EDPS 788: Contested Control: School Choice, Localism, and Centralization
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Office hours: By appointment only  
Tuesdays, 4:15-7:00

In 1925, after successfully prosecuting John Scopes for teaching evolution in violation of Tennessee law, the famed orator William Jennings Bryan asked, “Who shall control our public schools?” He answered, firmly: “All authority goes back at last to the people. They are the final source of authority...[The teacher] has no right to force his opinion upon students against the wishes of the tax payers and parents.” Bryan may have been right, but who are “the people” and who best represents their interest in the governance of schools? After all, taxpayers and parents are often in conflict with each other, as are local school boards and policymakers at the state and federal level. This course will examine a series of common, seemingly unobjectionable terms—“democracy,” “markets,” “choice,” “public,” “private,” etc.—each of which represents very different visions of school governance and authority. Readings will explore criteria of power, social justice, efficacy, and civic participation, but they will all return to one simple question: Who should control the schools?

**Required Texts**

We will be reading the following texts in their entirety. Students may purchase them or obtain them from the library. All other readings, marked with an [R], are available on electronic reserve through our course website, at elms.umd.edu.


**Grading**

**Weekly Reading Responses (25% of final grade)**

Each week, students will need to post a short response to the assigned reading. The response should provide an overview of the author’s argument, at least one direct
reference to the reading, and one question that we might take up in discussion. In
weeks with multiple readings, students may focus on one reading or combine their
analysis of several. Students are encouraged to respond to classmates’ posts, both
before and after class discussion. Responses are due no later than midnight on
Sunday, providing classmates time to review and respond to them before
Tuesday’s meeting. Responses will be graded for accuracy, insight, and clarity of
writing. Students may skip one week’s response without penalty.

Class Participation (25% of final grade)
Students are expected to arrive in class each week with a hard copy of the
reading or detailed notes, ready to pose or respond to the discussion questions
posted online. Strong participation grades reflect a willingness to engage in
sustained discussion on a topic and answer difficult questions, as well as mastery of
the reading. Knowing that our class is a community of shared deliberation, students
should demonstrate generosity and respect to their classmates; all should feel
equally welcome to engage. If you need to miss class, please send a brief email in
advance.

Final Paper (Draft 5%; Full Paper 45% of final grade)
Students will need to write a final paper of twenty-five to thirty-five pages
(inclusive of notes) on a topic relevant both to course content and to their own
research interests. The paper should be well written—of publication quality—and
should include comprehensive research, either in the form of a literature review
and/or original work. Possible topics include critical analyses of a particular form of
school governance, historical or philosophical appraisals of current school
governance initiatives, or policy proposals for school governance in the future.
Please note that the titles below are merely an introduction into the rich literature
of school governance, which encompasses political science, economics, history, and
many other fields. Court cases, state and federal legislation, and social movements
all offer innumerable possibilities for meaningful research. Students are encouraged
to discuss their topic with the professor before getting underway. A complete draft
of the paper is due in class on April 24th. Final papers are due in my mailbox by
4:00 P.M. on Friday, May 12th. Late work will not be accepted without a
prearranged extension.

Students With Special Needs
The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination
statute that provides comprehensive civil-rights protection for people with
disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires all schools, colleges, and
universities to make reasonable accommodations for disabled students so that they
can have access to an equal learning environment. If you have a disability requiring accommodation, please let me know so I can make the appropriate arrangements.

**Schedule of Readings**

**Week #1 (01/31/2017)—Introductions**

**Option I—Parental Control**
Perhaps the most fundamental form of educational governance is the parent’s decision about how and where the child learns. Yet families often perpetuate profound inequalities based on their own social, economic, and cultural differences. What is the philosophical basis for parental prerogative, and what assumptions make it a desirable governance model? How strong a legal claim do parents have on their children’s upbringing, and how have elements of diversity, privacy, and choice been incorporated into contemporary policy discussions?

