

CALLING THE ROLL

Study Circles for Better Schools

P o l i c y R e s e a r c h R e p o r t

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Introduction

National and state education legislation as well as local school policies are created and enacted to address the needs of learners and support effective strategies for educators. Policymakers at all levels face complex decisions on issues such as school choice, school finance, curriculum content, and achievement standards. While policymakers often are able to access expert information and draw from education policy research, critical input on reform decisions from the public (students, schools, families, and communities) is often absent from the policy making arena.

This complex decision making environment calls for an examination of why and how state policymakers¹ might interact with the public in some fundamentally different ways as they gather information, debate, and ultimately create the state policy context for local education reform in our nation of increasingly diverse communities.

Deliberative Dialogue and the Study Circle Model

In order to explore ways in which policymakers and the public might interact more effectively, staff at the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) conducted interviews and held meetings beginning in the fall of 1996 around the engagement method known as deliberative dialogue. Yankelovich (1999) describes dialogue as interaction aimed at seeking mutual understanding through a

willingness to internalize the views of others. Citing Buber, Yankelovich continues to discuss dialogue as a process of successful and authentic relationship-building. Deliberation adds the process of careful consideration of alternatives that might lead to new understanding or decision making.

Deliberative dialogue has a long history in the United States as a way for people to exercise active citizenship in a democracy, reaching as far back as 16th century citizen assemblies and, later, colonial town meetings. Face-to-face discussion and deliberation is a familiar tradition in many other cultures as well (from the citizen assemblies of ancient Greece to Native American councils to the Solidarity movement in Poland in the 1980s) (Study Circle Resource Center, 2000). Today, across the United States, community service organizations, interfaith groups, public agencies, and others are implementing deliberative dialogue programs to help the public gain a better understanding of local problems and build commitment toward resolving them.

SEDL conducted a policy workshop and a roundtable discussion with experts on public engagement prior to this current research and developed a deeper understanding of the potential of deliberative dialogue:

- Deliberative dialogue is an inclusive, democratic public engagement method that asserts the responsibili-

¹ For the purposes of this report, state policymakers are defined as elected and appointed representatives whose jobs as state legislators, state board of education members, or other state-level officeholders place them in a position of accountability to the citizens of their state.

ty of individuals and gives them a role in setting the social or political agenda by involving them in weighing multiple perspectives, choices, and consequences.

- Output from deliberative dialogue appears to include better informed (although not necessarily consensus) opinions, clearer definitions of persistent problems, more coherent perceptions of the range of solutions and their consequences, and a sense of public priorities.
- Promising uses of dialogue by state education policymakers might include a way to better manage tough policy decisions, gauge the level of public concern about particular problems, test ideas, discern the majority point of view, redefine the social compact around public education goals, and build “social capital” for implementing decisions.

Issues of public education lend themselves well to deliberative dialogue. A number of dialogue processes are being used in states to accomplish public engagement goals in the context of education improvement. For instance, national organizations dedicated to education (among them the Annenberg Institute for School Reform; the Institute for Educational Leadership; and a collaboration among Phi Delta Kappa, the National Parents and Teachers Association, and the Center on Education Policy) are applying and studying dialogue strategies, most of which are based on two existing models refined and facilitated by private, nonprofit foundations: study circles (Study Circles Resource Center, Pomfret, Connecticut) and National Issues Forums (Kettering Foundation, Dayton, Ohio).

Study Circles

Of the two models, SEDL focused its research interest on the deliberative dialogue model known as study circles. Study circles emerged by that name in the late 19th century, when the Chautauqua adult education movement attracted thousands of Americans to participate in voluntary, participatory, small-group meetings in their neighbors’ homes to learn about and discuss social, economic, and political issues. For more than ten years, the Study Circle Resource Center (SCRC) has worked to help individuals and communities across the United States use the model to create a “deliberative democracy” in this country (SCRC, 2000).

Study circles are judged by SEDL to be particularly suited to engaging state policymakers and the public in dialogues about education for three reasons. First, within a study circle, community members and their public officials can interact about education in ways that differ from the interaction possible in policymakers’ typical encounters with the public—legislative hearings, public speaking engagements, one-on-one contacts with constituents, and other such settings. As described by SCRC, a study circle:

- is a small, diverse group of eight to twelve people.
- meets regularly over time to address a critical public issue in a democratic and collaborative way.
- sets its own ground rules for a respectful, productive discussion.
- is led by an impartial facilitator, typically a fellow community member, who is trained to lead civil dialogue.

- looks at the selected public issue from many points of view, guided by a topic-specific “study circle guide” that provides information and poses provocative questions.
- uncovers areas of agreement and common concern without expecting or requiring consensus.

Second, the study circle process is increasingly implemented as a community-wide model for engaging broader and more diverse segments of the public and providing a structure for identifying joint action to solve community problems. During the last decade, nearly 200 communities in the United States have taken steps to use the community-wide process as a basis for local problem solving, and 85 have successfully coordinated and convened programs that resulted in local action (SCRC, 1997a). This expansion of deliberative dialogue to include more constituents and consider policy-relevant action suggests the study circle model has potential impact for entire communities as they work to improve their public schools.

Third, the community-wide study circle process lends itself to a continuum of impacts on participating individuals, groups, and communities. SCRC contends that local citizen engagement in study circles can result in changes that range from individual learning to small-group action, organizational change, community-wide initiative, and public policy change (SCRC, 2000). Given their dual identities as individual citizens and state representatives, state policymakers who participate in education study circles not only will experience individual-level effects but also are likely to be interested in what local program results suggest for their efforts at the state-level to improve the state education system.

What remains unclear, however, is the potential for deliberative dialogue and the study circle model for bridging the gap between the public and state-level decision makers.

Current Research Effort

To deepen current understanding of dialogue and study circles, SEDL planned and conducted an investigation around the potential of deliberative dialogue for bridging the gap between the public and policymakers. Study circles were implemented in Arkansas and Oklahoma to help communities, schools, and state policymakers engage one another in discussions about education. Research activities conducted to investigate this implementation, named *Calling the Roll: Study Circles for Better Schools*, allowed SEDL to learn more about study circles and their potential for connecting policymakers with the public in state education policy making.

Following the introduction, the four major parts of this document present the research effort and its findings:

- Part One presents a review of relevant literature that guided the research and interpretation of findings.
- Part Two includes a description of the two-state implementation of study circles that was the subject of SEDL’s research and an overview of the research effort.
- Part Three presents major findings of the research.
- Part Four concludes this document, presents final discussions, and identifies areas of future inquiry.

In Part Three, key findings from qualitative analysis are presented. The presentation of findings uses Strauss and Corbin’s analytic story line concept (1990) to portray the layers of findings in a logical order. This story line is presented in three major sections with a synthesis in the conclusions, and follows a line of inquiry, as follows:

- How is the public defined, and how do different groups of the public relate to the political arena in which policymakers do their work?
- How do policymakers articulate the disconnection or gap between themselves and the public?
- Does deliberative dialogue through the study circles format serve in closing the gap between the public and policymakers? What barriers continue to challenge effective

interaction between policymakers and the public?

- What are the implications of research findings for civic participation and improved connections for public education?

For the reader’s reference, a list of acronyms follows this introduction. At the end of the document, the appendices include a description of the research methodology, data collection instruments, and selected figures and tables. A list of references and a glossary also appear at the end of the document.

SEDL expects that policy research audiences will benefit from this report, which expands current understanding of the education policy making process and suggests implications for increasing interaction between the public and state decision makers.

Acronyms

AFBS—Arkansas Friends for Better Schools

CR—*Calling the Roll*

LWVO—League of Women Voters of Oklahoma

SCRC—Study Circles Resource Center, a project of the Topsfield Foundation, Inc.

SCs—study circles

SEDL— Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

UALR—University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Center for the Research of Teaching and Learning

UON—University of Oklahoma, Norman, Department of Sociology

PART ONE

Review of the Literature

Considering the Bridge between State Policymakers, Educators, and the Public

In the enterprise of public education, parents and other community members have traditionally stood apart from state policymakers and educators. State policymakers make decisions about the philosophical, legal, and fiscal resources for public education that affect all communities in their state. Local school boards and educators combine these resources with their own to make and implement decisions about school structures, teaching, and learning in their unique schools and districts. Members of the general public typically have been spectators in local and state education reform.

The 1980s ushered in a new era when “the American public was inundated by a sense of school failure” (Coombs and Wycoff, 1994, p. 3). The landmark report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk*, ignited a sense of crisis in public education. The reform movement that followed was set into motion largely by state legislatures, governors, government agencies and officials, and education interest groups—not only professional education associations but active business and corporate leaders as well (Massell et al, 1994; Coombs and Wycoff, 1994). The general public watched as local school boards and educators began to implement reform agendas that Coombs and Wycoff (1994) say “shifted the focus of public education from equity to quality and emphasized themes of high standards, school choice, competition, devolution, and accountability” (p. 1).

With the early 1990s came the awareness that the school reform movement had awakened the public’s educational concerns but had not widely or productively engaged them. Some members of the public began to express

discontent with the direction of both state- and locally-initiated education reforms. In certain areas of the nation, discontent grew into active opposition by well-organized groups of citizens. Connecticut’s statewide plan for education reform was defeated in 1993. Pennsylvania was the site of a grassroots campaign against establishment of student learning outcomes in 1992 and 1993, and local school board turnovers occurred across the nation. Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas experienced challenges to curriculum and instructional strategies in such areas as sex education, HIV/AIDS awareness, and literature-based reading. Communities were divided over district programs on parenting and student self-esteem. State initiatives to establish standards-based curricula or restructure traditional classroom relationships between teachers and students were the object of controversy (Mutchler, 1993).

