

CHAPTER V
A MODEL FOR STATE SCHOOL GOVERNING COUNCILS IN THE
DARLING DOWNS REGION

To date the only Australian state education system that has not initiated public discussion on the issue of establishing new structures of governance for state schools is the Queensland system. The existing traditional structure makes no provision for direct participation in decision making at the school level by the community, parents or students, and only limited participation for teachers. The Parents and Citizens Association, as it exists today, is largely a fund-raising organization and is prevented by regulations from formally discussing matters affecting the professional operation of the school.

In those Australian systems where school boards or councils are already in operation, experience tends to indicate that some benefits in the operation of schools can be derived by involving both professional and community personnel in the government of schools,¹ (see also Chapter II). Benefits are also indicated in the areas of school policy, budgeting

and the determination of needs for physical supports for the teaching process. The survey conducted in the Darling Downs Region during 1975 indicated that there is some felt need for a change in the school governing structure to incorporate the views, in decision making, of all those who are concerned in the education process at the local level. Strong support was also shown for an extension of the existing form of decentralized administration, i.e. the Regional Directorates, but with some form of central control maintained.

Because of the variety of types of school within the region and the remoteness of some of the smaller primary schools it is apparent that no one single structure for local governing bodies would be appropriate for all schools. The types of schools include a number of one and two teacher primary schools in more remote geographical locations, large primary schools, primary schools with "high tops" (i.e. the first three years of secondary education attached to primary schools), and secondary schools with student populations ranging from approximately 300 to 1300.

It is therefore recommended that two basic

types of structure for the governance of state schools in the Darling Downs Region be established. First, a governing council be appointed to each school where there is a full compliment of grades in primary schools and high tops, and for each secondary school. The second type of structure recommended is for a council to be established for a group of primary schools where there is not a full compliment of separate classes for all grades, e.g. the one and two teacher primary schools. The number of schools to be controlled by a combined council would be dependent upon the number of schools within close proximity to each other. As a guiding principle no more than four schools should combine in this manner. Close proximity can be defined as being within 45 minutes drive from a central location. This limitation is necessary to allow members of the governing body easy access to meetings as well as ensuring that schools under the control of the council would not become too detached from relevant local policy.

A variety of names for the governing bodies in other education systems have been used and proposed. In the process of conducting the survey, and in private discussion with a number of educationists, it became

obvious that the use of the term school board brought forward negative reactions, due largely to overtones of the American system. In an attempt to offset some of this reaction, it is recommended that the governing bodies in the Darling Downs Region be known as,State School Governing Council, for primary schools and high tops, andState High School Governing Council for secondary schools. Where two or more schools combine to form a council the name of each school should be included in the title.

The Proposed Functions of School Councils

It is not envisaged that councils become completely autonomous for there are some services better organized, for economic efficiency and to maintain standards, if controlled from a central body both on a state and regional basis. In making recommendations for the functions of school councils, the detailed responsibilities of the central authorities will therefore not come into the scope of this thesis. Decisions in the following areas would remain the province of the central authorities:-

1. employment and final placement of teaching staff;

2. payment of salaries;
3. preparation of broad curricula outlines;
4. overall planning and future development;
5. basic policy on the administration and operation of schools;
6. building programmes;
7. the provision of major services such as guidance, research, etc. and educational supplies.

The primary purpose in establishing school councils is to make education more relevant at the local level and to include those who are directly concerned in education at this level in the process of decision making. To achieve these ends, and to have effective decision making at the school level, it is recommended that the school councils should be responsible for the following functions:-

1. determination of broad school policy, e.g. on issues such as the aims and objectives of the school;
2. the preparation of budgets and control of funds received from Parents and Citizens Associations and grants;
3. preparation of a proposal for staffing requirements and being consulted by the employing authority for

the appointment of individual teaching staff to the school;

4. employment of non-professional staff;
5. maintenance and minor extensions to buildings;
6. encouragement of experimentation in all aspects of the education process.

