School governing bodies: the experiences of South African educators

Noleen van Wyk

Department of Educational Studies, University of South Africa, P O Box 392, Unisa, 0003 South Africa

The South African Schools Act of 1996 (SASA) mandates the establishment of school governing bodies (SGBs), comprising parents, educators and non-educator members of staff. As parents are required to form the majority on an SGB, they have been placed in a powerful position with authority to influence fundamental issues, such as school budget, school and language policy, discipline, and appointment and promotion of teaching and administrative staff. A survey of educators' experiences and perceptions of the role of SGBs, followed by in-depth interviews with selected principals, was undertaken. Findings suggested that educators do not consider their SGBs to be very effective. They support the role of the SGB in learner discipline, but they have reservations about its role in matters of educator misconduct. The role of the SGB in appointing staff is accepted, although educators feel that school governors should be trained for this and all other functions of the SGB. Many educators are concerned that the principal may dominate the SGB. Results further suggested that a purely legalistic approach to dividing the responsibilities of SGBs may not always be helpful and that the emphasis should rather be placed on the constitutional principles for co-operative governance.

Decentralisation and school governance

The concept of decentralisation originates from the belief that the state alone cannot control schools, but should share its power with other stakeholders, particularly those closer to the school, on a partnership basis (Marishane, 1999:78). The devolution of authority, it is argued, will lead to a healthier and stronger relationship between schools and communities and provide an alternative form of accountability to bureaucratic surveillance (Gamage, 1994:45-46). This is based on the premise that when educators and communities collaborate in making important decisions about educational alternatives, a true mutual responsibility will grow. Thus advocates of decentralisation base their reforms on the assumption that to ensure improvement in schools, those closest to the learners should be offered the authority to make key decisions (Parker & Leithwood, 2000:38). Godden (1996:21) adds that the development of a learning society requires the reclaiming of education by all communities in the country. However, in South Africa, neither parents nor educators have had much experience of participatory decision making since, in the past, principals were generally considered to be the only people with the knowledge and authority to make decisions (Heysteck & Paquette, 1999:191).

Against this background there is now considerable interest in the way SGBs establish working relationships with all stakeholders in schools to enable schools to function according to community and national needs. It is therefore important to determine what effect SGBs have on the functioning of schools and those who teach in them, as well as the extent to which educators accept the role and legal status of governing bodies as required by the South African Schools Act of 1996 (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 1996a), hereafter referred to as the SASA. This article endeavours to contribute to the debate.

School governance in South Africa

Since the general elections of 1994, the adoption of a new constitutional dispensation and the phasing in of new education legislation, a new system of education and training has been created in South Africa based on the fundamental principles of democracy, unity, non-discrimination, equity and equality (Squelch, 2000:137). This means, *inter alia*, that government is committed to the development of a democratic system that provides for participation of all stakeholders with a vested interest in education. Thus, the SASA mandates the establishment of democratic structures of school governance in all schools (RSA, 1996a, section 16). The rationale is to ensure that educators, parents, learners and non-teaching staff will actively participate in the governance and management of schools with a view to providing a better teaching and learning environment. The provisions for school governance included in the SASA were put into effect in May 1997 when the first official SGBs were elected (Karlsson, McPherson & Pampallis, 2001:163).

Composition of school governing bodies (SGBs)

According to the SASA (RSA, 1996a, section 23) the membership of SGBs should comprise elected members, the school principal (who is an *ex officio* member) and co-opted members. Elected members of the governing body shall comprise individuals from the following categories: parents of learners at the school; educators at the school; members of staff who are not educators, and learners in the eighth grade or higher. Parents must form the majority on the governing body. In response to opposition by the South African Democratic Teacher Union (SADTU) and Congress of South African Students (COSAS) (Karlsson *et al.*, 2001:156) this majority was restricted to "... one more than the combined total of other members of a governing body who have voting rights" (RSA, 1996a, section 23 (9)). Should a governing body need assistance in fulfilling its functions, a member or members of the community may be co-opted to the governing body. Generally, only two to three educators serve on the governing body. The implication is that educators frequently have to rely on the SGB as a whole (and not specifically on their own educator representatives) to meet their needs because research shows that educators on SGBs are reluctant to engage in direct confrontation with school principals during SGB meetings (Deem, Brehony & Heath, 1995:127).

