

6-21-1987

The Willis-Harrington Commission: The Politics of Education Reform

Robert D. Gaudet

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umb.edu/nejpp>



Part of the [Education Commons](#), and the [Education Policy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gaudet, Robert D. (1987) "The Willis-Harrington Commission: The Politics of Education Reform," *New England Journal of Public Policy*: Vol. 3: Iss. 2, Article 7.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umb.edu/nejpp/vol3/iss2/7>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. It has been accepted for inclusion in New England Journal of Public Policy by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. For more information, please contact scholarworks@umb.edu.

The Willis-Harrington Commission:

The Politics of Education Reform

Robert D. Gaudet

The 1980s have witnessed a nationwide movement to upgrade public education, including reform efforts in the New England states. Massachusetts periodically has grappled with the challenge of improving its schools. During the 1960s, the Massachusetts legislature authorized a thorough examination of education in the state. This mandate was carried out by a blue-ribbon panel that came to be known popularly as the Willis-Harrington Commission. In 1965, the commission issued a 624-page final report that included findings and recommendations relating to many aspects of public education in the state. This article chronicles the history of Willis-Harrington and discusses the problems that thwarted implementation of many of the wide-ranging changes it envisioned.

Between 1962 and 1965, the Massachusetts Education Study, known popularly as the Willis-Harrington Commission, undertook a major examination of public education in the state. In September 1961, Senate president Maurice A. Donahue filed the enabling legislation that created the commission. The legislation was enacted in February 1962, and the appointments to the commission were completed by the following September. Beginning in the spring of 1963, the commission spent thirty months and \$300,000 to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the state's school system. In December 1964, the commission issued its summary report; in October 1965, it published its findings in a 624-page final report that included more than one hundred programmatic recommendations.¹ "The General Court [the state legislature] would have been hard put to have passed a broader or more far-reaching resolve," observed an early staff working paper prepared for the commission.²

Despite the extensive effort and general optimism that characterized the Willis-Harrington Commission through the mid-1960s, and despite the support it received during this period both from elected officials and the media, the major difference in Massachusetts public education after the commission had finished its work was a reorganization of the board structure that governed the public schools. The commission did not succeed in making the new governing boards powerful enough to effect its programmatic goals, and

Robert D. Gaudet is a marketing and education consultant. A political consultant from 1976 to 1984, he is currently writing a history of Massachusetts education reform.

education policy as reflected in the classrooms of the Commonwealth was virtually unchanged. The question that arises from any study of this effort is, Why was the change brought about by Willis-Harrington much less substantive than the reformers had intended?

This article will begin with a discussion of the circumstances that led to Willis-Harrington, then will go on to describe the commission's composition and the conclusions it reached. The commission focused most of its attention on the areas of elementary and secondary school reform, and the article will further consider the reasons that many of the changes the commission proposed in these areas were never implemented.

The Mess in Bay State Education

Massachusetts in 1962 was ripe for an extensive evaluation of public education. Its population of 5,149,00³ included a million children of school age, 98 percent of whom attended secondary or elementary institutions.⁴ Because of the baby boom, enrollment in the state's school systems was rising at a rate of 30,000 pupils a year, and parents, particularly those who lived in the suburbs, were becoming increasingly concerned about the quality of education their children were receiving.⁵ The rapidly growing suburbs were a major constituency for education reform during the period.⁶

A 1962 report prepared by Harvard economist Charles S. Benson for the New England School Development Council asserted that standards in more than 40 percent of the state's public schools were below the national average. Additionally, Benson found that in comparison to the nation as a whole, 40 percent of all Massachusetts communities spent less on education; 41 percent had higher student-teacher ratios; the credentials of many Massachusetts teachers were not as good as those of their out-of-state colleagues; and 60 percent of the state's communities paid less than the yearly national average of \$5,135 per instructional staff member. Some feared that the economic expansion of the 1960s would lure college graduates away from teaching, toward a more lucrative profession, thus further depleting the pool of potential teachers.⁷ The Commonwealth's state aid formula, which made no correlation between state aid and local need, was "hopelessly outmoded," the report said.⁸

In and of themselves, however, deficiencies in the education system do not lead to reform. In September 1961, a series of *Boston Globe* articles entitled "The Mess in Bay State Education" documented the problems of public school education in the Commonwealth and called for action to remedy these ills.⁹ Having brought the subject into full public view, the articles may have served as a catalyst for the formation of Willis-Harrington. They pointed to insufficient state aid; a school aid distribution formula that was sixteen years out of date; education whose quality was based on "the accident of geographic location"; and a weak Department of Education. Since the state was covering only 16 percent of the costs of local education, there was an inordinate reliance on the property tax to provide quality education.¹⁰ Further, as a result of using 1945 property valuations as the basis for determining school aid, towns like Wilmington, with less need, were receiving \$55 per pupil, while cities like Lawrence, with more serious educational problems, were receiving only \$36 for each student.¹¹ Unless this situation changed, the series argued, the Commonwealth's municipalities would continue to offer two standards of education: one where property values were high, another where they were low; and education, especially in the cities, would suffer. Under this double-standard system, 420,000 city schoolchildren in Massachusetts were assigned second-class status.¹²

Nor did the shortcomings in the public school system end at the high school graduation ceremony, according to the *Globe* series. Asserting that “public education in this state is at its worst at the college level,”¹³ the authors pointed to the same lack of coordination for college resources which characterized kindergarten through high school. In short, they said, “public higher education is not really ‘a system’ but a tangled historic legacy still without an overall plan.”¹⁴ The absence of direction and coordination meant that schools were left to fight with each other over state resources that the University of Massachusetts historically had controlled, and still did.¹⁵

The *Globe* articles did not hesitate to assign blame for these problems. The efforts of the state Department of Education were “inadequate.” The situation was so bad that educators were going to the state’s private colleges, not to the Department of Education, to learn the current thinking on educational issues.¹⁶ There were no state standards for curricula, no programs for career upgrading of teaching skills, and no overall state plan for achieving and maintaining quality education for all Massachusetts residents. The articles traced the beginnings of this inaction to the 1930s, when “the Department of Education became just another haven for political appointees”; now, in the early 1960s, an often self-serving “old-boy” network was still in place.¹⁷ Education commissioner Owen Kiernan was criticized for a lack of leadership, especially concerning curriculum reform and overall coordination. Finally, the articles attributed part of the “mess” in education to a situation of long standing: there had been no statewide review of schooling for well over a hundred years, since Horace Mann’s term as secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education.