**Week #2 (02/07/2017)—Homeschooling**
- Wagner, “Homeschooling as a Constitutional Right,” *Oklahoma City University Law Review* 39 (Fall 2014) [R]

Also recommended—

**Week #3 (02/14/2017)—The Market Metaphor**
• Chubb and Moe, Politics, Markets, and America’s Schools (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1990) (pp. 1-25, 206-229)

Also recommended—

Option II—Community Control

American schools remain profoundly influenced by the communities they serve. As a result of historical accidents, patterns of settlement, and suspicion of other social service institutions, local school districts remain the primary source of educational governance. But what exactly does “community” mean in the context of public education? What are its benefits for students, parents, and taxpayers, and what are its drawbacks? How should schools arbitrate injustice or conflict at the local level? Are local school districts a relic of the past, or do they hold promise for future reforms?

Week #4 (02/21/2017) — Schools as Creators of Community

• Asen, Democracy, Deliberation, and Education (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2015) (pp. 1-5, 180-194) [R]

Also recommended—

**Week #5 (02/28/2017)—School Districts as Public Institutions**
- Segal, *Battling Corruption in America’s Public Schools* (Boston: Northeastern University Press), 3-23, 119-132
- Justice, “Settler Colony on the Hudson” [R]
- This American Life, “A Not-So-Simple Majority”

**Week #6 (03/07/2017)—Limits of Community**
- McDermott, *Controlling Public Education: Localism Versus Equity*

Also recommended—

**Week #7 (03/14/2017)—**
No class meeting. Please ensure that you have started work on your final paper!
Week #8 (03/21/2017)—
No class meeting. Spring break.

Week #9 (03/28/2017)—Charter Schools and Local Communities
- Finn, “Charter Schools: A Public-Building Strategy That Creates Communities” [R]

Option III—Centralized Government Control
Since the nation’s founding, educational reformers have dreamed of overcoming local inequalities with the intervention of an enlightened, centralized state. Since the turn of the twentieth century, they have had that power in their grasp. How have reformers expanded the capacity of cities, states, and the federal government to set educational policy? Does their expansion represent a one-way trend, inseparable from the apparatus of the modern state? Is it zero-sum, with involvement of higher levels of government coming at the expense of those below? What have been the effects of centralization?

Week #10 (04/04/2017)—Origins of Centralization
- Lippmann, *Drift and Mastery* (pp. 91-112) [R]
- Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules* (excerpts) [R]

Also recommended—


**Week #11 (04/11/2017) — City/State Control**

- Henig and Rich, “Mayor-centrism in Context” and “Concluding Observations,” in *Mayors in the Middle* [R]
- Wong and Shen, “City and State Takeover as a Reform Strategy” [R]
- Malen, “Tightening Their Grip” [R]

Also recommended—

Wong et al., *The Education Mayor: Improving America’s Schools* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2007)


**Week #12 (04/18/2017) — Federal Control**


Also recommended—

Anderson, *The Nation and the States: Rivals or Partners?* (University of Minnesota Press, 1955)


Option IV—Professional Control

If centralization yields virtues of order, uniformity, and expertise that political jostling cannot, why should educational policy submit to democratic politics at all? Perhaps school reform is best understood as an engineering problem along the lines of public health or military strategy: the purview of qualified technocrats operating largely outside the public eye. What are the risks or benefits of entrusting school reform to unelected bodies and focused interest groups?

Week #13 (04/25/2017)—Courts

_Rough draft of the final paper due at the beginning of class._

- Zackin, *Looking for Rights in All the Wrong Places* (excerpts) [R]
- Balkin, *What Brown v. Board of Education Should Have Said* (excerpts) [R]
- Superfine, “The Evolving Role of the Courts in Educational Policy” [R]

Also recommended—


Superfine and Thompson, “Interest Groups, the Courts, and Educational Equality,” _American Educational Research Journal_ 53, no. 3 (June 2016): 573-604

Week #14 (05/02/2017)—Unions and Teacher Organizations

- Peterson, “Rethinking Teacher Union Strategy” [R]

Also recommended—


**Week #15 (05/09/2017)—Philanthropic Foundations**

Also recommended—

*Final papers due in my mailbox by 4:00 P.M. on Friday, May 12th.*