Today, although the heat of the last decade seems to have dissipated, relationships among the public, their state policymakers, and educators remain uneasy in the United States.

The Public’s Priorities

Public opinion polls and focus groups reveal that members of the public remain concerned with the state of public schools and with current reform efforts. Public opinion trends reported in the mid-1990s (Johnson and Immerwahr, 1994; Johnson, 1995; Elam, Rose, and Gallup, 1996) are echoed today in reports of respondents’ low levels of confidence in public school quality and dissatisfaction with the direction of school reform.

At minimum, there is a sense that policymakers and educators are not recognizing and responding to the concerns that are of highest priority to members of the public (Coombs and

Wycoff, 1994; Rose and Gallup, 1999; Public Agenda, 2000). Respondents to a 1999 telephone interview (ICR Survey Research Group, 1999) rated three issues as “major problems” for the public schools in their community—lack of parental involvement (55 percent), student use of alcohol or illegal drugs (51 percent), and students who are undisciplined and disruptive (50 percent). These priorities contrast sharply the predominant education reform agenda which, since the 1980s, has focused solidly on defining and measuring student and school performance.

This difference between public and policy priorities is not that members of the public do not support higher educational standards. They do, overwhelmingly (Coombs and Wycoff, 1994). Respondents to the most recent Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup education poll (Rose and Gallup, 1999) indicate satisfaction with current achievement standards (57 percent) and support for further increases (33 percent). Nor is it that state policymakers are not concerned about parental involvement, student alcohol and drug use, and student discipline. In most states, policymakers direct considerable effort toward initiating legislation and creating support programs in these areas.²

These differences in priority do, however, suggest a mismatch in what the general public and its representatives (both in policy and practice) believe to be most important in public education today. The divisions among these critical groups are now perceived as troublesome gaps.

Although there may be new ways to bridge these gaps, some educators, researchers, policy

analysts, and public officials advocate strengthening the bridge that already exists. These thinkers and activists suggest that the public can no longer stand by as, or be relegated to, spectator in the enterprise of public education if the nation’s public school system is to endure, much less achieve greater success (Center on National Education Policy, 1996; Matthews, 1996).

A New Understanding of Education Policy Change

The literature relevant to this question of the bridge between policymakers, educators, and the public draws from areas of research and theory such as democratic political philosophy, policymaker knowledge utilization, and policy change. Two concepts important to understanding public education policy development in the United States today integrate knowledge from the political scientist’s and the education policy researcher’s points of view (Jones, 1994; Mitchell and Boyd, 1998; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993):

Concept 1: Policy development is a dynamic interaction among interrelated processes.

Concept 2: Policy making requires the processing of complex knowledge.

Together, these concepts depict policy development as a dynamic process in which policymakers are problem-solvers challenged to access and use a diversity of complex knowledge in an equally diverse and complex decision making environment.

² Examples include state funding of parenting programs and required inclusion of parents on school-based management teams, integration of alcohol and drug education in health curricula, and state-mandated codes of student conduct and consequences for dangerous or disruptive behavior on school grounds.

Policy Making as Dynamic Interaction

A model [of decision making] that does not incorporate dynamics is not going to be very useful in understanding politics, where dynamics dominates.

Jones, 1994, p. 227

Policy change in any public arena, including education, is the result of a dynamic interaction among various interrelated processes (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993). In describing this multifaceted change process, the two researchers contrast the practice of policy making in the real world with the broadly accepted “stages” model of policy and politics that focuses on analyzing specific steps of the policy development process. The stages model is depicted in a variety of ways by different theorists, but most share five key elements: (1) problem identification or definition, (2) agenda setting or policy proposal formulation, (3) policy adoption, (4) implementation, and (5) evaluation (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Sato, 1999).

Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith claim that stages theory fails to explain how these five elements link together or interact to create policy change. For example, how do information-gathering and issue-framing activities in the “problem identification” stage intersect with information analysis and decision making during the “agenda-setting” stage? And how does the model account for the frequent variations in how policy decision making progresses from one process stage to the next—such as the fact that agenda setting often is driven not by a new problem but by the evaluation of an existing policy initiative? Finally, they ask, how does

stages theory explain the influence on ultimate formal policy of the “multitude of overlapping directives and actors” (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993, p. 3) that interact in real-world policy making?

Questions such as these led Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith to propose a model, the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), which they think more accurately depicts the practice of public policy development. The model describes a non-linear and highly complex interaction among the individuals and organizations that directly act in what Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993) term a “policy subsystem.” The education policy subsystem consists of policymakers and policy influencers³ whose interests, expertise, and individual or organizational goals provide the motivation and commitment to devote time to actively participate in education policy development activities. Most of these actors cluster into one or more advocacy coalitions, each based on shared beliefs about education and a willingness to engage in joint policy-oriented activity.

The place of the public in this dynamic environment. There is little argument that the general public typically is *not* directly involved in the actions of the education policy subsystem. Most members of the public have neither the time nor desire to become deeply involved in policy change activities (Coombs and Wycoff, 1994; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993). Indeed, in his initial development of the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) in 1988, Sabatier depicted the public as more or less invisible—present but unnamed as one among many “socioeconomic conditions” in the external environment.

³ Policy influencers are defined as individuals and organizations whose positions and resources allow them ready access to state policymakers and, thus, regular influence on their policy decisions. Influencers include agency officials, lobbyists, other interest group leaders, and political party leaders.

In 1993, Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith made a significant change in the place of the public in their Advocacy Coalition Framework. They “tested” the ACF by requesting that six researchers use the framework to analyze policy change in their respective policy areas of expertise⁴. Application of the ACF to real-world examples of policy change convinced them that public opinion can “constitute a substantial constraint on the range of feasible strategies available to subsystem participants if it persists for some time and demonstrates some recognition of value tradeoffs” (1993, p. 223). As such, they determined that changes in public opinion warrant specific recognition in the framework.

In addition, in their revision of the ACF, Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith describe a group of individuals between those represented by “public opinion” (the general public) and “policy subsystem” actors (policymakers and policy influencers). Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith label these people the “interested/attentive public” that includes “members of interest groups and other people who try to stay reasonably informed on an issue and are available for occasional mobilization by interest-group leaders” (p. 235). Jones (1994) and Yankelovich (1991) echo this idea of a subset of the general public, peopled by constituents who are not core policy players in subsystem politics but are attentive to information and events relevant to one or more public policy areas.

Together, these researchers suggest that the role of ordinary citizens, whether through the expression of public opinion or through individual action, is complex and integral to the dynamic interactions of policy development. The general public cannot be viewed as a mass or single entity, external to the actions of edu-

cation policymakers and policy influencers. Instead we see a much more diverse group, some of whom are occasionally drawn into direct interaction with policy actors on a specific education policy issue.

Policy making as the Processing of Complex Knowledge

It is the cumulative effect of findings from different studies and from ordinary knowledge that has greatest influence on policy (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993, p. 16).

The role of knowledge and information has long been considered central to both the process of public policy decision making and the quality of its outcome (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Mitchell and Boyd, 1998; Rich, 1983; Weiss, 1977). Traditionally, the examination of information use, or knowledge utilization, by policymakers has been concerned primarily with how they obtain *technical knowledge* from experts, assess it, and apply it in decision making.

Technical information, or social science research, is assumed to be the currency of “policy-oriented learning,” a term used by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993) to describe policymakers’ ongoing process of searching for, accumulating, and using empirical evidence to achieve policy goals. They also assert, however, that one of a policymaker’s purposes in furthering his or her policy goals is to identify the extent of agreement or disagreement between newly acquired information and specific policy strategies he or she supports. These strategies are associated *not* solely with data-based evidence but rather with a set of precepts that includes both normative, or value-based, and empirical components. Termed the “policy

⁴ Testing of the ACF has included application to Canada’s education arena and Japan’s smoking policy (Mawhinney, 1993; Sato, 1999).

core” of a policymaker’s belief system, this mix of value priorities and factual support serves as the foundation for a decision maker’s fundamental policy positions relative to education (or any other policy area).

Thus, these researchers would say that the idea of policy-relevant knowledge as only a fact-based resource or “good” that one acquires and directly applies to a policy problem (Jones, 1994, p. 49) is inadequate. Although technical information is critical to a decision maker’s accumulation of new data-based knowledge and effective monitoring of empirical challenges to his or her policy positions, it clearly is not the only kind of information he or she uses.

Further, since the 1960s, some researchers have suggested that policymakers’ use of knowledge is not the linear, rational process typically assumed by political scientists. Instead, the policymaker is viewed as a problem solver who requires direct linkage and interaction with various knowledge sources (policy, research, and practice) in order to integrate and apply that information to immediate and future policy problems (Havelock, 1969).

Kennedy (1983) weaves these ideas together in her assertion that policymakers depend on a diverse body of information she calls *working knowledge*, defined as including “the entire array of beliefs, assumptions, interests, and experiences that influence the behavior of individuals at work. It also includes social science knowledge” (pp. 193-194). Policymakers incorporate these various kinds of information in an active, continual, and unsystematic way by assimilation, interpretation, or inference. The result is an “integrated and organized body of knowledge” (p. 199) that Kennedy asserts policymakers use spontaneously and routinely as they make decisions.