The Commission

The mandate of the Willis-Harrington Commission went beyond that of any other education study in the history of the state: it was all-encompassing, involving an analysis of every aspect of public learning in Massachusetts. The enabling legislation stated that an “unpaid special commission” was established “for the purpose of making an investigation and study of the laws of the commonwealth pertaining to education, of the educational institutions of the commonwealth and their organization, of the various school systems therein, and of the educational laws, programs and school systems of other states.” The study was to be undertaken “with a view to

elevating educational standards in the commonwealth, reorganizing the scope of the various educational boards and administrators of the commonwealth, revising and modernizing the organizational and financial structure of schools and school systems, extending the facilities, curricula, and educational goals of the schools and colleges of the commonwealth, and providing increased financial aid for education.”¹⁸

A major strength of Willis-Harrington was its reliance on a blue-ribbon panel to analyze education policy in Massachusetts. Seven members from the House and three from the Senate were included, as well as eleven distinguished citizens, among them business leaders and school and college administrators.¹⁹

Senate Education Committee chairman Kevin Harrington (D-Salem), who was on his way to becoming one of the most powerful members of the Senate, became chairman of the commission. House Education Committee chairman Thomas Wojtkowski became the commission’s vice-chairman. Together, Harrington and Wojtkowski created a group that was comprised mainly of nonpoliticians, an unusual situation in the annals of Massachu-

setts education reform efforts.²⁰

Harrington had had lifelong interests in history, government, and education, and, as a former teacher and one who had depended on scholarship aid for his college education, he had a firsthand appreciation of the value of learning. His interest in the improvement of education was no doubt genuine, as was his belief that the commission could be successful. He was also politically ambitious. As one of the rising leaders in Massachusetts government, he was to be appointed majority leader in 1964 and elected Senate president in 1970. Harrington believed that pulling together a constituency for substantive education reform would enhance his chances of moving up the political ladder. Voters in the 1960s were concerned about education, and they would give special consideration to a young politician who cared about the schools.

Benjamin Willis was not a voting member of the commission but, as its executive director, was charged with overseeing its day-to-day operations. Willis had presided over the resurrection of the Chicago school system. As superintendent of Chicago schools, he was well-known for his capacity to analyze problems, develop solutions, and drive his staff toward implementing those solutions.²¹ He was highly regarded in education circles of the early 1960s, and his appointment brought a certain star quality to the commission. Harrington and Wojtkowski no doubt believed that the prestige and interest generated by Willis's appointment would help further the commission's work. Willis's credentials were so impressive that he was chosen as executive director even though he retained his job as Chicago school superintendent.²²

Beginning in the spring of 1963, six full-time and seven part-time researchers were hired. They analyzed public education in Massachusetts, collecting data and developing position papers on a wide variety of topics ranging from school curricula to public funding mechanisms for education. John L. Steele, former superintendent of the U.S. Army Dependents' Schools in Europe, was the staff director. Examination of the material generated by the researchers indicates the high level of organization Steele brought to the effort—organization that was critical to the success of the commission's research phase. Steele also stood in for Willis during the week, when the executive director was in Chicago. Staff people attended over sixty commission meetings and designed and implemented a major survey on the logistics of learning (class size, condition of buildings, curriculum, textbooks, support services) which more than two hundred school superintendents filled out and returned.

Findings

The activity of Willis-Harrington was divided into three distinct phases. The sixty-seven-page summary report, with capsule programmatic recommendations, appeared first; legislation to reorganize the Board of Education was filed at the same time. In the spring of 1965, the legislature debated the merits of the reform legislation, on the basis of information contained in the summary report; the new board reorganization was signed into law in June 1965. The massive 624-page final report embraced the recommendations contained in the summary report but provided more detailed information about the condition of the state's public education. The final report also offered explicit recommendations that addressed the problems identified in the summary report.

The findings outlined in the final report would not surprise a student of Massachusetts education history. They included the following:

- There was a great disparity in the amount of money spent on education

among the school districts, partly because the state underfunded its school aid formula by 50 percent.²³

- Some systems were deficient in curricula offered and in the length of time required to be spent in academic study. Only 40 percent of the state's high schools offered their pupils state-of-the-art physics courses, and only 29 percent provided instruction in contemporary calculus.²⁴
- The state's contribution for local education costs was lower than that of forty-two other states.²⁵
- The Board of Education and the Department of Education were "primarily advisory" and lacked almost every resource necessary for enforcing minimum school standards.²⁶
- No statewide means existed for measuring school performance.²⁷
- The quality of textbooks and school libraries varied widely among districts.²⁸
- Special and vocational education programs were not meeting the needs of students.²⁹
- The public higher education system was ill-prepared to meet either the immediate needs of the growing population of college-age students or the long-range needs of the Massachusetts economy.³⁰

The report went beyond listing these individual findings, many of which had been set forth in previous studies.³¹ Over fifty pages were devoted to a consideration of the special problems of certain school populations, including minorities, the handicapped, and students who did not speak English. In the education system, black citizens were disproportionately the victims of poverty. They "were forced to live by themselves" in cities where quality public education was not in evidence. And, in keeping with its overall thrust, the report stated that learning would help disadvantaged citizens move up the social and economic ladders upon which Americans placed so much stock.³²

The report gravely concluded that many of the state's local school districts were proving shortsighted in their treatment of education, which they viewed as merely a budget item, not as a "gilt-edge investment" in a better future.³³ Despite the benefits of good education for all, "the bulk of the Commonwealth's cities and towns put into schooling what money they could afford to spend, not what they could afford to invest."³⁴ This circumstance was a fundamental concern of the report: "It matters vitally to every individual where the accident of birth and home locates him. And the very fact that it does should matter more than anything else in Massachusetts."³⁵

Major Recommendation

The commission's key proposal was to reorganize the existing Board of Education into two distinct entities, a Board of Public School Education and a Board of Higher Education. These new governing units were to be filled by appointees who were not educators—a clear repudiation of the old Board of Education, which had been staffed exclusively by school professionals.

The old Board of Education had assumed responsibility for elementary, secondary, and

postsecondary schools, but the two new boards were to divide responsibility. The Board of Public School Education would govern kindergarten through high school; the second board would administer higher education.

The Board of Public School Education. Once the old Board of Education had been dissolved as part of the June 1965 legislation, the new structure became known by the same name. The new BOE was composed of outstanding Massachusetts citizens who were to be in charge of setting education policy for the elementary and secondary schools. All aspects of learning at these levels, including education of the handicapped, special needs, and vocational training, were within the purview of the BOE. Before the reorganization, separate divisions in the Department of Education had set policy in these areas, often without considering how the plans of a particular division would fit into the state's overall education system. The broadening of power in the new BOE, then, was expected to bring greater efficiency to the setting of education policy.

The BOE that was created by the 1965 law was given new statutory powers, including the authority to set minimum educational standards for all courses; fix maximum pupil-teacher ratios; evaluate the state school-aid formula and recommend changes; and withhold state and federal funds from school committees that failed to comply with laws or regulations that it promulgated. The BOE chairman was the chief spokesman for school improvement; he and his board would work with the legislature to secure the funds needed to carry out specific programs. In short, the new Board of Education was to be the vehicle for implementing the commission's programmatic reforms.

The Board of Higher Education. This body was created to bring order and organization to the state's system of postsecondary institutions. It was to determine the location and mission of new institutions, allocate resources effectively, and set program priorities. It was also to act as a buffer between the institutions and the legislature, determine the funding levels for individual campuses, and oversee the expansion of the state's public higher education system.

The previous Board of Education had been given little in the way of support staff. To remedy this ill, the new governance boards were to be supported by a nongoverning research arm, the Massachusetts Advisory Council on Education (MACE). While not a policy-making unit per se, MACE would act as a standing committee on educational matters, with the professional demeanor and research capabilities to monitor the education process in Massachusetts. It would also screen candidates for gubernatorial appointment to the new BOE and the BHE.