Functions of SGBs

Subject to the SASA (RSA, 1996a, sections 20 and 21) the SGB of a public school must, *inter alia*, develop the mission statement of the school; adopt a code of conduct for learners of the school after consultation with the learners, parents and educators of the schools and determine the admission and language policy of the school, within the framework laid down in the Constitution (RSA, 1996b) and the South African Schools Act (RSA, 1996a) and any other applicable provincial law. Moreover, the SGB may suspend learners from attending the school as a correctional measure for a period not exceeding one week. The SGB is also tasked with recommending to the Head of Department of the province the appointment of teaching (and other) staff at the school and dealing with the disciplinary hearings of educators. The SGB must also support the principal, educators and other staff members of the school in the performance of their professional functions. SGBs are tasked with supplementing the resources supplied by the state in order to improve the quality of education provided by the school. In this regard parents may be asked to pay school fees. Such funds are administered by the governing body. The governing body must also prepare a budget each year which shows the school's estimated income and expenditure for the following year. An amendment of the SASA allows all public schools to employ additional educators to supplement the numbers of those allocated and paid for by the provincial departments of education as long as the school raises funds

for the remuneration of these additional educators (RSA, 1996a, section 20(3)).

Although this list does not include the full range of responsibilities of governing bodies, it serves to illustrate the pivotal role of the SGB and the indispensable link it forms between the school and the community it serves. It also shows that SGBs have the potential to contribute to whole school development. However, this necessitates the support of all stakeholders, particularly educators. As Parker and Leithwood (2000:55) warn: "successful improvement efforts are highly unlikely unless teachers seriously engage the reform."

Capacity building of school governing bodies

The government recognises that many SGBs, particular in the rural and less advantaged urban areas, do not have the required skills and experience to exercise their new powers and may have difficulty fulfilling their functions. To deal with this, the SASA (RSA1996a: section 19) obliges provincial governments to provide training for governing bodies. In this way, the state hopes to build a framework for the governance of schools which is characterised by power sharing among parents, educators and the community in order to support the core values of democracy and contribute to more effective schools.

Thus the broadsheet on governing bodies and effective schools points to six features for effectiveness: working as a team; good relationships with principals; effective time management and delegation; effective meetings; knowledge of the school; and the training and development of school governors (Creese & Earley, 1998:8). Most of these were mentioned or implied by the educators and principals who participated in this research.

The research design

In the light of the important role assigned to SGBs by the SASA and the impact this has on all stakeholders in schools, including educators, the aim of this study is to determine educators' perceptions and experiences of the functioning of the SGB in their school. The study involved two successive stages: (a) a questionnaire completed by a group of educators attending a workshop; and (b) detailed interviews with seven school principals.

Data collection

During the first stage of the research, a 12-item survey, requiring about 10 minutes to complete, was distributed to educators attending a workshop. Eighty questionnaires were distributed and 70 completed. Both quantitative data (closed form items) and qualitative data (open questions) were obtained by means of the questionnaire which was completed anonymously. The answers to the questionnaire did, however, reveal that 66 of the 70 educators who completed the questionnaire were teaching in township schools, mainly attended by African learners. Only four educators indicated that they were teaching in multicultural suburban schools. The questionnaire did not provide for information indicating whether the schools were situated in urban or rural areas. Although most items on the questionnaires were closed, space was also provided for comments or explanatory notes. The respondents were also afforded an opportunity at the end of the survey for additional comments, of which the majority made use. Thus the questionnaires also served as a "self revealing document" (Blase & Blase, 1999:355) or "first-person document" which "describes an individual's actions, experiences and beliefs" about a particular phenomenon (Schumacher & MacMillan, 1993:434). This provided qualitative data which were analysed according to procedures typical of qualitative research.

In addition to the survey, in-depth interviews were conducted with seven principals of public primary schools. The principals were chosen according to purposeful or judgmental sampling, the aim of which was to locate information-rich individuals or cases — that is, those who are likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomena under investigation (Johnson & Christenson, 2000:180).

The seven principals who were interviewed were all white males. Details of the schools included are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1   Characteristics of schools

School	Learners	Locations	Economic status	Feeder area
A	800	Suburb	Middle-class	Neighbourhood
B	653	Suburb	Middle-class	Neighbourhood
C	1 500	Inner city	Lower middle	Neighbourhood
				Bussed from township
D	1 500	Inner city	Lower middle	Neighbourhood
				Bussed from township
E	724	Suburb	Mixed	Neighbourhood
F	635	Suburb	Mixed	Neighbourhood
G	930	Suburb	Lower middle	Neighbourhood

Schools A and B are located in middle-income suburbs and the learners live in the vicinity of the schools. Both schools use Afrikaans as the language of learning because it is the home language of the vast majority of the learners. However, in both these schools approximately 2% of learners have English or Xhosa as their home language. Schools C and D are located adjacent to the central business district and serve lower middle-income communities. Both have a geographically mixed catchment area. Approximately half of the learners attending these schools live in the apartment buildings and houses in the vicinity whilst the rest are bussed to the schools from a local township. Most learners attending the schools are English Second Language (ESL) speakers. Two schools (E and F) are located in mixed-income suburbs and the catchment areas serve the surrounding neighbourhoods. Both schools use English as the language of instruction, but have approximately 15% ESL learners. The seventh school (school G) is a dual medium school (English and Afrikaans) and is situated in a lower middle-income suburb and the learners come from the immediate neighbourhood.