In the area of school policy, within broad guidelines laid down by the Queensland Department of Education, the council would be responsible for determining the school's aims and objectives. As such the council would be concerned with drafting the basic philosophy of the school and so relate its purpose to the style of life in the community in which the school is located. A high proportion (85 per cent) of respondents to the survey gave support to this function. A similar level of support was also given to the idea that the council should adapt the basic curricula provided by the central authority (76 per cent). This would make it possible for the objectives of courses to be more appropriate to the needs of the students in their locality. This is not to say that the council should be responsible for drawing up separate curricula. It would be their responsibility to set down broad guidelines and then give the responsibility to teachers to implement the curricula in the manner best suited to satisfy the

syllabus objectives. The council would not be responsible for the internal administration of the school, teaching strategies or content of courses. This is an area best left to the professionals, but not to the exclusion of suggestions from council. It is important that the professionals be left with the responsibility of purely professional matters. The principal would be responsible to council for the successful implementation of such matters. The division of responsibilities along these lines would be in accord with those respondents who felt that the council should be advisory only, while also providing the avenues for positive decision making for those who felt the council should be an executive body. It is also in accordance with the high proportion of respondents (87 per cent) who agreed that the council should be accountable to the Director-General of Education for all of its actions.

In the question of finance, experience in the Australian Capital Territory has shown that some disappointment could arise if the councils are not allocated sufficient funds annually to cover all running costs, excluding salaries. However, it should be noted that initially many council members, including pro-

fessionals, would lack the necessary experience to budget successfully in the education setting. A second, and more important point to keep in mind is that the state must provide equal opportunity in all state schools for children to receive an adequate and appropriate education. Allocation of funds on a per capita basis would seriously disadvantage the small schools, or an "across the board" allocation to all schools may disadvantage others. With such a variety of types of schools in locations that range from large urban to remote rural areas, combined with a limited state budget for education, the most economic way to finance the operation of schools is through a central authority.

The majority of respondents (87 per cent) indicated that they would like to see the council involved in financial matters, and this is necessary if decision making is to become meaningful. It is of little value if council plans are thwarted by the central authority refusing necessary funds. Therefore a prime purpose of the council should be the preparation of a budget for the following year covering recurrent costs, excluding salaries, and including costs for maintenance and minor extensions to buildings. This budget would then need to be forwarded to the Regional

Director for approval or amendment and then passed on to the central authority for final approval. If fully approved the necessary supplies and funds would be provided when required. It is suggested that major alterations to the budget should not be made by either of the central authorities without consultation with the council.

Experience in financial matters could be gained by allowing councils to allocate Parents and Citizens Association funds and government grants in the manner they think best at that time. In addition councils should be given the opportunity to apply for and administer special grants to cover the costs for innovative programmes, disadvantaged schools, educating migrant children and any other approved programme. Additional funds may be obtained from projects operated outside school hours and organized by the council, when any profit made may be passed on to the council to spend as they see fit.

Finally, it would be the responsibility of the council to provide audited accounts annually to the Regional Director.

The appointment of academic staff has caused the greatest concern to teachers in

all existing proposals and a similar reaction was obtained from this survey. It is evident that teachers will not accept the principle that school governing bodies should have the power to "hire and fire" (only 32 per cent in favour). The argument in favour of this responsibility being given to councils is that only those staff would be appointed when the philosophies of both teacher and school are in fairly common agreement. However, the main argument against this is that it is an infringement on the professional status of teachers if laymen are able to have a significant say in the employment of teachers.

A problem that must apply particularly in Queensland is that of attracting staff to remote-area schools if councils are able to "hire and fire" but not able to provide monetary incentives to offset remoteness. Despite its faults the existing system of the central authority appointing staff appears to be the most practical. However, the responses in the survey on staffing matters did indicate that the council should be involved in some way in the appointment of academic staff (61 per cent in favour of being consulted).

This could be achieved in one of two ways,

either through consultation between the Department of Education and the council as to whether a particular appointment would be in accord with school policy and philosophy. The alternative could be for the council to provide a duty statement setting out the needs of the school with respect to particular positions and forwarding this to the Department. It would then be the responsibility of the Department to match the duty statement with the most appropriately qualified teacher, and make the appointment.

It is therefore recommended that the school council have no direct role in staffing schools but should be consulted by the employing authority in one of the two methods outlined above. The council would also be responsible for notifying the Department of Education on staffing requirements.