The Commission's Price Tag

The commission diffused much of the potential argument against the cost of the reform by not incorporating programmatic recommendations in the legislative package that was signed into law in June 1965. The final report detailed 111 suggestions for improvement, but only those which the new boards authorized would be pursued. With two boards instead of one, administrative costs would increase by several hundreds of thousands of dollars, but that was the probable extent of immediate increased costs. The price tag seemed acceptable for the benefits that would be delivered. A few critics, such as Rep. Joseph Brett (D-Quincy)—a commission member—and Sen. William Wall (D-Lawrence) voiced concern about cost, but there was little concerted objection regarding the commission's likely effect on the taxpayer.³⁶

Legislative Proposals

Legislation reorganizing the governance of public education was filed in December 1964, coincident with the release of the summary report. The reaction was largely positive. The state's legislative leadership was solidly behind the study and was committed to passing its major recommendation. There was little immediate public opposition to the new education governance boards and remarkably little initial opposition to the extensive programmatic agenda of the commission. In fact, in 1965, optimism abounded concerning the commission's proposals. The media (especially the *Boston Globe*, which was establishing itself as the up-and-coming paper of the decade) were highly supportive, as were most educators. (A notable exception to this favorable response was Owen Kiernan, who was commissioner of the Board of Education that preceded Willis-Harrington—and no relative of Rep. Cornelius Kiernan, another critic.)³⁷ In the mid-1960s, teachers' unions were not major players in the formulation of public policy, so their voices were generally absent from the commentary on Willis-Harrington.³⁸

Yet, from today's perspective, it would seem that the commission's ambitions exceeded its grasp of political reality. Reading through the 624-page final report, with its detailed analyses and recommendations, gives the reader a sense that, if only because of sheer volume, this education manifesto could never have been realized. Very probably, in the latter part of the 1980s, any knowledgeable observer of the history of education in the Commonwealth—a history based on almost autonomous local control of the schools and a traditionally weak state Department of Education—would view the commission's agenda with serious skepticism. Clearly, there was a contradiction between the commission's expectations and what it could realistically hope to accomplish.

The difficulty the commission experienced in motivating the political and civic cultures to implement its agenda can be attributed to five major factors. These include the shifting of the social agenda; the legacy of strong local control of schools in Massachusetts; the failure of the state to earmark money to implement the commission's recommendations; weaknesses in leadership; and traditional legislative prerogatives.

The Shifting of the Agenda

The explanation of the contradiction between the goals of the commission and its accomplishments lies partly in the more general historical context. The years 1962 and 1963 were heady times in Massachusetts and in the nation. Unemployment and inflation were under control, and personal income was rising steadily.³⁹ John F. Kennedy's administration had stirred much hope. The pragmatic rationalism that characterized the president's tenure held that with the right kind of research, planning, and commitment, anything could be accomplished.⁴⁰ The United States was a solid contender in the space race, and the president had pledged to land an American on the moon before the decade's end. Education had been a major issue in Kennedy's campaign platform, and he had made comprehensive education reform one of his legislative goals.⁴¹

Massachusetts was experiencing good times. A son of the Bay State was in the White House. Thirty thousand children a year were entering the state's school system. If the United States was on its way to the moon, Massachusetts could certainly be on its way to providing educational excellence for all. Kevin Harrington, Benjamin Willis, and their allies could reasonably believe that the state would be the driving force that would ensure this excellence.

However, both the state and the nation changed dramatically between 1962 and the time when the new Board of Education became fully operational, in 1967. Just as the commission was beginning to develop its research, John F. Kennedy was assassinated, an event that dampened the kind of idealism in which Willis-Harrington was conceived. Part of Lyndon Johnson's legacy included the Great Society, which sent billions of federal dollars to the states to combat poverty and improve education. By the mid-1960s, the arena for social progress and improvement of schools had shifted dramatically—to Washington, away from state and local government. The year 1965 brought race riots to some cities and an escalation of the war in Vietnam, while less attention was paid to state education initiatives.

As the decade wore on in Massachusetts, improvement of schools lost its urgent status on the state agenda. Tens of thousands of baby boomers swelled college enrollments, indicating that elementary and secondary education were doing a good job with the Commonwealth's children. Feared shortages in teachers never materialized, and new schools were built to remedy the double-shift school days of the early decade.

The same legislative session that had passed the Willis-Harrington reorganization legislation had also passed the Massachusetts Racial Imbalance Bill, and how to educate minorities better became the lead school issue. Martin Luther King's march on Washington in 1963, the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Watts riots and the Selma march of 1965, and the numerous race riots of 1966 and 1967 all helped create a heightened national awareness of racial inequality. In Massachusetts in 1965, political leaders passed a progressive racial imbalance law that was designed to desegregate public schools.⁴² One of the ironies of this era is that actions aimed at promoting racial equality essentially con- signed to the back burner efforts to improve public education.

Problems related to desegregation interfered with the new BOE's ability to implement Willis-Harrington's master plan. Two months after passage of the commission's legislative package, the legislature enacted the Racial Imbalance Law. For Willis-Harrington supporters, it was an unfortunate coincidence that two of the most important education bills in the state's history became law in the same session. Owing to the preoccupation with redressing racial imbalance in some urban systems (Boston and Springfield primarily), less energy was focused on the general quality of education in the late 1960s. A content analysis of the newspapers of the period shows that more than 80 percent of the reportage on education dealt with issues of racial balance.⁴³ Even allowing for press bias, that figure is a telling indicator.

From the beginning, Harrington had insisted that the commission consider the problem of segregation in the public schools.⁴⁴ From its inception, however, the new BOE was consumed with trying to redress the racial imbalance without offending any constituency. By 1967, given the overriding racial issue and start-up problems that still persisted, the BOE could find little time to work on the more general problems of public education in Massachusetts.⁴⁵ By 1973, the board was still being criticized for neglecting the needs of white parents because of its preoccupation with the Racial Imbalance Law.⁴⁶

What was believed probable in 1962, with respect to the Willis-Harrington agenda, seemed impossible five years later.

The Tenacity of Local Control

Local control of education, which is a strong national tradition, is very pronounced in Massachusetts. Among the industrial states, Massachusetts may be the most locally ori-

ented concerning education.⁴⁷ Historically, it has paid a relatively low percentage of the cost of education. In the absence of substantial state aid, support of schools becomes largely a local responsibility, and the corollary is local control. Massachusetts has few state-imposed course requirements (just four years of physical education and one year of history) and no state standards for graduation from high school. Those who would reform education in the Bay State, then, have always searched for some way to do so without offending the sensibilities of municipalities.