All the interviews with the principals were audio taped and later fully transcribed. The transcriptions, together with the additional comments elicited by the questionnaires, comprise the qualitative data in this research.

Data analysis

The statistical data derived from the questionnaires were coded to list percentages in each response category for each question. The basic descriptive statistics produced "profiles" of the perceptions and experiences of educators of the roles SGBs play in their respective schools. These descriptive statistics are referred to in the findings.

The qualitative data consisted of transcripts of the interviews with the principals as well as the comments of educators elicited by the questionnaires. The analysis of this data — which Hatch (2002:148) refers to as a "a systematic search for meaning" — initially consisted of reading and rereading the transcripts of the interviews and the comments elicited by the questionnaires. Thereafter, relevant extracts of the text were highlighted and then grouped under themes. These were subsequently clustered into categories. Extracts from the raw data were selected and either paraphrased or quoted to illustrate the patterns.

Findings of the research

In this research the opinions expressed by educators who completed the questionnaires mainly reflect the experiences of educators teaching in township schools. In contrast, the principals who were interviewed are employed in schools that serve fairly affluent to lower middle-income communities. The findings derived from the two stages of the research therefore demonstrate a wide variation of experiences and perceptions of school governance. This can be partly ascribed to varying socioeconomic circumstances of schools and the level of expertise of the various SGBs. However, many of the findings cannot be satisfactorily explained on this basis alone and may warrant further investigation. The main findings are discussed below.

The effectivity of SGBs is questioned

When asked to indicate how effective the SGB of their school was in fulfilling their tasks, only 27% of educators who completed the questionnaires considered their SGB to be "very effective". One comment read as follows: "Our SGB has promised to fulfil its tasks working together with teachers, the principal and parents. This they have achieved since being in position." Another added: "They are effective because they have done their work effectively, they have planned all the issues pertaining to the smooth running of the school." Most of the principals interviewed also praised their SGB highly and felt that they were able to draw on the professional expertise of its members to deal with a wide range of tasks which needed to be performed in the school.

In contrast to the above, 53% of educators felt their SGB was only "slightly effective", whilst 20% thought their SGB was "not effective" in fulfilling their tasks. As one educator explained: " SGB members lack confidence and are not sure about their duties." One educator said that this resulted in their depending on the principal "... who uses his professional powers to influence the SGB". Where educators felt the SGB was not effective, it was often attributed to a lack of interest in the school, low levels of literacy and lack of training, which led one educator to suggest that "SGBs should have members who were involved in education, for example, ex-principals and ex-teachers". This was supported by another participant: "SGBs should comprise of at least retired teachers who will help in the course of the management of the school."

One rationale for the choice of decentralised school governance is the argument that it will improve decision-making about teaching and learning, result in more effective use of resources, and contribute to more effective practices and outcomes. However, although parents have more knowledge of local conditions, they often know little about larger issues that are just as important in determining an appropriate course of action (Levin, 1997:261).

SGB support for educators is narrowly defined

Section 20(1e) of the SASA (RSA, 1996a) states that it is the duty of the governing body to "support principals, educators and other staff in the performance of their professional duties". This encompasses staff development programmes which include the identification and satisfaction of the professional needs of individual staff members in pursuing their careers. This also means exposing educators to in-service training and professional and career development experiences, incorporated within the broader school development plan (Simkins, Elison & Garret, 1992:100). In general, this support is seldom realised.

When asked in the questionnaires whether the SGB makes educators feel valuable, only 31% answered "always"; 57% said "sometimes" whereas 11% commented that this "never" occurred. An educator who is clearly dissatisfied with the SGB remarked: " The SGB that we are having this year are against us. They are inferior because they think we undermine them and they make rules that show that we are not valuable at all." Another added: "They (the SGB) always tell us that we cannot survive without them or they threaten us with redeployment." No one mentioned that the SGB ever supported them in their professional development.

The principals who were interviewed argued that educators do not need support in their teaching tasks and that efforts should rather be made to decrease their workload by employing additional educators paid for by school funds. One principal elaborated: "That in itself is incredible support for the teaching staff, it cuts the workload down ...". Another added that the SGB always sent notes to educators thanking them for work well done.