Mitchell and Boyd (1998) support Kennedy’s concept of working knowledge by pointing to the specific nature and complexity of the knowledge that policymakers use in education decision making. Their “knowledge utilization map” describes knowledge as ranging along different continua: from the empirical to the theoretical, and from the most practical—such as how schools can be successfully organized—to the most profound—for example, whether “civic integration is the goal of education” (Mitchell and Boyd, 1998, p. 137). From the perspective of these two researchers, the knowledge on which policymakers rely appears to be a shared domain among researchers and non-researchers—including public officials themselves and the general public whom they represent. In this domain, “personal experience, beliefs, and commitments . . . function in the same way as other forms of knowledge” (Mithcell and Boyd, 1998, p. 136).

In their analysis of how collective public opinion changes, Page and Shapiro (1992) provide further support for the idea of working knowledge. These two researchers focus first at the individual level in a discussion of the many ways in which people change specific policy preferences—ways we can assume are shared by individual policymakers:

When an individual has new experiences or receives a flow of news over a period of time, the various bits of new information . . . may cumulate and alter the individual’s beliefs in a systematic way that produces a real long-term change in policy preferences (p. 32).

Finally, Jones (1994), who ascribes to the notion that democratic policy making is a problem-solving process (as compared to a preference-satisfaction process), contends that information processing is at the core of democratic

decision-making. Indeed, he asserts that “democracies respond to problems and their openness allows the expression of problems more efficiently than do closed systems of governance” (p. 21). Decision makers in the system acquire and use information to frame and reframe policy problems, thus changing their individual and shared understanding of the problem and the aspects of policy preferences that demand policy attention.

The place of the public in policymakers’ knowledge utilization. In Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith’s original Advocacy Coalition Framework, the public was depicted more or less as a single entity—simply represented by “public opinion.” In the estimation of some opinion researchers, however, there is considerable misunderstanding among policymakers about the quality and value of public opinion as measured by polls and surveys (Page and Shapiro, 1992). Yankelovich declares that most opinion polls cannot “do justice to the richness and subtlety of public opinion” (1991, p. 29). Indeed, he claims the results of a typical poll or survey are “merely a snapshot of public opinion at a moment in time.”

According to Jones (1994), a key role of policymakers is to be attentive to the preferences of the public, weigh conflicting preferences, and make policy choices based on those preferences. While public preferences are actually quite stable, the nature and context of policy problems are always changing. The public’s focus on different aspects of their preferences, thus, often shifts—creating new priorities for policymakers to address (Jones, 1994).

Together, these and other researchers argue that effective policymaking in a democratic system must be a reflection of what Yankelovich (1991) terms “public judgment,” that is, it must respond to public opinion, attitudes, and values as well as to technical knowledge. In working to attain this goal, however, policymakers face great challenges to gathering this valuable input from constituents.

Conclusion

This literature review offers a baseline understanding of the bridge between the public and state policymakers in the context of American public education. Policymakers and educators need two kinds of support from members of the public as they chart and carry out the course of state education reform. First, they need access to the public’s *knowledge*—particularly knowledge about the human and social values people associate with public education. Second, they need assurance of the *public will* to maintain and improve the public schools. Given today’s complex education environment, policymakers should review the processes that comprise education policy development. With deeper understanding, they might strengthen the bridge to the public and, in so doing, produce education policies that will both reflect the public’s knowledge and ensure its support over the long-term.

The remainder of this document explores one potential strategy for strengthening the bridge between the public and policymakers: deliberative dialogue. In the next section we provide an overview of the community dialogue program that served as the subject of SEDL’s research.

PART TWO

The Calling the Roll Program

Calling the Roll: Study Circles for Better Schools

Calling the Roll is a two-state education study circle program that occurred from September through November 1998 in Arkansas and Oklahoma. The program was a collaborative effort that began in the fall of 1997, through the efforts of the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL), the Study Circles Resource Center (SCRC), Arkansas Friends for Better Schools (AFBS), and the League of Women Voters of Oklahoma (LWVO). Two university-based partners—the Center for Research on Teaching and Learning⁵ at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and the University of Oklahoma, Norman, Department of Sociology, representing AFBS and LWVO, respectively—worked with SEDL and SCRC to evaluate the program and examine its impact. The partners worked to plan, implement, and learn from study circles. The implementation phase of the program ended in 1998. *Calling the Roll* research activities will continue through 2000 (see Figure A.1 in Appendix A for a time line describing major *Calling the Roll* and related post-program activities).

The state partner organizations (AFBS and LWVO) sponsored the effort in their own states, developed their own coalitions, built local networks, coordinated the *Calling the Roll* (CR) program, and provided support and information for research activities. SCRC provided technical assistance in facilitating community-wide study circle programs, ranging from advice on organizing strategies to help with communications and facilitator training. SCRC also conducted a locally focused process evaluation.

SEDL assisted in implementing the study circle program in both states by involving state policymakers in the program, by developing

program discussion materials (including state-specific education resource guides), and by providing seed money to each of the state coordinating organizations. Most importantly, SEDL investigated the study circle model, examined impacts on the education policy making process, and developed products to disseminate research results (see Table A.1 in the Appendix for an overview of the responsibilities and roles of each of the program partners).

Approaches to Program Implementation

Fifteen communities (five in Arkansas and ten in Oklahoma) participated in the *Calling the Roll* program. A coordinator in each of the fifteen communities was recruited to implement study circles locally. Local coordinators, primarily volunteers, were encouraged to follow the study circle model closely, but also were influenced by the specific needs and resource limitations of their communities. Basic elements recommended by SCRC that local coordinators might have incorporated into the programs in their communities include: a kick-off forum, a series of four study circle sessions in one or more sites, and a community-wide action forum. Study circles were implemented as a community event, open to all residents who wished to participate. The two state coordinators and SCRC offered recruiting and coalition-building advice to help local coordinators broaden participation to reflect the diversity of their communities.

The discussion guide that structured the dialogues, *Education: How Can Schools and Communities Work Together to Meet the Challenge*, was developed by SCRC to facilitate discussion of education issues that are important at the community level (SCRC, 1995b). To ensure that a portion of the study circle discussion guide covered an issue relevant to *state* educa-

⁵ Now the Center for Applied Studies on Education.

tion policy development, the partners developed a session guide on accountability to replace the existing guide used during session three.

The CR communities and state coordinators applied various approaches to program implementation. Relative success of the programs in the individual communities and between the two program states also varied widely. For example, both state organizers expected to involve ten communities in *Calling the Roll*; however, Arkansas recruited only half this number and a number of the ten Oklahoma communities were not able to fully commit the resources necessary to coordinate community-wide study circles. The Oklahoma program relied heavily on the established LWVO network for program organizing, with community organizations and schools providing additional support. In Arkansas, AFBS was a relatively new and loosely-coupled consortium of organizations without a strong local network. The school district was the primary focus of program organizing; study circles were organized only in communities in which the school superintendent agreed to support the project.

Arkansas implementation. The state coordinating organization for the *Calling the Roll* program in Arkansas was the Arkansas Friends for Better Schools, a coalition of 14 state education associations and organizations. AFBS assisted the implementation of community-wide study circles in five cities and towns in the state. AFBS estimates that 374 people attended study circles during the program period October–December 1998 (Arkansas Friends for Better Schools, 1999).

The study circle site selection and recruitment process began with the identification of school districts that AFBS board members felt might be interested in community dialogue. The coordinator approached school leaders,

presented the study circle model, and invited their participation in the *Calling the Roll* program. The support of the superintendent and school board of each district was a prerequisite for coordination of the program. Five school districts in the state that were able to work within the time and resource constraints of the program agreed to support the implementation of a study circle program. Local coordinators were identified at the community level and included both volunteers and paid staff.

The five community-wide study circles in Arkansas were implemented at the local level with guidance from AFBS and the Study Circles Resource Center. The study circle model depends heavily on volunteer and in-kind resources from the community, which encourages collaboration but also results in local interpretation of the program model. Examples of ways in which some Arkansas communities diverged from the model included elimination of kick-off activities and exclusion of school district administrators from dialogues. In one of the five sites, instead of implementing a community-wide program, organizers piloted the study circle model with 36 invited participants from the school community.

Oklahoma implementation. The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma (LWVO) was the state coordinating organization for the *Calling the Roll* program in Oklahoma. LWVO's state office, with the help of local chapters and other community representatives, organized study circles in ten communities. According to estimates from the LWVO, more than 500 people attended study circles in the state (League of Women Voters of Oklahoma, 1999).

The network of local LWVO chapters throughout the state served as the basis for organizing the study circle programs in Oklahoma. Ten communities with active

LWVO chapters volunteered to help organize the effort. Organizers cooperated with other community groups to share the coordination work and to expand the participant recruitment effort. Schools and school districts were often supporters of the study circle effort, and, in some locations, school administrators and staff helped implement the program.

As in Arkansas, Oklahoma study circles were implemented at the local level with basic principles of the model in mind. Variation in the communities was evident. Kick-off and action forum events were held in only a few of the communities. Local steering committees were extremely diverse in some communities and limited in others. The number of study circle meetings held in each community, the types of facilities, and the formats of groups varied as well. One community diverged from the community-wide study circle planning model and assigned individuals from the steering committee to coordinate and conduct study circles on their own.