Early statutes helped establish the preeminence of the locality in matters of education, and a glance backward to the formative days of Massachusetts can help explain the development of municipal power. The Puritans who settled communities like Dedham—whose roots have been researched at length—had rigid, hierarchical concepts of religion and government—indeed, of life generally. Outsiders were not welcome, and each newly established town was expected to be largely self-sufficient. Calvinist theology taught that any failure to succeed indicated a spiritual flaw, so there was little likelihood that a community would admit to any problems and ask others for help, no matter how badly needed that help might be. Such a request would have been tantamount to admitting a weakness of faith, an admission that people were loath to make.⁴⁸

Even as the state's towns and cities evolved, the belief in self-sufficiency remained powerful. The early settlers had left England to escape the intrusion of central power into their lives, an intrusion that forbade their religious practices. Subsequent generations of New Englanders prided themselves on their independence from government. When public education came to the state, control was kept at the municipal level through the powerful force of tradition. The early Board of Education could only suggest policy to local systems, so success "depended less on the pleasure of the legislature in session than on the persuasiveness of the Secretary sitting down with local school committees."⁴⁹ As Willis-Harrington's participants discovered, the hold of local control was still very firm.

The new BOE did not make substantive recommendations affecting local districts until November 1967, fully seventeen months after its creation. In a move designed to make public education more efficient, the board issued guidelines for reducing the number of school districts in the state from 390 to 250. At the same time, it recommended a teacher-student ratio of 1 to 25 for elementary school and 1 to 16.7 for high school.⁵⁰

Once the new governing body had actually set forth substantive recommendations, resistance developed rapidly. Criticism was levied at the commission for having presented proposals in the absence of any cost projections. Further, the findings of the commission which justified these recommendations had not been adequately publicized, especially with respect to the school districts that would implement them. Local school personnel felt they had not been given an adequate opportunity to provide input. The *Boston Herald*, the establishment newspaper of the period, was particularly concerned about the new BOE's actions:

Even the most progressive school committeemen tend to be bewildered when the board takes two of the most important reform actions in the history of Massachusetts education in the same day, and then provides few hard facts as to how these reforms may be implemented.⁵¹

Officials in forty communities were petitioning the legislature in protest of another commission recommendation, one mandating that kindergarten be available in all districts.⁵² The negative response by school districts to these initial programmatic recommendations indicated that implementing any major reforms would be difficult.

Willis-Harrington did not aim to set up a rigid, centralized school system.⁵³ In his speech before the 1965 Tufts Assembly, commission member Franklin Patterson reassured local officials that the new system would not mandate programs, but merely “set up a floor beneath which educational services cannot fall.”⁵⁴ Those associated with Willis-Harrington continually asserted that the recommendations would not change the power of the local school board to control education. The commission maintained that districts would be required merely to meet certain minimums, yet for a school system that would have to increase its number of teachers by 15 percent or budget in kindergarten facilities, this was a tall order that threatened its sacrosanct autonomy.

The new boards of education were intended as vehicles to shape education policy and bring more state resources into the classroom. Clearly, this constituted a shifting of power. Though the commission as a whole tried to understate the impact its agenda would have on local control—and probably believed that the impact could be absorbed—local districts, feeling that changes were being imposed upon them and that they were not included as partners in the process, were predisposed to reject the agenda. The commission’s selection of understatement as a strategy was ultimately perceived by local school districts as a kind of deliberate betrayal.

Failure to Earmark State Aid

More than 90 percent of the commission’s final report was devoted to identifying specific problems in the schools and suggesting solutions. Such suggestions included hiring more teachers to lower the student-teacher ratio, upgrading the quality and currency of textbooks, improving the physical plants of schools, and doubling state aid to local school districts. Willis-Harrington itself estimated the total cost of putting its new programs in place at \$123 million,⁵⁵ while Rep. Cornelius Kiernan argued that the cost would exceed \$215 million.⁵⁶

If the state was to obtain more control over local education, Massachusetts political leaders would have to appropriate more money to implement the new board’s agenda. The legislation for a sales tax that was supported by Governor Volpe passed in November 1967. While there was clearly no quid pro quo linking the levy to Willis-Harrington, the tax was on the public policy agenda during the mid-1960s, and this was seen by some as an indication that it could be used as a funding mechanism for education reform. The governor had referred to the sales levy as an “education tax.” But there was a general consensus that in the absence of strong leadership from the BOE, any new state revenues would be used to reduce real estate taxes or expand other local services besides education.⁵⁷

Since state education aid was not earmarked for education, increased local aid would not necessarily go to the schools. After the state sales tax was voted into law, local aid increased, but many districts did not apply the new revenue toward education expenses. Even after Willis-Harrington’s work and the creation of the new boards, there was no major institutionalized increase in the percentage share that the state contributed for local education.⁵⁸

Local autonomy was a determining factor here as well. Municipalities want to retain control over their budgets, including whatever state revenues they receive. Further, the new BOE had not yet developed a strong presence with the state’s educational and political institutions by the time the new sales tax was in place. A third problem was the steady stream of federal dollars that came into Massachusetts and other states during the middle and late 1960s. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) targeted

federal aid to poor children and brought tens of millions of dollars of federal money into the Commonwealth in the second half of the decade. With this federal largesse in hand, there was less incentive for political leaders to consider earmarking more state education aid.⁵⁹ In its second year of operation, the BOE was unable to move the political process to dedicate new revenue toward some of the more basic Willis-Harrington recommendations.⁶⁰

The Problem of Leadership

The major leadership problem faced by the new boards may have revolved around the people that Governor Volpe appointed to oversee education in the state. Though solidly respected in their own fields, the appointees had little or no experience in public education or in Massachusetts political life. Their lack of exposure to the realities of Massachusetts politics proved to be a serious obstacle as they attempted to overcome the tenacity of local control and other institutionalized resistance to educational change.

The BOE Chairman

The chairman of the new Board of Education was William G. Saltonstall, a former principal of Exeter Academy and past head of the Peace Corps in Nigeria. Contemporaries of Saltonstall generally had nothing but praise for his integrity and sincerity, but he seemed to lack a realistic appreciation of the political process required to improve the state's public education, and this proved detrimental in three significant areas: the board's relationship with the state legislators; its attitude toward publicizing and marketing its proposals; and its estimation of local control as a counterforce to its own power.

During an interview in July 1966, Saltonstall reported that the BOE had not yet had time to meet with the state legislators and build a foundation of trust. At the same time, he complained that progress was slow because all personnel recommendations had to be cleared through the legislature's Ways and Means Committee.⁶¹ Yet six months had passed since Governor Volpe's appointments, and during this time, board members had failed to connect with the legislators in charge of funding and personnel oversight. Saltonstall was discouraged about the lack of progress and about the unwillingness of the legislature to trust and consult with the board he headed.⁶²

With respect to the issue of local autonomy, Saltonstall believed that "the mandated power of the board recommending directly to school districts" would be enough to ensure change. He also thought that local school committees, superintendents, and principals were "enthusiastic" about the Willis-Harrington study and "eager to see [the BOE] assume its authority."⁶³ By 1967, the board's initial recommendations had been publicized, but the times had changed and they were met with a negative response. Saltonstall's apparent naïveté about local control may have led him to underestimate the importance of a marketing strategy for the board's proposals. In any case, when he was confronted with the observation that during its first year of existence the board had not developed a positive image, he replied that he did not consider developing public relations to be part of his job.⁶⁴ This attitude reflected perhaps the ultimate failure of leadership among the ranks of Willis-Harrington advocates: they did not understand that marketing their recommendations was a critical first step toward bringing about change. The following year, in November 1967, the board's recommendation to decrease the student-teacher ratio was attacked at least in part because local districts had not been adequately informed about the proposal.