The interviews with the school principals showed that few SGBs were concerned with the professional development of educators, tending to leave academic matters to school management. This is consistent with practices elsewhere in the world. As Creese (1995:225) explains "when curriculum issues arise, teachers on the one hand are all too ready to say 'leave it to the professionals' and governors, on the other hand, uncertain of their ground and not necessarily well informed, are often happy to do so." One principal even suggested that academic issues had nothing to do with school governors and they should not "poke their nose in where it does not belong".

A common problem experienced by many SGBs in South Africa and abroad is the lack of or inadequate expertise within the field of education which has a negative impact on the SGBs' ability to support educators as intended by the SASA (RSA, 1996, section 20 (1e)). According to Guskey and Peterson (1996:12) some governing bodies therefore avoid, ignore or neglect issues related to teaching and learning. Likewise, Mambane (2000:16), contends that school governors are seldom encouraged to make policies on curriculum issues thereby excluding them from the main business of the school and depriving educators of valuable support in the field of teaching and learning.

Educators' acceptance of their circumscribed role in school governance

In order to restore or improve the culture of teaching and learning in South African schools a common purpose or mission among students, educators, principals and governing bodies must be developed, with clear, mutually agreed and understood responsibilities and lines of co-operation and accountability (RSA, 1995:21-23). However, because there is limited representation of educators on the SGB, the perception may be created that their input into school governance is under-valued. This is reiterated by Motala and Mungadi (1999:15) who argue that school governance was introduced with insufficient school-level preparation and that, for many teachers, this change appeared as a "top-down" state instruction. However, in response to the question on educator input, 46% of educators felt that they were "often" given the opportunity to express their opinion on school governance; 36% of educators said that this occurred "occasionally", whilst 19% felt that they were "never" given an opportunity to express their opinions on issues of governance at their schools. One educator argued that SGB members consulted staff only when they are afraid of taking responsibility: "They do sometimes allow discussion when they are in trouble of some sort." Another felt strongly that the composition of governing bodies should be changed so that parents are not in the majority. He or she felt that teachers as "enlightened professional people who know about children" should not be placed in a position where they could be outvoted by parents.

During interviews with the school principals it was apparent that considerable consultation took place between the principal and the chairpersons of the various SGBs. In contrast, very little mention is made of consultations with eductors other than the members of the school management team. In general it would appear as if principals assume that they represent the interest of educators fully and that there is no need for further discussion with the latter.

The position of educators on SGBs is somewhat ambiguous and while the role of the principal as "chief executive" or "leading professional" is relatively clear-cut, it is often difficult for educator governors to find a meaningful role. Moreover, educators on SGBs often feel uncomfortable discussing an item on the agenda which would impinge directly upon their employment conditions (Deem *et al.*, 1995:126). This means that educators often look to parents on the SGB to support their interests, rather than to their own representatives on the SGB.

The power of SGBs

Members of SGBs are empowered by the provisions of the SASA. In addition, parent governors also bring to their governance tasks power and status from other contexts. In contrast, educators and principals rely heavily on the power and status offered by their position in schools (Deem *et al.*, 1995:11). In affluent communities this could mean that SGB parent members have more status and power than educators by virtue of their position in society. However, the opposite is often true in low socioeconomic communities, where educators may be the most highly qualified members in the community. In this regard one principal admitted that in his previous school situated in a poor

community, he could virtually do as he pleased because most of the members of the SGB were poorly qualified and accepted his status and knowledge. In contrast, the more affluent community his current school serves, can choose highly competent school governors who have a clear understanding of their rights and duties, and who exercise considerable power in the school.

In response to a question on the amount of power enjoyed by SGBs, 49% of educators felt that SGBs had "just enough power", whilst 16% stated that members of the SGB had "too much power". A significant 33% of educators felt that the SGB had "too little power". However, educators who chose the latter option generally went on to explain that SGB members were unable to make an impact on school policies and practice because they did not fully understand the SASA and the power and responsibilities it afforded school governors. As one educator explained: "Most of them are illiterate and therefore fail to execute the tasks delegated to them." Another educator complained that the SGB is often "... too easily manipulated into making deci-sions". However, those who clearly felt that their SGB had too much power were often extremely vocal in their disapproval. As one ex-plained: "The SGB controls almost everything. Without their consent nothing can be done. Sometimes the principal cannot make an emer-gency decision." Another added: "They (school governors) just do as they like and even interfere where they are not supposed to."