Community Turnout

In both states, the local communities' abilities to recruit program participants was inconsistent, and turnout was lower than expected. Originally, organizers estimated they would recruit 500 participants in large urban communities and 100 participants in small communities. From participation estimates, however, only one of the urban communities successfully recruited more than 100 participants and only one of the small communities was able to attract that number.

Arkansas program participation. The five communities in Arkansas that participated in the *Calling the Roll* program varied in size from populations of 500 to 59,184. Four of the five communities had populations of less than 10,000 people. The highest participation numbers were achieved in the smallest and the largest communities (see Table 2.1.).

Table 2.1.
Population and Number of Participants in the Five Arkansas *Calling the Roll* Communities

<i>Community</i>	<i>Population Estimate^a</i>	<i>Program Participants</i>	<i>Policymaker Participants</i>
1	500 ^b	75–100	1 ^c
2	6,097	30–75	1
3	4,526	32–36	0
4	59,184	82–100	4
5	8,618	43–70	1

^a From U.S. Census Bureau (June, 1998) *Population Estimates for Places: Annual Time Series, July 1, 1990 to July 1, 1998*. http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/metro-city/scts/SC98T_AR-DR.txt (18 October 1999)

^b Unofficial estimate

^c This policymaker attended the action forum of the first round of study circles and also attended the second round of study circles in this community.

Table 2.2.
Population and Number of Participants in the Ten Oklahoma *Calling the Roll* Communities

<i>Community</i>	<i>Population Estimates</i>	<i>Program Participants</i>	<i>Policymaker Participants</i>
1	15,313	20–30	0
2	33,672	20–30	0
3	45,234	20–30	0
4	81,107	25–30	0
5	38,386	20–30	3
6	93,019	10–20	1
7	472,221	80–100	3
8	27,008	varied	0
9	38,765	100	2
10	381,393	100	2

^aFrom U.S. Census Bureau (June, 1998) *Population Estimates for Places: Annual Time Series, July 1, 1990 to July 1, 1998*.
http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/metro-city/scts/SC98T_AR-DR.txt (18 October 1999)

Demographic information was collected from 262 program participants through a survey that was administered immediately before the study circle discussions began. As summarized in Figure A.2 in the Appendix, survey results revealed that participants were predominantly educated female professionals with incomes well above the state median household income. Racial and ethnic characteristics of participants closely reflect the statewide distribution. Much of the imbalance in the demographic characteristics of participants might be explained by the high percentage of educators who participated in study circles. Nearly one half (46 percent) of all participants are current educators (34 percent), retired educators (8 percent), or had received training as educators (4 percent).

Oklahoma program participation. Population estimates of the ten *Calling the Roll* communities in Oklahoma ranged from 15,313 to

472,221. All the communities were largely urban with populations of more than 10,000 people. Two communities were major cities with populations of more than 300,000. Program participation was consistently low in most of the communities. Three communities, however, had almost 100 participants (see Table 2.2.).

In Oklahoma, 338 participants completed the same survey that was completed by participants in Arkansas (see Figure A.2. in the Appendix). As in Arkansas, Oklahoma participants were, for the most part, highly educated with household incomes far greater than the state median income. Participants were predominantly female (77 percent) and most were older than 30 (86 percent). Racial and ethnic characteristics of participants closely reflect the statewide distribution, except for a lower percentage of American Indian participants. Also similar to the Arkansas program participant

demographics, a high percentage of current and past educators participated in the Oklahoma study circles. More than half (59 percent) of all participants are current educators (31 percent), were previously educators (21 percent), or were trained as educators (7 percent). Oklahoma participants had a higher percentage of participants who are retirees and a lower percentage of parents of school-age children than in Arkansas.

Barriers to Program Implementation

SEDL collected limited data on local implementation. Anecdotal reports, however, suggest a number of implementation factors that may have contributed to the low level of community member participation at most *Calling the Roll* sites. These include:

- faulty communication about recruitment to local program coordinators and, consequently, poor application of SCRC-recommended strategies from practice;
- delayed start in local coordination activities (late commitments from some Arkansas communities and low levels of commitment or underestimates of time required from some Oklahoma communities resulted in short organizing time lines); and
- heavy dependence on volunteer efforts for local program organizing, which is an implementation feature typical of study circles.

Lower than expected participation of community members in *Calling the Roll* modified SEDL's original expectation that the two states' study circle initiatives could be considered "statewide" efforts. Low participation levels in many CR communities in both states, the lack of communities recruited in Arkansas, and the

absence of statewide publicity efforts to link CR communities contributed to low participation. Thus, the CR program is more accurately described as study circles programs in 15 communities.

Calling the Roll: Research Study

SEDL's study addressed two specific research goals: (1) to explore how policymaker participation in study circles affects the state education policy making process and (2) to learn about the process of implementing a statewide program of study circles on education that includes policymakers.

The *Calling the Roll* program offered an important opportunity for SEDL to explore these research interests. SEDL staff worked with program organizers to secure the participation of state-level policymakers in the program and planned and implemented a research project to study program impacts and evaluate its implementation. Key features of the study are summarized below, followed by a profile of state policymaker participation in the two-state program. A detailed discussion of the research methodology appears in Appendix B.

SEDL's Research Approach

In developing the research design, SEDL recognized the need to pursue two distinct research approaches to fully address the research goals. The research approach appropriate to Goal One is an exploratory descriptive study of program impacts, and the research approach appropriate to Goal Two is a process evaluation (see Figure B.1. in the Appendix for an overview of the SEDL research study).

Goal One research approach. In designing the research approach for Goal One of this study, SEDL staff adopted a design that would

reveal the most complete picture of the complex phenomenon under study. No research findings currently address the impact of study circles on policy making. The unique program elements of *Calling the Roll* include participation of policymakers and implementation in multiple communities in two states. Therefore, an exploratory descriptive research approach relying predominately on qualitative data was used. This approach used interviews, observation, and the inductive abilities of the researchers as primary sources to develop an in-depth description of how the program affected education policymakers who participated in *Calling the Roll* study circles.

This impact study began with the identification of general themes to be explored, rather than the development of a hypothesis or a narrow set of expected outcomes. Themes were intentionally broad so that they would provide fundamental foci for the study but also allow freedom to explore additional, related phenomena that might emerge in the course of the study.

To track the impact of study circle participation on state policymakers over time, SEDL collected data before, during, and after implementation of study circles in the fall of 1998. Frequency and central tendency calculations were performed on numerical (quantitative) survey data. SEDL analyzed qualitative data—predominantly transcripts of interviews with state policymakers participating in study circles—using a coding method developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990). This multi-stage method is a well-accepted approach to analyzing and comparing the expressed perceptions and experiences of key informants. Iterative coding and analysis allowed SEDL to test, deconstruct, reconstruct, and elaborate themes that emerged from the data from all key informants. The research findings reported in Part

Three present the “story line,” as Strauss and Corbin (1990) term it, of state policymakers’ experiences as participants in the *Calling the Roll* program.

Goal Two research approach. SEDL’s second research goal was concerned with documenting the *Calling the Roll* program and examining the implementation process, including planning, coordinating, and conducting the study circle sessions in the fall of 1998. Researchers sought to document the resources, planning, and coordination necessary to implement a statewide study circle program on education.

Interviews with program implementers and review of state coordinator logs were the primary data sources for research Goal Two. As described in the previous section, *Calling the Roll* implementation in neither Arkansas nor Oklahoma took the form of a statewide program. So these data did not answer questions of how a statewide program is planned and implemented or what costs are associated with involving state policymakers in a statewide program.

State policymakers’ experiences in their study circle programs, however, yielded important information regarding the strategies used to involve them in dialogues on education. SEDL researchers were able to identify successful strategies and barriers related to policymaker participation—findings that will be valuable to individuals and organizations seeking to successfully engage state policymakers in community dialogue on education. These process evaluation findings are included as contextual background for this report. More importantly, they will be used to inform the development of written products appropriate for study circle organizers and potential policymaker participants.

State Policymaker Participation

Since 15 rather than 20 communities were recruited for participation in *Calling the Roll*, the pool of policymakers with constituents in participating communities was small. SEDL staff with state and local program coordinators were able to recruit 24 policymakers (defined as legislators and other key state-level education decision makers) who agreed to participate in *Calling the Roll*. Policymaker participation in *Calling the Roll* was less than expected, however, in terms of overall individual experience. Four

of the 24 policymaker participants were unable to attend, and a number of others were not able to attend all of their study circle sessions (see Table 2.3 below).

The majority of policymaker participants in Arkansas were located in the largest community, where there are more legislative districts. Each smaller community had only one state representative and one state senator as possible candidates for participation in *Calling the Roll*. In the Oklahoma program, policymaker participation was clustered in five of the 10 communities.

Table 2.3.
Characteristics of *Calling the Roll* Policymaker Participants

Gender	17 males 7 females
Current office/position	8 state senators 13 state representatives 3 other
Experience as a state policymaker	Range of 0-16 years
Professional experience with education	8 educators
Other recent experience with education	13 parents or grandparents of grade school-age children 6 with family members who work or volunteer in public schools 6 with career-related experience
Previous experience with small-group dialogue	5 with study circles 10 with other small-group processes 11 with other medium- or large-group public engagement
Number of sessions attended	4 attended 0 sessions 8 attended 1 session 4 attended 2 sessions 4 attended 3 sessions 4 attended 4 sessions

Key informant interviews with policymaker participants uncovered challenges and barriers that may inhibit study circle benefits to policymakers. The three primary reasons given by policymakers for not attending all sessions were:

- time constraints,
- scheduling conflicts, and

- dissatisfaction with low participation by community members.