The message had to be delivered to the public that costly changes in the state's education system would be beneficial, if not essential, to the continued prosperity of the Com-

monwealth. In the absence of a major effort to focus public opinion, the new BOE was unable to develop the broad backing that its systemic education reforms required.

The BOE Commissioner

Owen Kiernan's job as commissioner of the prior Board of Education had been eliminated in the reorganization, but when the votes were counted, he was the commissioner of the new board. This was curious, in that Mr. Kiernan clearly was not comfortable with the conclusions of Willis-Harrington. The 1961 *Globe* series had leveled its charges primarily at Kiernan and his bureaucracy, and much of the evidence for the series had been provided by the commission. In December 1964, when the summary report was issued, Commissioner Kiernan had been openly skeptical about the possibility of implementing the study's objectives and had criticized its recommendation to eliminate the old Board of Education, calling the idea "indefensible."⁶⁵ Commission vice-chairman Wojtkowski described Kiernan as a "survivor" who, while having little use for Willis-Harrington, would not jeopardize his tenure by being too critical of the effort viewed by many as the state's most significant attempt to improve education.⁶⁶

Owen Kiernan generally supported the idea of Massachusetts education reform. His chief objection to Willis-Harrington was that it infringed on the legislative prerogative,⁶⁷ and to anyone who had followed the progress of the study, this reservation was puzzling. The object of this reform effort, in the words of Thomas Wojtkowski, was to keep the state legislature from being a "school committee of the whole" for the state.⁶⁸ The two new boards were to be given enough power in the political process to make substantive improvements in Massachusetts education, and the new structure would ensure that public school policy would be based more on rational education theory than on politically driven considerations. Kiernan was in some agreement with the ends but not with the means.

With the clarity of hindsight, it seems absurd that a major critic of the Willis-Harrington recommendations would be chosen to lead the drive to implement them. In April 1967, the *Globe* noted that many observers, surprised when Kiernan was kept on, felt that "past weaknesses of the Department would not find correction under past leadership."⁶⁹

The Board of Higher Education

As with the new BOE, start-up problems sapped the energy of the Board of Higher Education. The search that resulted in the decision to hire Chancellor Winthrop Dakin, a respected Amherst attorney, took over a year. The actual governance of public higher education in Massachusetts was just as disjointed with this new board in place as it had been before, and by the mid-1970s Kevin Harrington and other political leaders were looking to replace the BHE.⁷⁰

Perhaps the biggest problem for the BHE was that the established institutions of higher education—the University of Massachusetts, Lowell Tech, and Southeastern Massachusetts Technological Institute in particular—still had powerful allies on Beacon Hill. Another problem was that the new board had to compete with five already existing boards of trustees who oversaw the segments of public higher education (the community colleges, state colleges, the technical institutions, and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst) in setting policy. The new board's leadership could not overcome the politics of long-established relationships between legislators and lobbyists, and so was unable to fulfill the hopes of its sponsors, who had sought to create a strong, independent body.⁷¹

Like other states in the nation, Massachusetts experienced dramatic growth in public higher education facilities in the 1960s; the baby boom had increased the demand for

higher education. The BHE was rarely a major player in this dynamic. Just as they had before the BHE's creation in 1965, the legislature and the campuses determined policy and building priorities.⁷²

The Governor

Historically, the decentralized character of state government in Massachusetts has precluded the development of a powerful governor's office. Until 1966, possibly because of a colonial aversion to a strong executive, Massachusetts governors served two-year terms. As a result, they generally spent the second year running for reelection rather than working on policy issues.⁷³ Between the end of World War II and the enactment in 1966 of the law setting a four-year term, voters never kept a governor of the same party in office for more than four years, so the executive had little opportunity to exert partisan political power.⁷⁴ Thus, the office occupied by John Volpe from 1965 until 1969 was relatively weak.

Governor Volpe did not stand directly in the way of implementing the Willis-Harrington agenda, but his support was tempered by his concern about its cost. Commenting on the summary report issued in December 1964, he referred to the plan's price tag as "hardly a Christmas present."⁷⁵ When the reorganization legislation was signed in June 1965, he said the job was only half done and reiterated the need to infuse millions of dollars into education to make the new governance machinery function well.⁷⁶

Like most people, Governor Volpe believed that the improvement of public education was a worthy goal, but he did not make increased funding for local education one of his priorities. In January 1966, he wrongly asserted that "the state was providing one hundred million dollars in additional revenue over and above existing programs to our cities and towns for the support of local public elementary and secondary education as recommended in the Harrington-Willis Study Commission Report."⁷⁷ The governor may have been anticipating that the legislature would include this money in the FY 1967 budget, but that did not happen. Since he was relatively restrained in his reaction to Willis-Harrington, and since his office lacked the clout we have come to expect from contemporary governors, Volpe's capacity to help realize the goals of the commission was rather limited.

The Majority Leader

From 1962 to 1965, Kevin Harrington was the chief spokesman for the commission's work, and throughout the effort his enthusiasm and commitment were obvious. Yet even Harrington grew frustrated with repeated efforts to persuade the legislature and the public to make the necessary choices—especially in terms of spending money.

During 1966 and 1967, as Harrington began to doubt the new system's capacity to implement the educational master plan, his enthusiasm waned. In much of the post-1965 coverage of the commission's aftermath, his voice was conspicuously absent. When he was cited, he was frequently critical of the performance of the new boards. In October 1966, Harrington noted a growing belief on Beacon Hill that the new BOE had failed to create the necessary "groundswell of public support" for increased aid to public education.⁷⁸ Several months later, he said that "the legislature has failed to develop respect for the new boards of education. Neither the boards' recommendations for programs nor requests for appropriations have been heeded."⁷⁹ He was as critical of the educational culture of the state, with its resistance to change, as he was of the new governance structure.

Harrington also was concerned about his own political agenda. Since no new constituency had developed around the commission's proposals, he could not afford to make the improvement of local schools his priority. He had been appointed Senate majority leader in 1964. With the road to the Senate presidency apparently ahead of him, developing the external constituency needed to implement the plan he helped craft became less important.

The Legislative Prerogative

For many years prior to 1965, the legislature had been a major force in Massachusetts public education. Although the old Board of Education was reputed to be independent, the commission pointed to the absence of a strong, central policy-making body in the education system which was not subject to control by the highly politicized legislature. In theory, making education less of a political football made good sense, but it was unlikely that the Massachusetts legislature would readily give up the control it maintained over public schooling.

According to commission vice-chairman Thomas Wojtkowski, changes made by the Ways and Means Committee to the reform legislation weakened the new structure and helped ensure the legislature's continued involvement in education. These included altering some of the language of the legislation and limiting the salaries of the new boards' leadership. The salaries of the BOE commissioner and the BHE chancellor were reduced from \$35,000 to \$30,000, and, more important, the stipends were made subject to appropriation.⁸⁰ With relatively low salaries locked in place, the new boards would have difficulty hiring top-flight administrators, and the committee removed one of the board's independent powers by making salaries contingent upon appropriation.