The appointment of ancilliary staff is a different situation to that described above. In this case each member of the council would be expected to be in a position to know the needs of the school with regard to teacher aides and so capable of making an appropriate selection on behalf of the school. Those surveyed in the Darling Downs Region were strongly in

favour (77 per cent) of the council being given the responsibility for being involved in the selection of ancillary staff. However, to ensure security of tenure and parity of salaries between schools it is essential to retain the Public Service Board as the central employing authority. With regard to ancillary staff the recommendation is that the school council be responsible for their selection and recommendation for employment by the Public Service Board. The number of ancillary staff employed in each school should be in accordance with the formula already in existence.

In order to implement school policy or innovations some minor alterations to physical plant may be necessary. Similarly repairs to buildings and equipment are constantly required in schools, some urgent some not so urgent. In either case the people most conversant with the requirements of the situation are those immediately responsible for the administration of the school, i.e. the council. It is therefore recommended that the school council be empowered to arrange for minor alterations and maintenance to physical plant. If necessary tenders may be called and contracts let by council and it should be the respons-

ibility of council to supervise works to their satisfactory conclusion. Accounts should be forwarded to and paid by the Department of Education. Again such responsibility would provide meaningful decision making in areas where expenditure is not excessive. Major alterations or building programmes should remain the prerogative of the central authority to ensure expenditure is allocated to the most needy schools.

The final area of responsibility of the council concerns the creation of an appropriate climate in which experimentation in all aspects of the education process might be encouraged. Flexibility and progress in education is a product of an enthusiastic and capable administration. A council that will not listen to suggestions nor allow teachers to experiment will restrict progress, whereas both moral and physical support by the council for experimentation in teaching techniques, physical plant and curriculum content, if properly implemented and evaluated, may contribute to a better education.

The Proposed Composition of School Councils

There is some disagreement between existing proposals on the total number of membership and the

respective proportions of members representing different groups on school governing bodies. In the Australian Capital Territory system the number of professionals equals the number of lay members representing the school, but the representative of the Authority, who is also a professional educator, gives a majority of one for professional members. However, in New South Wales and South Australia it has been proposed that lay members should exceed professionals, while in Victoria, alternatives A, B and C require a maximum of lay membership and alternative D would allow either lay or professional members to dominate the council. The survey of the Darling Downs schools revealed strong support from the three groups surveyed for professionals to be in the majority on school councils (48 per cent). The bases for rejection of proposals in New South Wales and Victoria, the findings by Musgrave, and experience in the Australian Capital Territory indicating the lack of wide participation by the community (see Chapter II), all tend to support the argument that professionals should constitute a greater proportion of membership on school councils. It is therefore recommended that school councils in the Darling Downs Region have a

majority of professional membership over lay, and where appropriate, student membership.

Because of the necessity, referred to earlier, to have two basic structures for councils in this region it will be necessary to deal with each structure separately. However, the basic principles for the composition of councils will apply to both types of structure. Structure one will refer to councils formed for each school, and structure two to councils formed for a combination of schools.

Structure One

Size: Existing proposals and the data obtained from the survey provide widely differing opinions on what should be the minimum and maximum size of school councils. The guiding principal to be adopted here for the size of the council is that it should be sufficiently large to ensure proper representation of relevant groups, but at the same time not too large as to become unweildy.

Staff Representation: All indications clearly point to the fact that the Principal should be a member of the Council. The opinions expressed by the respondents to the survey also clearly indicate that staff should be represented and that the number of teachers, plus

principal, should exceed the number of lay members (the preferred composition being - 4 lay, 3 teachers, 1 principal and 1 Department representative). Inclusion of teachers can be argued on the grounds that it provides a major avenue for teacher participation in school administration and that as properly trained professionals their expertise would provide a valuable contribution on which to base policy decisions.

Parents and Community Representation: Traditionally Australian schools have been isolated from community influences on policy matters. However, the process of education is designed to "fit" students into the society into which they will proceed on leaving school. Parents are a crucial part of this education process and to exclude them from taking part in policy making at the school level denies them the opportunity of ensuring a complete education for their children.