SGBs have, by virtue of the SASA, been assigned considerable power and responsibility and, among other things, can capture the school's character and identity in the wording of the school's policy, as well as determine the way in which the school should achieve its pur-pose "systematically and consistently" (Gallagher, 1992:28). This calls for a sound knowledge of schooling, acceptable writing skills and the ability to verbalise the content of the policy to others in an effective manner. In general, educators accept this, but are not always con-vinced that SGBs are equal to the task.

Support for the role of the SGB in matters of learner discipline

The governing body is legally empowered, after consultation with educators, parents and learners, to adopt a code of conduct for learners and must ensure that learners abide by it. The main purpose of the code of conduct is to articulate acceptable behaviour for all in the everyday life of the school (Harding, 1987:141). Mambane (2000:21) argues that the inclusion of parents in developing a code of conduct for schools will help the school adopt more positive procedures for dealing with transgressions of the rules. Where transgressions do oc-cur, the SGB is empowered to suspend a learner after he or she has been given a fair hearing (Potgieter, Visser, Van der Bank, Mothata & Squelch, 1997:61). Should the governing body recommend that the learner be expelled, the case must be reported to the Head of Depart-ment of the province.

An overwhelming 91% of the educators who answered the questionnaire supported the involvement of the SGB in maintaining discipline at school. As one educator explained: "They (the SGB) are representing the parents of learners so they must be involved in dis-ciplining them." Another added: "As they developed a code of conduct for learners, they must be involved in discipline." The participation of the SGB in misconduct of learners was welcomed. One educator explained: " ... these learners come from the very community that they (the SGB members) serve, it is their children". Educators also admitted to having problems disciplining learners without resorting to corporal punishment and therefore welcomed any help in addressing discipli-nary issues. This was reiterated by school principals although most claimed not to have any serious disciplinary problems at their schools. In their comments, a number of educators stipulated that SGBs should be involved in disciplinary issue only if a serious offence had been committed and only after the principal had tried to deal with the matter.

In South African schools the focus has now been placed on posi-tive discipline and it is emphasised that discipline "... must not be punitive and punishment orientated but facilitate constructive learn-

ing" (RSA, 1998:3). However, research shows that many parents and communities still believe in corporal punishment as a means of dealing with misconduct (Mabeba & Prinsloo, 2000; Van Wyk, 2001), and it is therefore necessary to inform all stakeholders (including SGB mem-bers) of alternative methods if they are to play a meaningful role in establishing a culture of teaching and learning at their schools.

Support for the role of the SGB in appointing and promoting staff

In terms of section 6 of the Employment of Educators Act of 1998 (RSA, 1998), the appointment of staff is a matter of partnership be-tween the governing body and representatives of the employee organi-sations who act as observers in the interviewing process. The same process is followed in staff promotion. The participation of these parties is aimed at affirming both the transparency and democratisation of the interviewing process and ensuring that the applicants for the post are accorded fair, just and equitable treatment. In the final ana-lysis, it is the task of the governing body to make recommendations on the appointment and promotion of staff to the Department. Creese and Earley (1999:36) support this, arguing that school governors have their most direct impact on teaching and learning when they appoint a new member of staff, and the more senior the appointment is, the greater the impact is likely to be.

Surprisingly 74% of educators who completed the questionnaires were in favour of the SGB's involvement in the selection and promo-tion of educators. Various reasons were advanced. One educator said: "Maybe this will involve them and make them aware of the type of teachers there are in their school." Another mentioned: "It is their school and their children therefore they should have the power to select the educators whom they think are good for their children." Some argued that the law states that the SGB must interview educators and they were therefore compelled to accept the situation. Others argued this was sound policy because it made the selection process and promotions "transparent". One educator had a broader vision, arguing that SGBs have been given responsibility to make decisions about their schools "so as to preserve the values and norms of the community." Another educator also argued that members of the SGB "... know more about the needs of the institution than the District Office" and should therefore decide who should teach their children.

However, 26% of educators felt that the SGB should not promote or appoint educators. They maintained that "the school governing body does not have the expertise to do so." Furthermore, they felt that SGB members often looked for "... people whom they know even though they do not know that person's qualification". This was reiterated by another educator: "Sometimes the members of the SGB have relatives at school so they may choose their relatives and do not consider the competence of educators." An educator who had been part of a selec-tion process expressed the following opinion:

> It makes me angry to let the SGB select and promote educators while they didn't even finish Grade 8. Just imagine being inter-viewed by a person with less knowledge about your career and that such people must choose the correct person to lead the school! This must be done by educationists from the Department of Education.

