents inflate population five-fold)

Case Period: 1980-1994

Problem Statement:
Within a small, rural, demographically changing community:
- how can key school decision making process(es) be described?

Interviews: With +/- 5% of adults in community

Questions: cite important decisions; explain importance; name decision makers and influencers; factors aiding or hindering decisions; whether decisions

Findings: Six decisions were most commonly cited:
- Bond Issues (physical plant expansion or improvements)
- New American School Development Corporation Grant (three year, $500,000 grant including training funds and ACOT computer hardware)
- Multi-Age groupings of students
- Math Computation (intervention with low math comp scores in some grades)
- New Principal Selection (community process informing board of needs and preference)
- Teachers’ Association (less of a decision point than a political force)
- Also, two other decisions were pending: foreign language programs and technology links with neighboring school districts

Extension of the Study:
Three ithink® models were generated from the above data.

- what factors impeded or facilitated school decision making process(es)?
- can an historical decision making model be developed for stakeholders' future use in planning and decision making?

Purpose:
To advance knowledge on the topic of decision making at a local community-school level. Such knowledge can inform constituents when facing future decisions and change.

Relevant Foundational Literature:
- Power
- Community Power
- Rural
- Community Change
- Decision Theory
- Systems Thinking

Author's Previous Modeling Experience: None

Software Mentor: Rolfe S. Stanley, Ph.D.

Research Design: Case study, involving both organizational historical and responsive evaluation methodologies

Figure 1. Model of leader and organizational stability.
Figure 2. Model of teacher empowerment.
Figure 4. Teacher empowerment graph of empowerment, grant resources, and principal.

1: empowerment  2: grant resources  3: principal

Figure 5. Graph of leader and organizational stability with board, principal, and superintendent products.

1: bd prod  2: prin prod  3: supt prod