More significant was the alteration of language. The commission's proposal in December 1964 called for the BOE to "approve all plans for public school education."⁸¹ After the bill had moved through the legislative process, the new law said the BOE "shall develop plans for education to meet state needs," with no mention of any power to approve activities of local districts.⁸² Thus the power of the new structure to initiate or direct was greatly curtailed, and its role was reduced to an advisory one.

While the legislative leadership (Kevin Harrington, Maurice Donahue, and House Speaker John Davoren) had consistently trumpeted the work of Willis-Harrington, the floor fight on the commission's proposal revealed that many legislators had reservations about the reorganization. Several amendments to weaken the proposed BOE by splitting off vocational education and special education gained solid support before being defeated. The key vote came on an amendment to reject the commission's bill entirely and modify the current Department of Education by adding a separate division for special needs education. That failed by only eight votes, 110 to 102. A shift of five votes would have scuttled the commission's key recommendation to establish an all-powerful board to run public education.⁸³

Although legislative leadership and the Willis-Harrington Commission agreed that change was needed, the legislature as a body was more cautious. After all the research and writing had been completed, lawmakers still were reluctant to yield their power over local education to a new bureaucracy. Individual members had more routine contact with local school districts than did their leaders or the commission's members, a fact that may have contributed to the legislature's unwillingness to accept fully the education proposal. In the spring of 1967, criticism was leveled at the legislature for undercutting the power of

the new boards and obstructing the boards' requests for appropriations.⁸⁴ This should not have been surprising; many members of the House and Senate were not comfortable with creating the strong boards envisioned by the commission.

Evaluation

Where does Willis-Harrington fit in the hierarchy of Massachusetts education reform efforts? In a narrow sense, it did not do what it set out to do. The new Board of Education never became the powerful initiator of school policy that the commission had intended it to be. Twenty years after Willis-Harrington, a management study on the board and the Department of Education concluded that the BOE should "take steps to assert leadership, clarify its governance role, and promote a consistent approach to carrying out its mission." The study went on to recommend that the board develop a coherent statement of mission.⁸⁵

Most of the final report's major programmatic recommendations were not implemented:

- The aid formula for state reimbursement of local education was not fully funded and would not be until 1978, when another legislative commission worked to enact a short-lived progressive funding formula that was undercut by Proposition 2½.⁸⁶
- Willis-Harrington did not persuade the Commonwealth's political leaders to fund 40 percent of local education costs in order to decrease reliance on the property tax to pay for the schools. Thus, the commission was not able to equalize per-pupil expenditures among the poorer and wealthier cities and towns. In fact, by 1969, fully four years after Willis-Harrington had been released, the disparity in educational expenditures had widened, and by 1978 the gap was even worse.⁸⁷
- New state revenues were not earmarked specifically for local elementary and secondary education costs. The hope was that with the appropriate leadership from the reconstituted BOE, local governments would use new revenues for education reform without the need for earmarking, a constraint that municipalities vigorously oppose. In the final analysis, the legacy of local control took on the coloration of a moral imperative whenever the new board structure attempted to assert independent leadership.
- Statewide measures were not imposed to assess school performance. (They were established much later, with the passage of Chapter 188 of the Acts of 1985.)
- The disparity between the resources and offerings of poor (usually urban) and wealthy school districts remained intact. Today, student performance among these districts is increasingly divergent, particularly with respect to minority students.⁸⁸
- The overall student-teacher ratio has declined dramatically since the mid-1960s, but the decline is due primarily to the appearance of bilingual and

special needs teachers, who often serve small classrooms. There certainly has not been the sort of increase in state funding that would permit districts to hire enough teachers to lower the ratio for general education.⁸⁹

Given these programmatic shortfalls, it is clear that the structural changes signed into law in June 1965 did not transform the Massachusetts Board of Education into the equivalent of a powerful body like the New York Board of Regents. Yet, in a historical context, the impact of the Willis-Harrington Commission exceeded that of any of the one hundred or so other education reform efforts that preceded or followed it.

Certainly the largest effort in terms of scope, budget, and time frame, the commission did much to improve public education in Massachusetts. By opening up membership in the boards of education to lay people, it moved those structures away from a closed, clubbish atmosphere. And it did focus the media's and the public's attention on the schools during the mid-1960s.

In light of the BHE's ineffectiveness (it was dissolved in 1980), it is ironic that Willis-Harrington is remembered by many for what it did to promote public higher education. In the words of Joseph Cronin, former state secretary of educational affairs, Willis-Harrington "liberated the state colleges" and helped increase the likelihood that a Massachusetts high school graduate could go on to public higher education.⁹⁰

Willis-Harrington helped expand the state's higher education by publicizing the education system and by splitting off governance of postsecondary learning from that of general education. The previous Board of Education had often sought to advance personal gain at the expense of institutional growth. The new, independent governance provided an increased sense of legitimacy and credibility to the state's colleges and universities as a separate piece of the educational landscape. The commission's work also helped publicize the range of offerings of the state system. In the early 1970s, community colleges became an important part of public higher education, in part because of the commission's conclusion that expanded educational opportunities were important to the future growth of the state.

Willis-Harrington slightly increased the amount of money that state reimbursed localities. In what is one of the ironies of tax-policy development in Massachusetts, the commission probably helped bring about the imposition of the Massachusetts sales tax. Unfortunately for the commission's advocates, the tax was passed too late to infuse money into the BOE's education proposals. The perception that much of the new revenue would be used to pay for education reform probably made it much easier to sell the tax to the legislature and to the public.⁹¹ Although most of the new money was not used to improve schools, the sales tax, which many would argue is an essential general revenue enhancement device for Massachusetts, is still in effect today, and the commission can be credited at least in part with its passage.

The commission's greatest contribution, however, is an intangible: although it was unable to implement its ambitious agenda, it helped set the context for many reforms that followed. In the twenty years since Willis-Harrington, the state local aid formula has been made more progressive; special needs students have been given the opportunity to receive a quality public education; numerous school buildings have been upgraded and replaced; bilingual education has become a reality; and teacher certification has been modernized. All these reforms were suggested in the commission's final report, and it is reasonable to assume that they were easier to implement because of Willis-Harrington's clarion call for reform. Proponents of those efforts are in some large measure indebted to the efforts of the Willis-Harrington Commission for their later successes.

Conclusion

The experience of the Willis-Harrington Commission illustrates the essential ambivalence that attends education reform efforts in Massachusetts. On the one hand, leaders call for change; more than one hundred education studies have been authorized with education reform in mind.⁹² On the other hand, many people feel that local autonomy is a critical value that should not be assaulted. Civic and political leaders see a need for improving many of the state's school systems in the important areas of curriculum, teaching, and basic skills; but many resent the state telling local districts to make changes in these areas. Sometimes we clamor for more state education aid. At other times we rue the day the state became involved in local education at all.

Twenty years after the commission went out of business, much of its agenda is still the subject of reform activities. Educators and politicians are concerned about the disparity in the caliber of education offered in the local districts; of particular concern are the high dropout rates and the poor test results that attend urban systems.⁹³ Equalizing educational opportunity is a worthy goal, but one that seems to elude us.