A more detailed discussion of these barriers to participation appears in Part Three, integrated into the discussion of study circle impacts on policymakers.

PART THREE

Policymaker Perceptions of Study Circles

Calling the Roll Research Findings

The research findings presented in this section are the result of an exploratory, qualitative investigation of education policy making and the roles of and relationships between state policymakers and the public.

Using a grounded theory approach to qualitative research⁶, investigators relied heavily on surveys and interviews with key informants—the 20 policymakers who participated in the *Calling the Roll* program in Arkansas and Oklahoma. Data from these sources document the expectations, insights, and experiences of these policymakers. Such data shed light on the actual and potential benefits of small-group dialogue for increased public participation in civic life and specifically in public education. Analysis of the data allowed SEDL researchers to identify themes and theoretical constructs that frame and describe the complex phenomenon of public and policymaker interactions about education.

In the following pages, three major concepts are explored. First is the policymaker respondents' interpretations of the roles that the public plays relative to the policymakers themselves within the state education policy arena. Second, is the policymakers' perceptions of the disconnection between many of their constituents and the policy arena in which they work, as indicated by an unsatisfactory information flow and a lack of supportive relationships. Finally are the opportunities and challenges that deliberative dialogue offers to bridge the gap between policymakers and their public, so they might exchange information, forge relationships, and, ultimately, strengthen civic capacity to contribute to the improvement of public education in their states. Throughout this section, the theoretical concepts emerging

from SEDL's research are depicted graphically (Figures 3.1.–3.3.). The illustrative framework shows how public implementations of deliberative community dialogue have the potential to strengthen the bridge between the public and those who represent them in the state policy making arena.

As the results of SEDL's research unfold in this section, they answer the initial questions posed for this research on policymaker participation in deliberative dialogue on education. Also, integrated into this discussion of impact is SEDL's understanding of the CR program implementation, which was briefly addressed in the previous chapter.

Public and Policymaker Roles, Connections, and Disconnections

As revealed in a survey of 30 state legislators in *Calling the Roll* communities conducted in the summer of 1998, policymakers identified their constituents as the single most important source of input for education decisions. It is also clear from survey results that policymakers are very interested in receiving input from the public. Survey respondents use, on average, seven different sources to gain access to public input, including direct communication through conversations, telephone calls, mail, and e-mail; public opinion gathered through community leaders, lobbyists, interest groups, and advisers; and participation in public forums. Survey respondents generally agreed there is great interest in education issues from the public; however, many felt the general public is not active in local schools, and even more felt the public is not well informed about education issues. A majority of respondents felt the need for different or better ways of finding out the views of their constituents.

⁶ Researchers followed the grounded theory procedure outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

Survey results, while informative, also point to some unanswered questions and apparent paradoxes. For example, while some respondents reported that constituents are the most important source of information, others perceive that the public is not well informed. Also, while policymakers currently have access to a significant number of sources of public preference, they are in need of different and better ways of tapping the views of the public.

To better understand the complex relationship between policymakers and the public and the ways in which deliberative dialogue might affect that relationship, researchers began by exploring the role of the public in civic life from the perspective of policymakers who participated in the *Calling the Roll* program. Interviews with policymakers revealed that they interpret the term “constituent” in a variety of ways. Research findings indicated they perceive their constituency as ranging from those who work closely with them in the “policy subsystem”⁷ to the more general public with whom they work less frequently or not at all.

In order to understand the way in which dialogue might affect policymaker interaction with the public in education decision making, researchers probed respondents’ thinking to determine how they perceive their connection with the public. Just as there are different types of constituents, from the policymaker’s perspective, constituent roles and participation in education policy making are similarly varied.

As depicted in Figure 3.1., policymakers perceive three subgroups within civic society: members of the policy subsystem, participating public, and non-participating public. As displayed in the figure, the participating and non-

participating publics are distinct from the policy subsystem, where policymakers are most directly influenced and where policy is decided. The structure of this framework loosely parallels major components of the policy change model created by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993), with a focus on and elaboration of the public realm in that model. Each of the three subgroups is described in detail below.

Policy Subsystem

The policy subsystem encompasses the policymaker and those entities and persons that wield the most direct influence over his or her decisions. Individuals and organizations who fit in this subgroup (1) are focused and committed to a specific education agenda, (2) represent interests with immediate stake in the issues, and (3) maintain a high level of involvement in the political process, often initiating contacts to affect the decisions of elected officials.

Policymaker respondents readily understand and are able to define this constituent group. Indeed, much of their contact with the public in general is through invited appearances or talks at the functions sponsored by groups that participate in the education policy subsystem. Policymakers illustrate some ways in which they interact with this group:

Sometimes I’m invited to come to meetings . . . [where] issues of the affairs of state are being discussed and sometimes there are people who are irate and invite me to a meeting so that they can [express] . . . what they think I’ve been doing wrong in certain areas, but I go to a lot of meetings and listen to people.

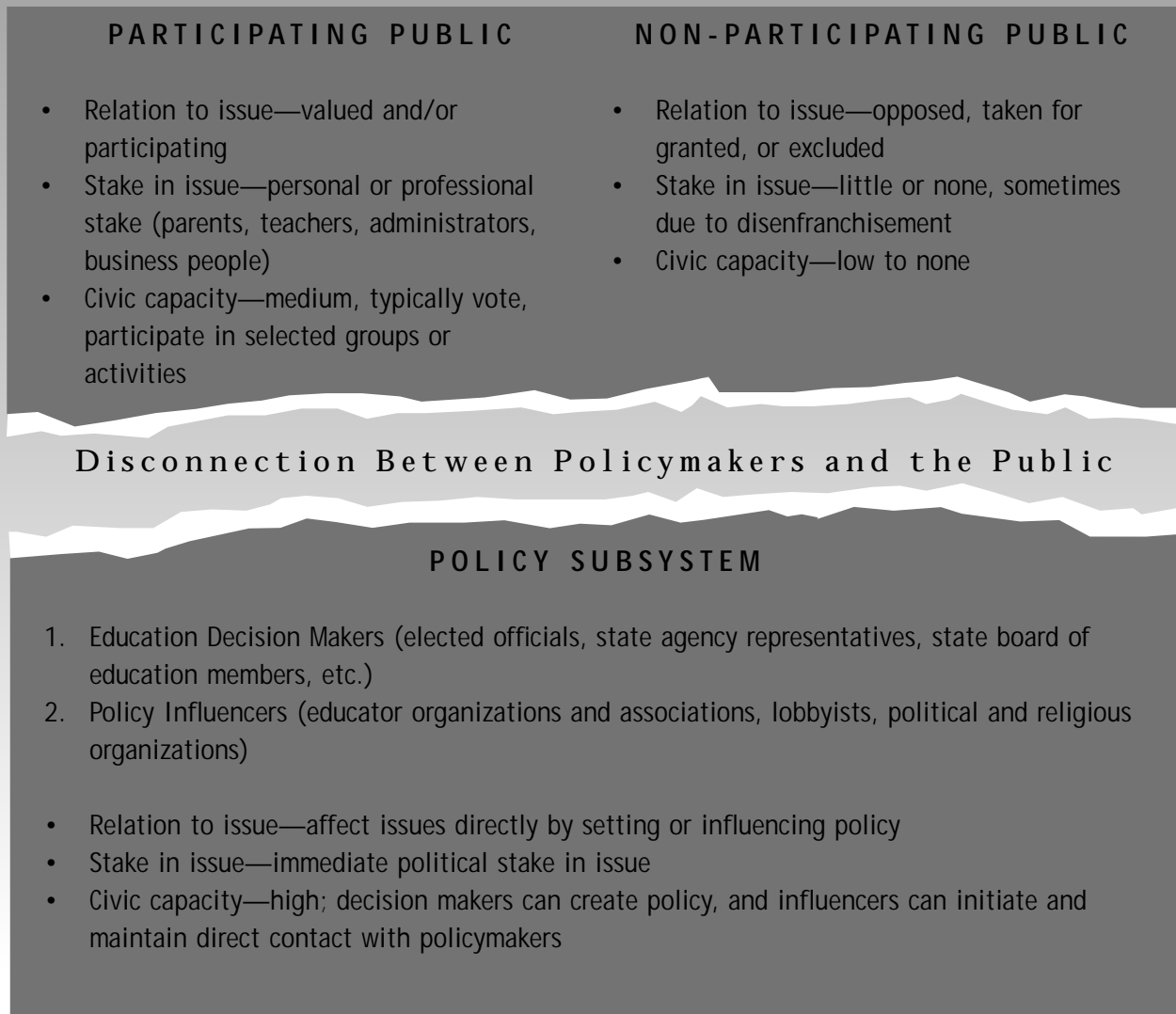
⁷ This term is defined as in the Advocacy Coalition Framework, refined by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993). Members of the policy subsystem span the full range of decision makers and significant policy influencers in the area of K-12 education, including professional education association leaders, nonprofit and religious organizations, key education research organizations, other interest groups and lobbyists, and certain media.

I interviewed with the [state teacher association] and let them know that the education things they were interested in I would certainly be interested in visiting with them.