To ensure that schools become a vital part of the community some form of community involvement in policy making is necessary. Parents and Citizens Associations have provided a minimum degree of involvement in school life for the community but a real part in policy making has been denied them. To foster meaning-

ful school-community relationships representatives from the community should be included on the council. Although this would allow only a small minority of the community to take an active part in policy making the avenues would be created to allow a greater involvement by them in the life of the school. The data from the survey supports the argument that both parents and community should be given the opportunity to be members of a school council. (See the results to questions 8 and 11). Thus lay membership should not be restricted only to parents of students at the school.

In specific instances it should be possible for selected members of the community to be co-opted to assist the council in making policy decisions in relevant areas. Co-opted members should not, however, be voting members of council.

Departmental Representative: As the main governing body that determines basic policy it is the responsibility of the Department of Education to see that this policy is carried out. A Departmental representative would be in a position to act as consultant on educational policy while at the same time ensuring that local adaptations would be in line with overall policy. Data from the survey indicates support for a Departmental repres-

entative on school councils. (See also question 8). This representative could be either an officer of the Department or a nominee of the Director General if there is a need to spread the work load of attending council meetings.

Student Representation: This question is relevant only to senior students in secondary schools. It is one issue that has caused most division between teachers, principals and community. In the survey the combined data on the relevant question indicates that students should be eligible as non-voting members (37 per cent). However, the three groups surveyed differed in their opinions as to whether they should or should not be included as members of council. It could be argued that as senior students they should be sufficiently mature to take part in policy discussions which would also provide good training for later life. On the other hand it can be argued that there will be matters discussed in which they have no expertise, such as buildings and curricula, or that matters will be discussed in which they should not be involved, e.g. discipline of staff or students.

Primary school students are too young to be considered for representation and it is probably best left to individual councils whether senior students in secondary schools should be included, and if so whether as voting or non-voting members.

On the basis of the above principles it is recommended that school councils for each school be constituted as follows (see Figure 3):-

PRIMARY SCHOOLS

The Principal

One nominee of the Department of Education.

Three members elected by the teaching staff.

Four members elected by the community.

Co-opted members if desired.

In "high top" schools two staff representatives should be primary teachers and one from the secondary department.

SECONDARY SCHOOLS

The Principal

One nominee of the Department of Education.

Three members elected by the teaching staff.

Four members elected by the community.

Co-opted members if desired.

(Where desired by the majority of staff and those members of the community who vote at school council elections), two students elected by the student body.

If students are elected to council one more member of staff is to be elected.

Structure Two

These will refer only to primary schools.

All principles outlined above, except those applying to student representation, will therefore apply to the composition of these councils. It is recommended that the structure of these councils be as follows:-

The principal or one teacher from each school which is to combine to form the council.

One representative from each community in which the school is located.

One nominee of the Department of Education.