Most principals who were interviewed feel strongly that the SGB should continue to play a role in this regard because they were competent, were aware of the needs of the school and community and would therefore know which educators to select or promote. In con-trast, Karlsson *et al.* (2001:176) warn that inequalities between schools could be exacerbated by allowing SGBs to recommend the appoint-ment of educators to schools. The reason for this is that affluent schools would be able to select the best educators since these schools could offer more than those in disadvantaged communities. This would further weaken these schools. The South African government supports this notion and now proposes in the Education Law Amendment Bill 31 of 2002 that the SGB only be allowed to interview educators who

are listed by the provincial department of education as candidates for the particular school (RSA, 2002).

Support for the role of the SGB in matters of educator misconduct

Legislation has made it possible for governing bodies to become actively involved in assisting the professional management teams of schools to handle cases of discipline and dismissals of educators (Marishane, 1999:92). When dealing with these cases, the governing body should comply with the school rules and procedures and the Education Acts on which these rules and procedures are based. Misconduct of educators may be referred to the South African Council for Educators (RSA, 2000) by the SGB, or to the provincial departments of education that is the employer.

Surprisingly, 73% of educators felt that the SGB should be involved in disciplining educators who have misbehaved. As one educator explained: "They (the SGB) should address such issues before teacher misbehaviour becomes an embarrassment for the school." Another argued that the SGB should be involved in disciplining staff as a natural consequence of being involved in their appointment. In addition, educators said that involving the SGB was particularly relevant "... if the principal has tried all other means of calling the teacher to task and has failed".

Twenty-seven percent of educators felt that the SGB should not be involved in disciplinary action involving educators. They were particularly vocal in their opposition to this provision in the Act. Some argued that the SGB members were not impartial, while others felt that the principal, as their academic equal, should be the only one to deal with such matters. One educators had the following to say: "They are supposed to discipline the learner only — not me! Never! I'm just fed-up with the so-called parents of the SGB. I will never allow them to discipline me." Such sentiments are understandable. However, many researchers have reported on the poor conduct of educators, particularly in township schools (Chisholm & Vally, 1996; Maja, 1993; Van Wyk, 2001). Granting SGBs the authority to investigate this issue is therefore appropriate. However, as mentioned previously, SGBs require training to fulfil this task to the satisfaction of all concerned.

Reservations regarding the SGB's management of school finances

In South Africa, the state generally builds and maintains public schools, pays educators' salaries and buys most of the teaching materials needed (Potgieter *et al.*, 1997:37). Because these funds are generally insufficient to meet the needs of the school, other sources of income need to be found. The SASA thus makes it possible for a SGB to recommend that school fees be paid. The governing body has a vital role to fulfil in overseeing the financial management of the school fees and any other money which may be paid into the school's account. This role includes planning, reviewing, controlling and approving the school budget in accordance with the school's needs as presented by the principal. Ultimately the governing body is accountable to the providers of the funds, namely, parents, private donors, the Department of Education and the business sector concerning the expenditure of funds.

The principals were satisfied with the role the SGB was playing in this regard stating that there were many professional people in the community who are able to deal with a school budget, which in one case amounted to R7 million. In contrast, educators had reservations about the SGB's competence to handle financial matter. Only 47% were satisfied with the way this was being done. As one explained: "The SGB is not well trained that is why they do not know what is expected of them with regard to the finances." Another added: "They only sign cheques, they don't work according to the budget. There is no financial committee. They do not participate in fund-raising of the school."

Whilst the state has made a genuine attempt to assist disadvantaged schools, this has often been at the expense of increasing the workload of SGBs and the financial burden of parents. A likely outcome is that in the long run there will be a systematic inequality between a small number of rich schools for whites and middle-class blacks and a majority of poorly resourced, mainly township schools (Weber, 2001:285). Karlsson *et al.* (2001:162) argue that, in addition, the state is forcing parents on SGBs to view their role as co-opted fund raisers and not as decision makers in educational matters. Educators are obviously perturbed about this and their observations that many parent members of SGBs are not equal to the task should be investigated.