Many respondents also use individuals and groups from this political arena to help them gain information on policy issues. Members of the policy subsystem become trusted sources after their biases are made clear to the policymaker and the viewpoint they provide helps inform decision making:

I know this is supposed to be an ugly word, but . . . a good source of information would be the paid lobbyist. I value their ideas and their thoughts. I don't always agree with them, I don't always vote the way they wish that I would because they are paid to, as you know, really bear down on the subject they are interested in, but they are a great source of information.

**Figure 3.1.
Roles and Relationships of the Policy Subsystem and the Public**



Members of the policy subsystem are an important, and often trusted, influence on education decision making. Policymakers also find that some members represent narrow agendas and that reliance on this group, while convenient, creates gaps in understanding and supports the tendency not to look beyond this group for input on decision making:

I think the legislature needs to be more responsive to those parents than they are to all these other interest groups. Right now, we do a great job of responding to all the other interest groups . . . the administrators, the teacher's union, the governor, and the department of education . . . they've got clout and they get listened to . . . and legislators think twice before they cross them.

Well, if you [do away with dialogue processes] then you're going back to the way we do most things. We have the [interest group] representative show up down here and they have a little bullet sheet and they say here's the six things our group has decided you need to be for. We fall right back into the trap.

Participating Public

Policymakers identified two subgroups within the public sphere, the first of which is the participating public. The participating public is comprised of individuals and organizations who are not part of the policy subsystem due to lack of organization and power but who remain a visible source of input and accountability for education decision making. Members of the participating public may have a personal stake in education, such as parents, business owners, retirees, and students,⁸ and/or they may have a

professional stake in the issue, such as educators and administrators. The participating public is also characterized by participation in civic life through voting, participation in local groups and meetings, presence at public events, or by making individual-level contact with school staff and elected officials.

Policymaker respondents report that they have access to the participating public through a number of different avenues: phone calls, letters, and e-mail from constituents. Polling is used on a limited basis, due to cost constraints. Many policymakers make use of more interactive formats for gaining citizen perspectives. For example, some policymakers keep in contact with the school and parent community through personal ties:

[I hear from constituents through] one-on-one contact: either out in the public, at meetings, [or] people will call me here at home [or] they will write letters. I send out surveys to ask people their opinion, how they feel on certain things.

Others plan formal meetings with citizens through personal networks in schools and the community and through hand-picked advisory panels. Policymakers seek citizen informants who are knowledgeable on one or more issues and who represent diverse viewpoints:

[I convened] an advisory body made up of people from all over the district, all kinds of backgrounds, not only education, but everything else, and I used the whole group as a formal feedback process.

Still others seek out the public input from formal meetings and public forums:

⁸ Students are limited in the extent of political power they hold due to their inability to vote; however, interview respondents value the perspective of students regarding education issues.

I also attended a public forum last night where voters were in attendance and asked questions of a panel of candidates running for public office, so . . . [we had] an opportunity to be at least fairly directly contacted by the constituents and I can hear their questions.

Whatever means of connecting with the public that policymaker respondents use, nearly all highly value input from the active citizenry. As one respondent articulated, the participating public offers a perspective that informs decision makers of local needs and issues and helps to clarify potential impact of state policy on schools and communities in the districts or areas they represent:

I think the information I get from parents and through my wife, her relationship with school parents, is especially valuable because I'll be off on some public policy tear at times and my wife will say . . . you need to visit a school.

Although policymakers seek contact with the participating public and value their views and perspectives, respondents also identify serious limits to gaining access to this group of constituents. Constraints on their time is the most prevalent limiting factor for policymakers gaining access to the public. As one policymaker reflected on his opportunities to interact with citizens, "You can always use more, but there's a limit as to . . . how much time you can spend doing that." Other respondents echo this realization:

I think for me that is the best communication and there is no substitute for talking to people, face to face. Two humans talking about an important issue: that is, far and away, the best way to do it. It is, unfortu-

nately, the most time-consuming and most difficult one to arrange.

Other policymakers do not seem overly concerned about their limited opportunities to access the public. They interact with the public only on rare occasions:

My constituency does not contact me unless they have a problem with the state system. Even my school principals and teachers don't contact me. So . . . I hear . . . [more] here at the Capitol than I do in my own district.

Another limiting factor is the quality and relevance of the perspectives offered by active citizens. First, just like policy subsystem members, the participating public is driven by individual agendas and personal interests. Policymakers also characterize contacts with the public as sometimes negative and reactive:

It is pretty rare for me to get a call from somebody who just wants to talk about an education issue, for example, and discuss it intelligently. I mean, the callers that I do get are [saying], . . . "I am mad," or "I need some services," or "I got an eviction notice." . . . My point again is that opportunities for just dialogue are few and far between.

Another frequently noted limitation of input from the participating public is that this perspective offers policymakers a narrow viewpoint that they can only consider on an individual basis. That is, it cannot be generalized and so doesn't represent a consensus or broad-based public opinion, which is most highly prized by state policymakers. The public also may not be informed of all sides of the issue, which further narrows the viewpoints expressed by members

of the participating public. These respondents illustrate the difficulties they have encountered in incorporating the perspective of citizens:

The weakness is sometimes they're not very well informed and they don't know, for instance, that nearly always there is an equal and an opposite reaction. Sort of like in the firing of a weapon . . . something that's good for us sometimes is detrimental to someone else, and that doesn't become apparent until you get more information.

You're going to get the personal when you talk to your constituent. All you're going to hear about is his or her problem. Now, eventually, you can tie a bunch of them together and say, "Gee, a lot of people are having this same problem."

Non-participating Public

The third subgroup inferred from SEDL's interviews with policymakers is the non-participating public. This subgroup is characterized by little or no participation in civic issues. Even though they may be parents or taxpayers or even educators, they do not claim an active stake in the issue of education. As one policymaker describes:

I think they are the silent majority . . . I guess we have to assume that evidently they are not riled up about anything or they would call or write or show up with a picket sign or do something . . . So, I don't know if they . . . vote . . . I don't know what they do because they don't seem to participate.

The reasons for their lack of participation are not well understood by policymakers, although apathy, disenfranchisement, and

intimidation were some reasons given by policymaker respondents:

[These people have] . . . different problems . . . [or are] disenfranchised, uneducated, and intimidated by the process in and of itself. They can't get there. In my opinion, they are not going to [attend civic events]. They don't vote anyway.

A lot of the communities that I represent . . . they have special problems because they are so rural. . . . They are very isolated. . . . Sometimes there are tendencies for areas like that to feel like they are not represented, . . . that they never really get heard by their government leaders.

I think that [the problem is] apathy with a big A, whether or not it is in certain levels of middle America [or] all the way down to those [with] lower socioeconomic backgrounds. So there is a desperate need [for policymakers] to reach out even if it is in very small ways.

Respondents generally agree that the non-participating public exists and may constitute a silent majority in public life. Because of their absence, is it difficult for policymakers to include this group as constituents to which they are responsive and accountable. There is also concern regarding the unmet needs of this level of constituency and the implications that their lack of participation has for democratic representation:

I think if those parents aren't informed and focused on those issues, then they don't really have an adequate say in the decisions that are going to be made, and the educational bureaucracies that exist are going to make those decisions.

So, when you talk about a majority of my constituents, see, they don't care about government, and that scares me.

Conclusion

The three major subgroups within society described above portray three distinct levels of civic participation among members of the public. Those who belong to the policy subsystem may be members of the public by definition, but more reasonably might be viewed as part of the state policy development system—directly connected to state policymakers' processes of information gathering and deliberation. They are perceived by policymakers as the most significant sources of input and, perhaps, as the most immediate constituents to whom they, the policymakers, are accountable.

Well separated from the policy subsystem is the general public, distinguished by level of activity relative to policy subsystem actions. The participating public is perceived by policymakers as the constituency they are charged with serving. However, they are also sometimes seen as limited sources of input and more removed from policymaker accountability due to their individual/reactive interests, ignorance of the issues, and inaccessibility. The non-participating public is a puzzle to most policymakers and little is known about these, who are appropriately called the silent majority.

Policymaker perceptions of the public as having varied levels of civic participation, different perceived stakes in education issues, and differing kinds of expertise relevant to the issue are important in understanding the role of the public in education. This first layer of the framework emerging from analysis of SEDL's data (Figure 3.1.) provides the basis for the next discussion, regarding the bridge between the

public and policymakers in education decision making.