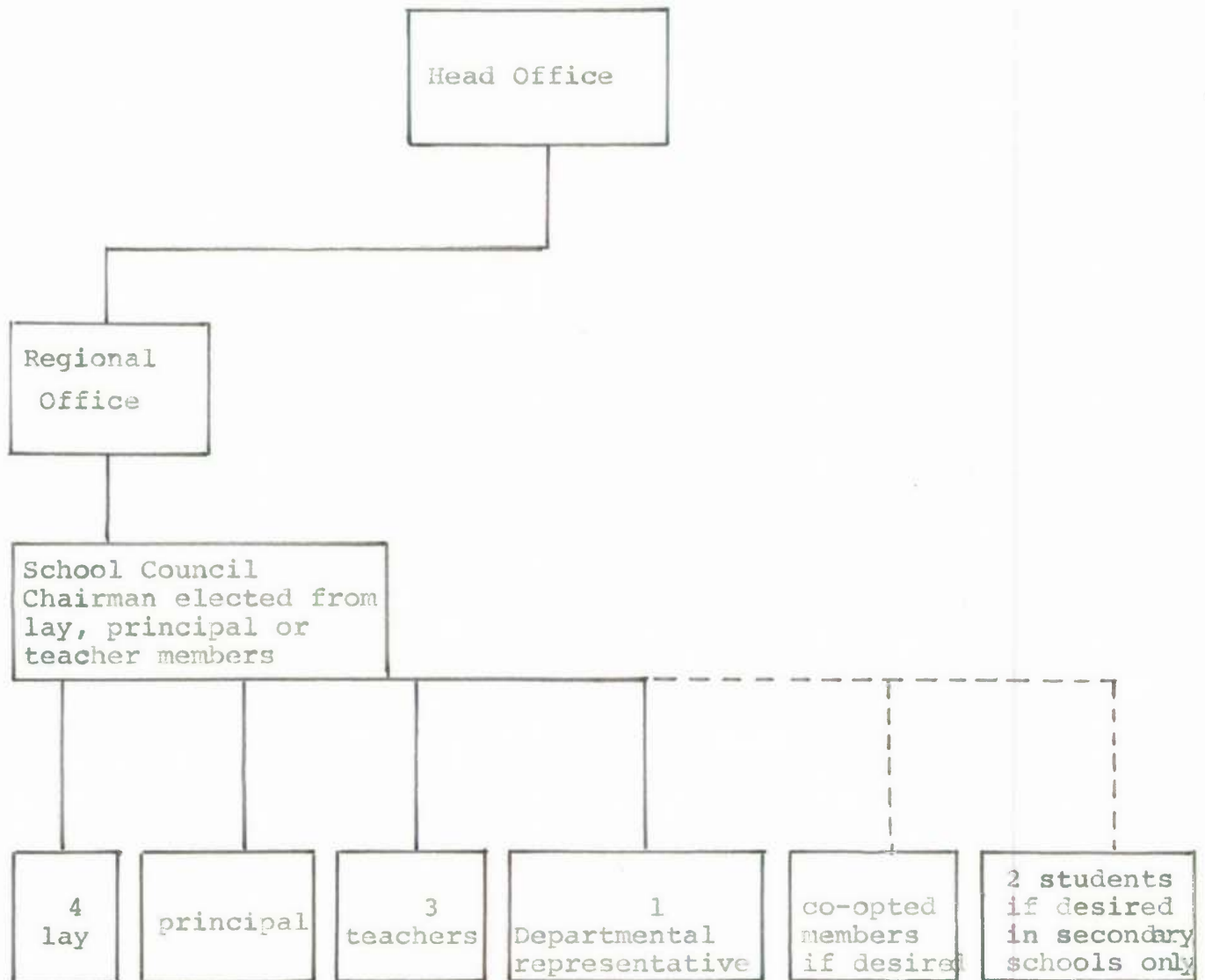
Co-opted members if desired.