Relationships of principals with SGBs

Looyen (2000:66) contends that, in the past principals largely controlled South African schools with little or no teacher-parent participation. The principal's leadership style and frame of reference largely drove the school's ethos, culture and impetus. Educators, parents and learners contributed little to policy and decision making, for the most part their role was supportive. The SASA has changed this situation. However, the principal remains an important link between the school and parents and between management and governance. Moreover, governors are highly dependent upon the principal for the quality of information they receive (Earley, 2000:200). When asked to indicate whether the school principal dominates the SGB, 41% of educators said "yes", 38% said "no", whereas 21% said that they "did not know". One educator had this to say of the principal of his or her school: "She dominates the SGB — she is the key player. She wants things done her own way, she does not take the school's interest into consideration." This seems consistent with research conducted in other countries, which shows that the principal is essentially in charge, with the governors having little impact upon the school's direction (Creese & Earley, 1999:6). In some cases this was with the approval of the governors and in others it arose by default because the governors were unwilling or unable to take on their new responsibilities. Sometimes the principal would outmanoeuvre the governors in order to retain control. One principal considered the role of the SGB merely to provide "general support" and admitted to playing a dominant role in the SGB. In other interviews with principals it was apparent that the principal and chairperson of the SGB work closely together and meet far more frequently than the whole SGB. This does raise concern because the decisions taken may not necessarily be representative of the views held by the whole SGB or the stakeholders they represent.

Parker and Leithwood (2000:41) agree that principals have a remarkable capacity to either derail community-based governance structures retaining control for themselves or ensure the effectiveness of these structures. Karlsson (2002:332) attributes this to the principal's position of power within the school, level of education in contrast to other members of the SGB, first access to information issued by education authorities, and because it is the principal who implements the decisions taken. Creese and Earley (1999:12) therefore suggest that principals and potential principals need to be trained to appreciate the value that an effective governing body could add to their schools.

The need for training for school governors

It is clear that the competence of members of the SGB was directly related to the amount of training they received. Many educators made use of the section "additional comments" to express their views on this. One educator maintained: "The workshops for the training of SGBs should be improved. Follow-ups should be made to evaluate their performance. No follow-ups, no improvement." Another participant added: "Much should be done to educate SGBs on matters concerning their legal tasks or functions. Intensive training should be implemented in helping them to cope with their tasks." Some educators even suggested that adult basic education and training (ABET) should increasingly be provided to parents in the community to help them in fulfilling their civic duties. One educator explained: "The SGB, especially the parents, needs to be workshopped. In my area, for instance, they are illiterate. The Department of Education needs to

educate these parents to at least (the level of) Grade 4 or 6." Educators also felt that parents who had received some form of training should be issued with a certificate. Some even suggested that parents serving on the SGB should be remunerated since this could serve to motivate them to fulfil their tasks as SGB members.

The training currently offered by some provincial departments (or NGOs appointed by them) was criticised. One educator elaborated as follows: "... the workshops should be done in the language they (the parents) understand not in the language that suits the providers. They should have copies of the Schools Act in their own language." This is supported in the literature where concern is raised that many parents do not want to serve on SGBs because they believe that they lack the expertise a governor requires (Morgan, Fraser, Dunn & Cairns, 1992: 18). In addition, ignorance and incapacity to perform certain functions tend to cause governing bodies to function only as crisis committees (Karlsson *et al.*, 2001:169). This will be to the detriment of schools and those teaching in them.

The shift to decentralised school governance and management requires governors, principals and educators to develop a wide range of skills and capacity to deal with the complex issues and tasks they are expected to fulfil. Educators often mentioned the necessity of providing appropriate training for school governors, particularly the parent representatives. They also suggested that the SGB should receive copies of the SASA in their own language and undergo training on the content thereof by people fluent in the local vernacular. However, Squelch (2000:143), argues that in addition to this, all role players should master a number of skills if they are to fulfil their tasks successfully. These include: problem-solving skills, conflict resolution, time management, change management and financial planning.

Conclusion

It is apparent that SGBs in South Africa have a statutory responsibility for many critical functions within schools which could make a valuable contribution to ensuring a school's effectiveness and continuing improvement. However, changing where and how decisions are made does not guarantee better, more efficient or more effective school practices (Eliason, 1996:92). Likewise, it is important to recognise that the SASA offers only sketchy assistance in the division of authority and the tasks of school management and SGBs. A legalistic approach to dividing responsibilities and functions may therefore not be useful. While it may be necessary to distinguish between the role of the governing body and that of the principal, the school management team, and other educators, the distinction should not detract from the constitutional principles for co-operative governance. According to Potgieter *et al.* (1997:19), these principles include ensuring effective, transparent and accountable governance, consulting on matters of common interest, and ensuring that agreed procedures are followed. Co-operative governance is thus best described as an interactive approach to education in which all stakeholders are represented and take co-responsibility for the effective and efficient operations of their schools. Judging by the research conducted, it is a challenge educators are willing to accept.

References

Blase J & Blase J 1999. Principals' instructional leadership and teacher development: Teachers' perspectives. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 35:349-378.

Chisholm L & Vally S 1996. *The culture of learning and teaching in Gauteng schools*. Johannesburg: EPU.