Those who work to improve the schools must pay attention to past efforts to advance education. Without an external constituency for change, good ideas will remain theoretical. Willis-Harrington demonstrated that doing just about everything right in the research and legislative phases of school improvement efforts is probably not enough to promote constructive change. The commission's agenda was thwarted by the old—the strong tradition of local control—and by the new—the ascendance of other priorities.

In summarizing the frustrations of the Willis-Harrington effort, Kevin Harrington said much about the process of Massachusetts education reform:

We enacted what we wanted to enact. We ripped layers of skin off the old system, but in a few years, the education establishment came right back in.⁹⁴

Harrington's observation points out the essential problem for those who would try to reform education. Being given the legal sanction to make decisions about education policy is not equivalent to having the power to change anything. In order to bring change to the system, reformers must realize that power is perhaps 20 percent granted and 80 percent taken. New laws replaced the old Board of Education with two new boards, but the foundation needed to capture the attention of the public and the political culture—a necessary step for those who wish to wield power in a representative democracy—was never laid. Not understanding the enormity of their task, the leaders of the new governance structure were unable to change the face of Massachusetts public education.

Perhaps more than anything else, the history of the Willis-Harrington Commission demonstrates that those who wish to reform education in Massachusetts must recognize the difficulty of changing the basic relationship between weak, centralized state power and autonomous local control. The Willis-Harrington researchers felt encouraged by the knowledge that Massachusetts cared enough about education to have authorized so many studies. Perhaps that piece of history should have been taken as a warning that in Massachusetts we prefer to initiate reform studies instead of improving education. The state's penchant for studying rather than reforming public education made the commission's task very difficult, and its successes quite impressive. 🐼

Notes

Remarkably little secondary source material is available regarding the Willis-Harrington Commission; therefore, a researcher on this subject must utilize primary source documents and interviews with participants. Fortunately, the work of the commission is well documented, both in terms of legislative materials and staff working papers and newspaper accounts, most of which are available at the Massachusetts State Library, State House, Boston.

1. The actual title of the summary report was *Quality Education for Massachusetts: An Investment in the People of the Commonwealth: Summary Report of the Massachusetts Special Commission Relative to Improving and Extending Educational Facilities in the Commonwealth* (Boston, 1964). The title of the final report was *Special Commission to Investigate and Study Educational Facilities in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts* (Boston, 1965).
2. Paul E. Marsh, "A Study of Massachusetts Studies of Education," unpublished working paper, Massachusetts Education Study Collection, Massachusetts State Archives, Dorchester, Mass., 27 November 1963.
3. United States Census, 1960.
4. General Court, *Special Commission to Investigate and Study Educational Facilities* (1965), 60.
5. Ibid.
6. Ian Menzies, member of the Hingham School Committee in the 1960s, former education writer and columnist, *Boston Globe*; interview, Dorchester, Mass., 13 August 1985.
7. Franklin Patterson, member of the Willis-Harrington Commission; interview, Boston, 17 August 1985. The fear of a teacher shortage proved to be largely unfounded.
8. *Boston Herald*, 28 October 1962, 18.
9. Ian Forman and Ian Menzies, "The Mess in Bay State Education" (Boston: Boston Globe Corporation, 1961). Reprint of a series of articles that appeared in the *Boston Globe*, 21–28 September 1961.
10. Ibid., 4.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., 21.
13. Ibid., 2.
14. Ibid., 16.
15. Ibid., 10.
16. Ibid., 21.
17. Ibid., 2; Thomas Wojtkowski, vice-chairman of the Willis-Harrington Commission, 1962–65; interview, Boston, 19 June 1985.
18. General Court, *Special Commission to Investigate and Study Educational Facilities* (1965), 8.
19. Ibid.; the names of the commission members are listed on pages 6 and 7 of the report.
20. Historically, education reform commissions in Massachusetts have been comprised mainly of elected officials, with a minority of nonpolitician appointees. See note 31 for typical commissions.
21. *Boston Globe*, 12 January 1963, 7.
22. Mr. Willis was technically a consultant to the reform effort. He commuted to Boston regularly on weekends and on days off from his job in Chicago.
23. General Court, *Special Commission to Investigate and Study Educational Facilities* (1965), 124.

24. Ibid., 66, 69.
25. Ibid., 56.
26. Ibid., 66.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., 80–81.
29. Ibid., 275, 253.
30. Ibid., 170.
31. See Massachusetts General Court, *Special Commission to Investigate the Educational Systems of the Commonwealth* (Boston, 1919); and General Court, *Special Commission Established to Investigate and Study Certain Problems of Education in the Commonwealth* (Boston, 1950), for findings on poor teacher preparation, the low percentage of state funding of local education costs, and the serious disparity in educational financing of poor and wealthy school districts in the state.
32. General Court, *Special Commission to Investigate and Study Educational Facilities* (1965), 31.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., 55.
35. Ibid., 82.
36. *Boston Globe*, 28 December 1964, 1. Frank Zeo of the Massachusetts Federation of Taxpayers' Associations protested the potential cost of implementing the specific suggestions.
37. *Boston Globe*, 28 December 1964, 1, 13.
38. The major teachers' union involvement in Willis-Harrington was the research provided by the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA). It was not until 1967 that the union became more adversarial and more involved in shaping public policy. For more on the MTA's coming of age politically and its disagreements with education commissioner Kiernan over the union's right to strike (which the commissioner said represented a "step towards anarchy"), see *Boston Herald Traveler*, 13 October 1967, 52; also, *Boston Globe*, 27 October 1967, 1; 5 November 1967, 49; and 12 August 1968, 34.
39. Lois Gordon and Alan Gordon, *American Chronicle* (New York: Atheneum, 1987), 391, 400, 409. The gross national product was increasing at a rate of 5 percent; unemployment was below 6 percent; and the rate of inflation was about 2 percent.
40. Charles R. Morris, *A Time of Passion: America 1960–1980* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 22, 23.
41. Campaign speeches and President Kennedy's first message to Congress emphasized the importance of education to the nation. See Tom Wicker, *JFK and LBJ* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1968), 25–26, 121.
42. Chapter 641 of the Acts of 1965, popularly referred to as the Racial Imbalance Law, was enacted on 18 August 1965.
43. The Massachusetts State Library at the State House in Boston has useful newspaper indexes for the 1960s and 1970s.
44. Kevin Harrington, chairman of the Willis-Harrington Commission; interview, Boston, 30 October 1985; also Forman interview, 17 July 1985.
45. Paul Marsh, former research associate, Willis-Harrington Commission, 1962–1965; telephone interview, Boston to Lincoln, Mass., 2 August 1985. Also Ronald Jackson, former research associate, Massachusetts Education Study, 1962–1965; telephone interview, Boston to El Paso, Tex., 15 July 1985. Also, "Boston's imbalance fight became a legal tangle between the state Board of [Public School] Education and the Boston School Committee," *Boston Globe*, 1 January 1967, sec. A, 8. Also, *Boston Globe*, 1 May 1967, 17: "With the Legislature standing cynically by, the board