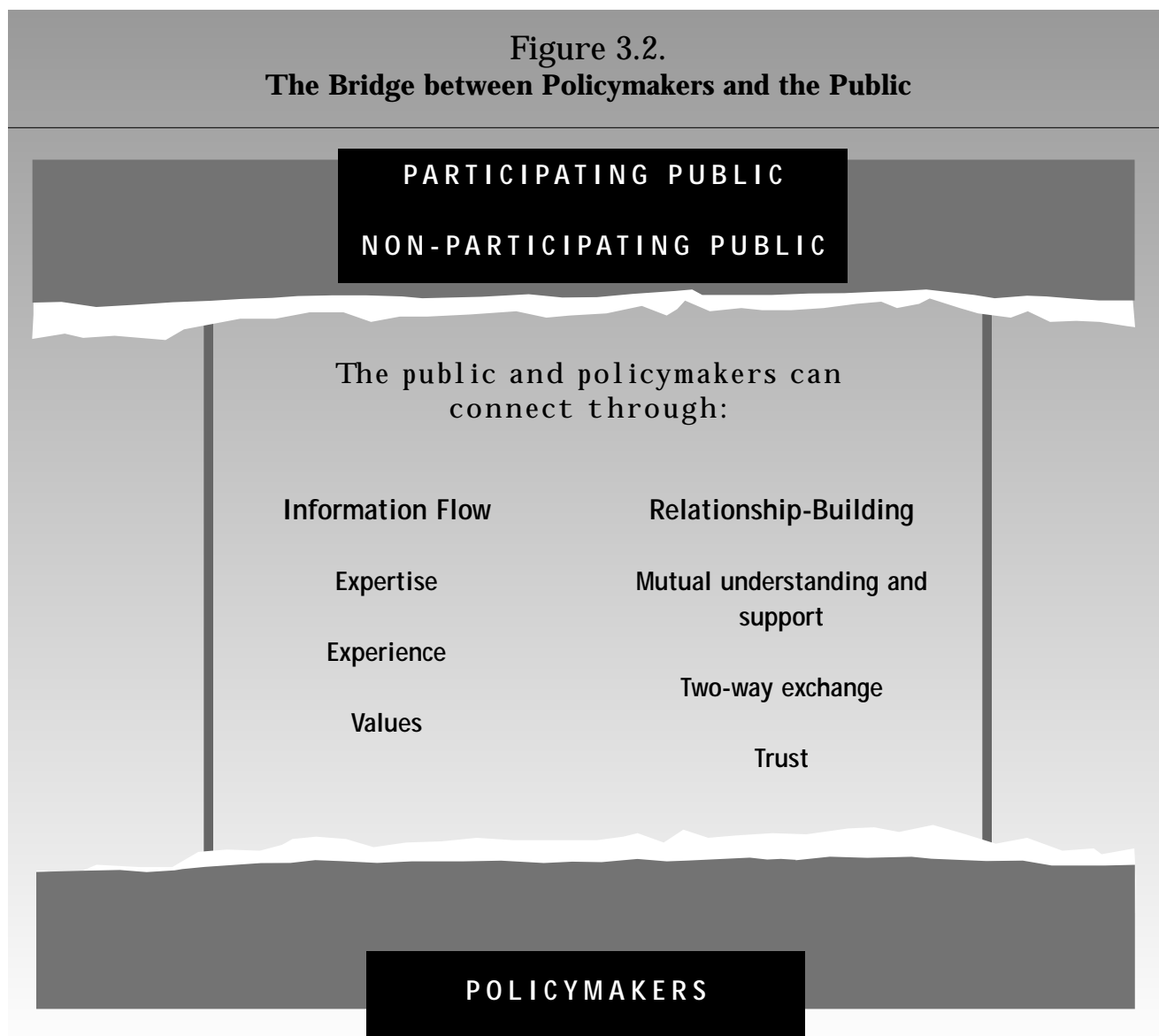
Bridging Disconnections between the Public and Policymakers

As discussed in Part One of this report, SEDL has identified a serious divide in U.S. society with regard to public education. Disconnections within the enterprise of public education not only constrain the potential success of public education reform; they prevent state policymakers from taking full advantage of the potential contributions of many of their constituents to the democratic decision making process that undergirds our public education system. Previous discussion in this section articulated a keener understanding of the divisions within society, depicted by SEDL's policymaker respondents as three unique subgroups—policy subsystem members, the participating public, and the non-participating public—and their differing levels of civic participation in the state education policy arena.

Policymakers are concerned about the specific disconnection they experience from large numbers of the general public, that is, those who stand outside the policy subsystem. Two major themes were uncovered. Cross-analysis of these policymakers' expressed opinions and experiences identify (1) information flow and (2) relationship-building as the processes through which stronger ties to these constituents might be forged.

Overall, deliberative dialogue is recognized by respondents as a potentially useful tool for moving the non-participating public into a participatory role and for bridging the gap between the public and the policymakers. Figure 3.2. illustrates these findings, and the discussion after provides further details.

Figure 3.2.
The Bridge between Policymakers and the Public



Theme #1: Information Flow

Information is essential for effective decision making (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Jones, 1994; Kennedy, 1983; Mitchell and Boyd, 1998; Weiss, 1977; Wong, 1995; Yankelovich, 1991). As discussed in Part One, policymakers are challenged to amass and process a complex array of knowledge. Indeed, policymakers who responded to SEDL's interviews rely on a wide range of information sources to build their knowledge of education

issues, including their own personal experience, education experts, the media, colleagues, school representatives, and the public.

Policymakers acknowledge that different information sources provide different perspectives, which contribute to their understanding of an issue. Empirical evidence from research, while critical for effective, informed decision making, is one of many inputs that these individuals process, interpret, and transform into "working knowledge," which they use for

decision-making activities.⁹ As one policymaker described, his understanding of policy issues is formulated not only by the data and expertise available from colleagues, interest groups, and others in the policy subsystem; it is also affected and informed by other experiences:

I go to . . . [the capitol] and learn something about the totality of how much tax money we're bringing in and where it comes from . . . but there's a lot of other things that have an impact on my decision other than that. . . . I have to put that in the context of a lot of other processes that I go through.

If you don't have communication [with] the community and the parents . . . and the schools . . . the only ones you are getting it from are your organizations that are lobbying for the schools.

Policymakers interviewed by SEDL identified examples of experiences with different information sources that contribute to their understanding of an issue for decision making. Respondents articulated three distinct types of knowledge that they gain from the variety of information sources to which they have access: expertise, experience, and values (see Figure 3.2.).

In considering how deliberative dialogue with members of the public might lead to better information flow, these policymakers revealed their particular expectations for this exchange of information with and among constituents. In their role as conveyors of information, policymakers value opportunities to help inform the public about education. As recipients of information from the public, it appears that policymakers most highly value public

input that is "informed" or that represents a perspective to which they do not ordinarily have access. As one informant said:

They're seeing the problem up front and personal, whereas somebody far removed from it doesn't see that. So I think the ones that are close to the situation may have the best idea about how to solve it.

Policymakers' perceptions of information flow important to their state education decision making are discussed below by knowledge type.

Expertise. This type of knowledge encompasses the understandings policymakers gain from current research, expert analysis, and firsthand professional knowledge. Policymakers receive expert input from education organizations, from attendance at professional meetings, and from the information compiled by legislative staff at the capitol. They perceived this input as research-based information that is provided by relatively objective sources:

I need specific information about a specific topic or specific statistics, and I have found that [specific research and information organizations have] been very responsive to me in generating that kind of statistical background [which] strengthens my arguments as I'm talking about public policy issues.

Other useful although biased expert information is received from lobbyists, local education organizations, and interest groups. Individual citizens such as educators, parents, and students also offer expert perspectives on education issues, providing information about local needs and circumstances. Policymakers

⁹ The composite of knowledge that an individual policymaker can carry to education decisions represents what Kennedy (1983) terms "working knowledge," made up of an individual's "experience, beliefs, interests, and a variety of forms of evidence."

provided insights about their valuing of such expert information:

I had an opportunity to speak with and hear from mental health consumers as well as caregivers and attendants so that I had an opportunity to hear their concerns . . . and for me, as a person who is not a consumer of mental health needs or not an expert in the field, I don't necessarily know what they need or what's important to them . . . that helps me to stay informed.

Policymakers value the public's acquisition of expert knowledge as well. SEDL's respondents see increased interaction through dialogue as a way to help create a more informed citizenry. They view themselves as experts in certain important areas and support sharing of this knowledge and the knowledge of other experts with the public:

We actually may have to do some educating . . . to bring . . . [the public] up to speed on the facts because it is appalling to me how ignorant most people are about the most basic things.

Experience. The second type of knowledge identified by policymakers is "experience." Experience yields informal evidence that also may connect with an individual interest or personal goal related to a particular education issue. Policymakers not only have experience-based knowledge in their own personal and professional backgrounds, but also receive this kind of information from direct interaction with the public, as illustrated by the following policymaker comment:

I . . . run things by certain people and try to explain to them what's going on with . . . the issue . . . and get their opinions . . .

they're fairly knowledgeable of the entire community, . . . so they would have considerable impact on how I vote on certain things.

Policymakers articulated a strong interest in receiving information from the public in the form of local needs and concerns and public attitudes and opinions. Reasons behind public attitudes that might not be apparent through polling or focus groups are important to policymakers and help guide their work. SEDL's respondents hoped study circles would give them an opportunity to listen to constituent viewpoints through dialogue:

I felt like because it's a cross section of people, educators, businesspeople, lawmakers, teachers, that I would get a cross section of opinion and a better understanding of . . . how different people felt about the . . . school system.

Policymakers also see the benefit in helping constituents better understand their education system and hope that dialogue can help raise awareness among the community about issues surrounding their children and schools:

I'm hoping that maybe through these study circles these parents will realize what these teachers go through each day. I don't think people understand that. I think that they think that the teachers go up there, earn their money during the daytime, and go home and forget about it—and that's not true.

Values. Finally, policymakers identify "values" as the third major category of knowledge. Policymakers carry their own sense of values into their work and they receive input on external values from constituents. Values reflect an individual's personal belief system and result in

policy positions that support these values (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Jones, 1994; Mitchell and Boyd, 1998). One legislator had this comment about the way that personal values affect policy outcomes:

I think probably for most of us . . . we have some sense of . . . what is right or wrong and that is borne out of our own philosophy of life as we have developed it over whatever years we might have here. We just left a conversation and one legislator just believes kids need to be whipped . . . I no longer believe that kids need to be spanked, that there are other ways to teach children and to discipline children if that's what needs to be done.