Creese MJ 1995. Management development: the way forward. *School organisation*, 11:223-229.

Creese M & Earley 1998. *School governing bodies: rationale, roles and reassessment. Viewpoint No. 8*. London: Institute of Education.

Creese M & Earley 1999. *Improving schools and governing bodies: making a difference*. London: Routledge.

Deem R, Brehoney KJ & Heath S 1995. *Active citizenship and the governing of schools*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Earley P 2000. Monitoring, managing or meddling? Governing bodies and the evaluation of school performance. *Educational Management and Administration*, 28:199-210.

Eliason LC 1996. Educational decentralization as a policy strategy in an era of fiscal stress. In: Chapman J, Boys WL, Lander R & Reynolds (eds). *The reconstruction of education. Quality, equality and control*. London: Cassell.

Gallagher KS 1992. *Shaping school policy: guide to choices, politics and community*. Newbury Park: Corwin.

Gamage D1994. School governance: Australian perspectives. In: Thody A (ed.). *School governors: leaders or followers?* Essex: Longman.

Godden J 1996. *Changing management to manage change in education*. Cape Town: University Press.

Guskey T & Peterson K 1996. The road to classroom change. *Educational Leadership*, 53:10-14.

Harding P 1987. *A guide to governing schools*. London: Kogan.

Hatch JA 2002. *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. Albany: State University of New York.

Heysteck J & Paquette J 1999. Educational governance in South Africa and Canada: changing frameworks for decision-making and participation. *Education and Law Journal*, 9:185-209.

Johnson B & Christenson L 2000. *Educational research: quantitative and qualitative methods*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Karlsson J, McPherson G, Pampallis J 2001. A critical examination of the development of school governance policy, and its implications for achieving equality. In: Motala S & Pampallis J (eds). *Education and equity: the impact of state policies on South African education*. Sandown: Heinemann.

Karlsson J 2002. The role of democratic governing bodies in South African schools. *Comparative Education*, 38:327-336.

Levin B 1997. The lessons of international education reform. *Journal of Education Policy*, 12:253-266.

Looyen R 2000. Co-operative school governance: from policy to practice. Unpublished MEd dissertation. Pretoria: University of South Africa.

Mabeba MZ & Prinsloo E 2000. Perceptions of discipline and ensuing discipline problems in secondary education. *South African Journal of Education*, 20:34-41.

Maja B 1993. *The breakdown of the culture of learning: a case study*. Johannesburg: The Urban Foundation.

Mambane MS 2000. Parent involvement as an aspect of school management: Implication for whole school development. Unpublished MEd dissertation. Johannesburg: Rand Afrikaans University.

Marishane RN 1999. Partnerships in school governance: foundation for reform and restructuring. Unpublished MEd dissertation. Pretoria: University of South Africa.

Morgan V, Fraser G, Dunn S & Cairns E 1992. Parental involvement in education: how do parents want to become involved? *Educational Studies*, 18:11-20.

Motala S & Mungadi R 1999. From policy to practice: achieving quality education in post-apartheid South Africa. Roodepoort: *SACHES Conference*, 30 September.

Parker K & Leithwood K 2000. School councils' influence on school and classroom practice. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 75:37-65.

Potgieter JM, Visser PJ, Van der Bank AJ, Mothata MS & Squelch J 1997. *Understanding the SA Schools Act. What public school governors need to know*. Pretoria: Department of Education.

Republic of South Africa (RSA) 1995. White Paper on Education and Training. *Government Gazette, No. 16312*. Cape Town: Government Printer.

Republic of South Africa 1996a. *South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996)*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

Republic of South Africa 1996b. *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996)*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

Republic of South Africa 1998. *Employment of Educators Act (Act 76 of 1998)*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

Republic of South Africa 2000. *South African Council for Educators Act (Act 31 of 2000)*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

Republic of South Africa (RSA) 2002. *Education Law Amendment, Bill No. 31 of 2002*. Pretoria: Government Printers.

Schumacher S & Macmillan JH 1993. *Research in education: a conceptual introduction*. New York: Longman.

Simkins T, Elison L & Garret V 1992. *The early lessons*. Harlow: Longman.

Squelch J 2000. Governance of education. In: Lemmer E (ed.). *Contemporary education: global issues and trends*. Sandton: Heinemann.

Van Wyk N 2001. Perceptions and practices of discipline and punishment in urban black schools in South Africa. *South African Journal of Education*, 21:195-201.

Weber E 2001. Shifting to the right: the evolution of equity in the South Africa government's developmental and education policies, 1990-1999. *Comparative Education Review*, 261-290.