- has spent its first year hiring five key new workers and wrestling with the racial imbalance issue. Little of its effort has been turned toward the critical function of mandating minimum standards that will apply in all school districts.”
46. *Boston Herald*, 8 July 1973, sec. A, 4: “Parents were screaming that the Board of Education, in its vow to support the 1965 Racial Imbalance Law, was neglecting the needs of the white parent.”
 47. Forman interview, 17 July 1985. Twenty years after Willis-Harrington, local control was still in command. The outcry from the Massachusetts Municipal Association and the Massachusetts Association of School Committees that greeted House 6262, the omnibus reform bill of 1983–84, was directed primarily at the fact that the proposed legislation would remove local control.
 48. For a valuable perspective on the Puritan sense of community in Massachusetts, see Kenneth Lockridge, *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1985).
 49. General Court, *Special Commission to Investigate and Study Educational Facilities* (1965), 128.
 50. *Boston Herald*, 29 November 1967, 3.
 51. *Ibid.*, 1 December 1967, 33.
 52. *Ibid.*
 53. Ronald Jackson interview, 15 July 1985. “We didn’t want to set up a police state to monitor the hell out of education,” Mr. Jackson said, and Kevin Harrington often reiterated that philosophy.
 54. Bradbury Seasholes, ed., *Public Education in Massachusetts: Problems and Challenges*, vol. 7 of *A Series on State Government and Public Responsibility* (Medford, Mass.: Lincoln Filene Center for Citizenship and Public Affairs, 1965), 136.
 55. *Boston Globe*, 3 January 1965, sec. A, 7.
 56. Cornelius F. Kiernan, “A Cost Analysis of House 3950 of 1965” (Boston, 1965), 9, available in Massachusetts State Library, State House, Boston.
 57. *Boston Globe*, 1 May 1967, 17: “If the board fails to develop a strong image and pattern of action, all observers, including politicians like Harrington and Gov. Volpe, agree that the new tax revenues will be diverted totally into the reduction of real estate taxes and the expansion of other town services.”
 58. Robert McLain, Jr., under secretary of the Executive Office of Administration and Finance; interview, Boston, 16 October 1985.
 59. William Crowley, executive assistant to the commissioner, Massachusetts Department of Education; telephone interview, Boston to Quincy, Mass., 14 September 1987. Also see Diane Ravitch, *The Troubled Crusade* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 148.
 60. Increasing the state share of educational costs is a perennial reform topic in Massachusetts. Even a decade after the work of Willis-Harrington, Massachusetts had the greatest gap in educational spending between districts. In 1978, because the disparities in educational spending levels among school districts were still among the most extreme in the nation, a legislative commission under the leadership of Rep. James Collins and Sen. Walter Boverini developed a new disbursement formula for state aid to education. The change targeted larger amounts of money to poorer districts to help equalize per-pupil spending. Collins-Boverini reduced spending inequities between districts before it was rendered moot by Proposition 2½, which removed School Committee autonomy, thus putting state money under the control of selectmen and city councilors who were less disposed toward funding education. See Edward Morgan, “Obstacles to Educational Equity: State Reform and Local Response in Massachusetts, 1978–1983,” *Journal of Educational Finance* 10 (Spring 1985): 441–59.
 61. *Ibid.*
 62. Robert Levey interview with William Saltonstall, “Board’s Future Hinges on ‘Real Progress,’” *Boston Globe*, 10 July 1966, 14.
 63. *Ibid.*

64. In the article, Chairman Saltonstall also said, "I'm sorry, but I have a healthy suspicion of public relations or at least so far as it means the creation of an image."
65. *Boston Globe*, 28 December 1964, 13.
66. Thomas Wojtkowski, vice-chairman, Massachusetts Education Study, 1962–1965; interview, Boston, 19 June 1985.
67. Owen B. Kiernan and the Massachusetts Department of Education, "A Critique of House No. 3300" (Boston, 1965), unpublished memorandum.
68. Wojtkowski interview, Boston, 19 June 1985.
69. Robert Levey, former *Globe* education reporter, "Education Reform Dying on the Vine," part 1, *Boston Globe*, 30 April 1967, 32.
70. For information on the problems of the old Board of Higher Education and on its replacement, the Board of Regents of Higher Education, see Muriel Cohen, "A major overhaul for state colleges," *Boston Globe*, 11 June 1980, 1. Also 14 (editorial), 20, 21, 22.
71. For a detailed analysis of the weaknesses of the Board of Higher Education, see John A. Stevens, "A Process for Determining the Appropriate Role for the Massachusetts State College System" (April 1980), a qualifying paper available in the Gutman Library of the Harvard University Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, Mass.
72. Wojtkowski interview, Boston, 14 July 1987.
73. Edgar Litt, *The Political Cultures of Massachusetts* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1965), 177.
74. Edward B. O'Neill and Robert E. MacQueen, *A Manual of the General Court* (Boston: Causeway Print, 1981), 386, lists Massachusetts governors since colonial days.
75. Michael J. Bennett, "\$244 Million Urged for Schools," *Boston Herald*, 28 December 1964, 1.
76. Paul Costello, "Governor Signs Education Bill," *Boston Herald*, 29 June 1964, 1.
77. James S. Reid, ed., *Education: An Obligation—An Opportunity*, proceedings of the Governor's Conference on Education, 1966 (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts, 1966), 4.
78. *Boston Globe*, 12 October 1966, 2.
79. Levey, "Education Reform Dying on the Vine," part 2, *Boston Globe*, 1 May 1967, 1.
80. Chapter 572 of the Massachusetts General Laws of 1965, sec. 1F.
81. *Massachusetts Legislative Documents*, 1965, House 3300, sec. 4, January 1965.
82. Chapter 572 of the Massachusetts General Laws of 1965, sec. 1G.
83. David B. Wilson, "All Amendments Rejected as House Votes Willis Bill," *Boston Herald*, 27 May 1965, 7.
84. Levey, "Education Reform Dying on the Vine," part 1, 1.
85. Massachusetts Department of Education, "A Management Study of the Massachusetts Board and Department of Education" (Quincy, 1985), 1.
86. Proposition 2½ was passed as a referendum in 1978. It reduced automobile excise taxes and imposed a limit on the amount of money collected through the property tax.
87. *Boston Globe*, 2 March 1969, 27. See note 60.
88. Massachusetts education commissioner Harold Reynolds discussed this in the *Boston Herald*, 25 November 1986, 3, and *Boston Herald*, 26 March 1987, 18.
89. The Massachusetts Institute of Social and Economic Research (MISER), located at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, has just completed a study of current teacher supply and demand in Massachusetts. MISER found that the current student-teacher ratio is about 13.6 to 1. Before any conclusions are drawn from this, one should realize that special-needs teachers and bilingual

teachers (two categories that did not exist in public schools in 1965) may have very few students in their classes, thus significantly lowering the averaged ratio statewide.

90. Joseph Cronin, former Massachusetts secretary of educational affairs; interview, Boston, 3 July 1985; Robert Levey, interview, Dorchester, Mass., 1 July 1984.
91. Forman interview, *Boston Globe*, 30 April 1967, 32. Marsh interview, 2 August 1985.
92. Over one hundred education studies are identified in Paul E. Marsh, "A Study of Massachusetts Studies of Education."
93. See *Boston Globe*, 18 August 1987, 1, for detailed test data on this.
94. Harrington interview, 30 October 1985.