Other Recommendations

It is recommended that elections for member-

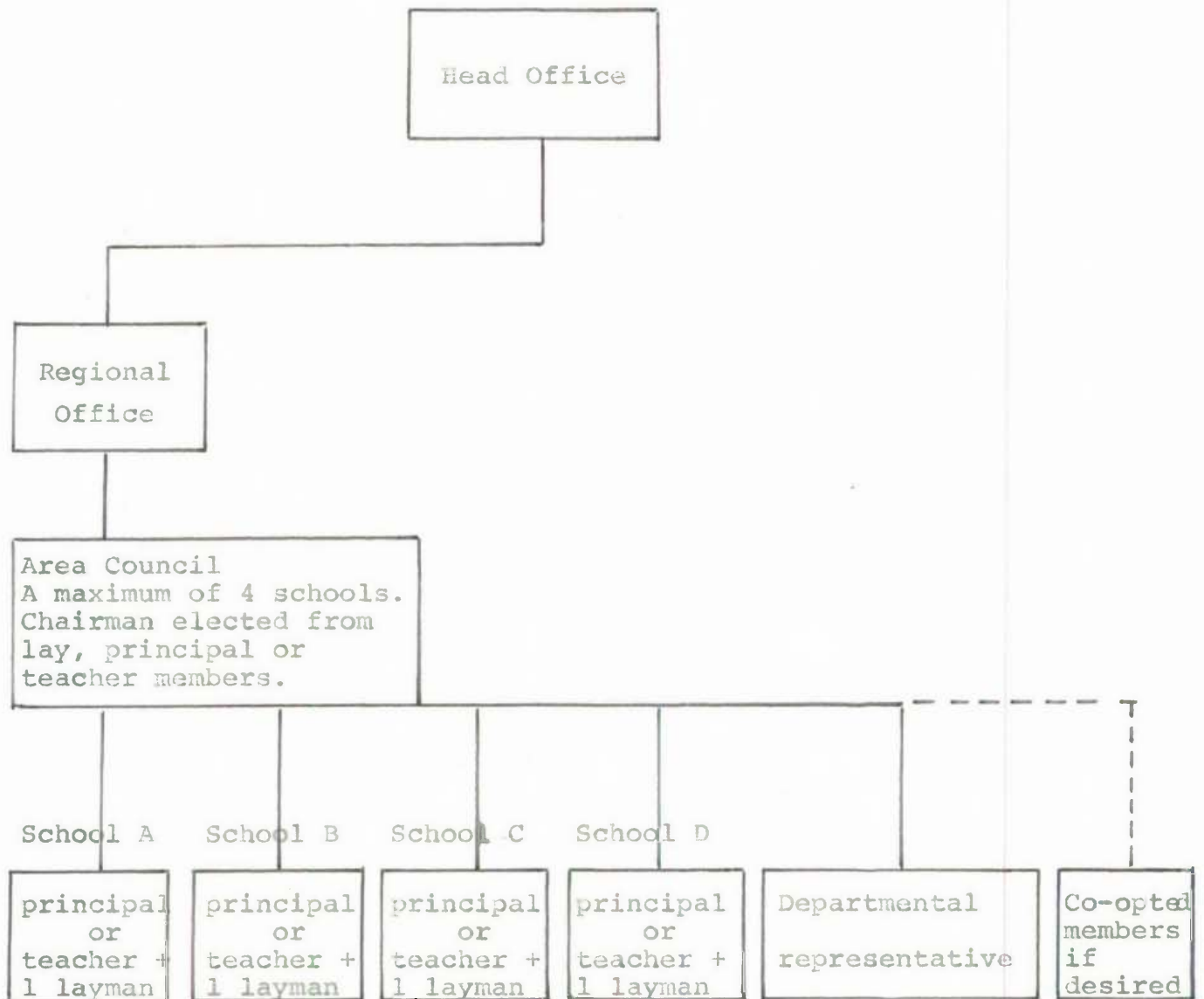
FIG. 3. PROPOSED MODELS FOR THE COMPOSITION OF STATE SCHOOL COUNCILS IN THE DARLING DOWNS REGION.

Structure I - Full Primary, High Tops and Secondary Schools.



--- non-voting members

Structure II - Primary Schools with
Combined Grades.



--- non-voting members

ship be held every three years during the last month of the school year. This time is suggested in order to allow the incoming council time to plan and budget for the following year. Vacancies occurring between elections will be filled by nominations from the groups concerned.

The chairman of the council will be elected by council members and may come from either professional or lay members. He is to have a casting vote.

It is hoped that the council would operate as a corporate body rather than representing specific interest groups. However, this may not always be possible and occasions may arise where there is a serious division on council. Even though in such a situation the proposal may be carried with a majority vote there should be avenues available to settle disputes or for making appeals against a council decision. Therefore it is recommended that an appeals committee be established by Regional Office, headed by the Regional Director, and composed of lay and professional people selected from school councils other than the one in which the dispute has arisen.

Although the structure and operation of the Regional Office is not of concern in this thesis, there

are some activities that are directly related to the operation of school councils. It is therefore recommended that:-

1. the Regional Director be fully responsible for the administration of his Region within broad guidelines laid down by the Department of Education;
2. the positions of research officer, public relations officer and educational consultants be incorporated in the Regional Office;
3. all recurrent supplies be issued from stores operated by Regional Office which in turn, for economic reasons, are stocked from the central authority.
4. a regional curriculum advisory service be established in Regional Office.

The above recommendations are specific to the degree to which the composition and functions of proposed school councils are clearly outlined but not to the extent that flexibility to suit local conditions is excluded. It is recognized that, particularly in the initial years of councils, adaptations to their structure and operation may be required and there should therefore be some inbuilt flexibility.

The Parents and Citizens Associations should

continue to function as they do at the present. It is not the intention to replace these organizations with school councils.

NOTES

1. Morgan, F. "Involvement in A School's Authority", in Mulford, W., et.al., Papers on A.C.T. Education 1974-75, School of Teacher Education, Canberra, A.C.T., Vol. 1., 1975.