One policymaker expressed the reasoning behind his desire for increasing the knowledge and awareness level of the public through dialogue. His experiences with powerful and differing value bases among constituents have led him to become wary of the narrow, reactive interests that define many of his interactions with the public:

So I'm hoping we're going to get a real good dialogue that's well informed, that will lead to what I think will be some balanced and reasonable recommendations that are based on what the average Joe thinks after he or she is informed of the issues. I'm not looking for knee-jerk reactions to somebody's emotions.

The range of information sources and types of knowledge briefly described above highlights the finding that policymakers consider many information inputs that influence and continually recreate the composite of their understanding and stance on education issues. The public is an important component of decision making.

Constituents provide information that supports all three types of knowledge identified as contributing to policymakers' understanding of an issue: expertise, experience, and values.

A number of policymakers who participated in the *Calling the Roll* program additionally went into the experience as an information-gathering opportunity that might be relevant not only to themselves as individual policymakers and to the people of their home districts, but also to the state policy arena. For example, this respondent expressed the need to collect input from local communities for consideration in state decision making:

I would hope to be better informed about what the constituents in this area are thinking about education, what their wants and needs are, and hopefully be able to translate that into something at the state level.

Theme #2: Relationships

As discussed in Part One, policy development is a dynamic interaction (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Jones, 1994; Louis, 1998; Page and Shapiro, 1992; Reich, 1988; Stimson, Mackuen, and Erikson, 1995). Policymakers experience this on a daily basis as they work with individuals and organizations that make up the education policy subsystem. Although such strong relationships do not exist between policymakers and most members of the general public, SEDL's policymaker informants appeared to recognize that they and the public can move towards more effective relationships in a number of ways.

According to respondents, just as information exchange between policymakers and constituents is important, so too is mutual understanding and support for each other's roles in

the state education policy making process. To some policymakers participating in the *Calling the Roll* program, dialogue is seen as a process that helps to bring the public into the state policy making arena by increasing understanding of the policymakers' work and by inviting further opportunity to participate in public life:

If support [grows] for . . . policymakers to improve education and make some changes . . . by identifying more and more people who are willing to at least write a postcard to a legislator and say vote for this, that's how the climate changes.

Establishing trust and building relationships are key elements that policymaker respondents identified for successful representation of their constituents (see Figure 3.2). These elements work in the policymaker's favor by building credibility for his or her policy action and by ultimately affecting efforts to be reelected. Many policymaker respondents, however, indicated they are unable to establish rapport and understanding with most of their constituents.

In order to gauge relationships between policymakers and citizens, researchers asked policymaker respondents to respond to the question, "Do you think your constituents have a clear understanding of your views on education?" Nearly one half responded negatively. For example:

No, nor do they have a clear understanding of my views on anything. I'd be kidding myself if I thought the majority of my constituency cared what I thought.

No, most of them don't even know who I am. You go to a man on the street and ask who his state senator is, he doesn't even know who it is . . . so if they don't even

know my name, they darn sure don't know what I think about vouchers or charter schools or choice or the curriculum improvements or any of the other school or education issues.

Most of the positive responses were guarded or hesitant, and all policymakers understood relationship-building to be a difficult ongoing process:

Well, I hope they do [understand my views]. They keep sending me back [to the legislature].

Oh, I'd say . . . probably only a small percentage actually would know what my positions are, I mean basic positions.

Respondents also stressed that relationship-building is a two-way interchange in that policymakers must be willing to make the effort to bring their views and positions to the public, where constituents can respond to them:

Oh, I would say at least half of the people [know my views] because I work . . . closely with the schools.

Policymakers value increased connections among the public, schools and education policy for a number of reasons. Some policymakers articulated the need for increased awareness among members of the non-participating public of their natural connections to public schools. As one said:

I think that . . . an older man on social security, who thinks education used to be a lot better, but doesn't want his . . . taxes raised to pay for [school] improvement might possibly see how . . . social security is [related] to who's paying into it; and the

salary . . . [of] the person [paying into it is related to] the level of [education and job] preparation the person has . . . The more that we can all make these connections, then education . . . [becomes less] isolated.

For their own part, policymakers talked about their belief that effective representation calls for a clear line of contact and understanding between the representative and the represented. For example:

I felt like I was going to get elected, and I wanted to be prepared to represent the people in this district.

I think it also will give me an idea of some of the problems that our school systems have and some of the needs they have and, as I said before, a better understanding of the district that I represent.

Policymakers feel that public support is important, but that this support is difficult to garner, resulting in decision making practices that may not respond to the public's needs and desires. What remains consistent, whether motivated by a desire to be reelected, to better know and represent their constituents effectively, or to create support and interest in public issues such as education and local schools, is that policymakers value strong relationships.

The themes explored in this section, information flow and relationship-building towards civic capacity, are important for understanding the disconnection between the public and policymakers. As foreshadowed in policymaker responses in this section regarding deliberative dialogue in bridging the disconnection, study circles play a role in bringing the public and policymakers together on public education issues. This topic is explored in the next section.

Benefits and Challenges of Study Circles for Strengthening the Bridge between the Public and Policymakers

This section presents research results that address the question of whether deliberative dialogue through the study circle process is a useful and feasible tool for bringing the public and policymakers together on education policy issues. Findings indicate that study circles offer a wide range of positive effects towards improved information flow and relationship-building between the public and policymakers (see Figure 3.3.). Policymakers who participated in *Calling the Roll* offered an overall positive assessment of the experience. Of the 13 individuals who responded to the question, "On a scale from one to ten, with one being 'not useful at all' and ten being 'one of the most useful things I've done,' how would you rate your experience?" only two rated the process as less than seven.

Findings also uncover a number of challenges that deliberative dialogue presents for policymaker participants. Through interviews with program organizers, researchers explored the ways in which the program affected the impacts that policymakers perceived from participation in *Calling the Roll*. Those challenges involved the study circle format, the dialogue process, and program implementation in certain communities. Policymakers encountered a number of specific challenges and barriers. Some respondents reported a few negative experiences interacting with the public and difficulty with or discomfort with the dialogue format. Time constraints was an important challenge faced by many respondents, and some also expressed dissatisfaction with the long-term deliberative process due to policymaker needs for immediate policy-relevant informa-

tion. In certain programs, respondents reported frustrating experiences due to poorly organized or badly facilitated dialogues. Negative effects are part of any program implementation, and those experienced by policymaker respondents are explained below, along with information about the specific program environment that may have contributed to those effects.

The following discussion presents the positive impacts of study circles on information flow and relationship-building, the two themes discussed in the previous section that emerged as important ways to bridge the disconnection between policymakers and the public in SEDL's data. Integrated into the discussion are relevant insights regarding the *Calling the Roll* implementation and key challenges to bringing policymakers and the public together that appear to be inherent to the study circle process and format.

Study Circle Impacts on Information Processes

The informational impacts that policymakers identified as resulting from participation in study circles fall into four major areas (see Figure 3.3.).

- Access to diverse perspectives
- Information exchange
- Reality check on policy directions
- Reevaluation or change in perspectives

Access to Diverse Perspectives

We had minority people, we had businessmen, we had women, we had young people, old people, young parents, people who

had kids in school and [those] no longer in schools. Our mayor's assistant was there. One of the municipal judges was there. It was a good group, and all those areas are affected by our public schools.

The study circle format encourages participation of all sectors of the community. Most policymakers were pleased with the range of participants from different educational and socioeconomic backgrounds who were present at the dialogues. Often, policymakers stated that interaction with these individuals was the most valuable part of the dialogue experience. A few recounted personal stories that community members shared. These stories provided policymakers with the human side of education policy and practice.

For example, one policymaker related his exchange with a parent who was struggling with the impact of the limited enrollment policies for magnet schools. The parent's son was unable to gain admission to the local magnet school because of the space limitations. After several years of attending the public school, he was finally granted admission to the magnet school, only to find that he was not academically prepared because of different grade-level expectations. This policymaker remembered the parent's dilemma:

This one particular parent [expressed that] she's struggling between leaving her son in the school he is in, where she knows the academic challenge is greater, as opposed to transferring him back to the school he left where she knows he'd be happier . . . [It was] a real dilemma for that mother, an African-American mother. And she talked about staying up until 11:00 or 12:00 at night trying to help her son with his studies. You just got the feeling that this

Figure 3.3.
Study Circles Bridging the Gap between Policymakers and the Public

PARTICIPATING PUBLIC
NON-PARTICIPATING PUBLIC

Study Circles can provide a structure for:

Increased Information Flow

Study Circles improve information flow by facilitating:

- access to diverse perspectives
- information exchange
- reality check on policy directions
- reevaluation or change in perspectives

Relationship-Building

Study circles build relationships by strengthening:

- personal networks and mutual credibility
- personal commitments toward public education

Study circles can provide a process for encouraging civic participation. A stronger civic capacity has potential for activating a new and broader constituency who can initiate or support education policy action.

POLICYMAKERS

mother's commitment was complete. It was kind of heart-wrenching...to see a parent struggling with that.

Access to diverse perspectives also provided policymakers a counterbalance to familiar negative perspectives on the status of public education and the public's attitude toward it:

There were two junior college students, . . . one attended the local high school . . . but also had gone through the alternative education program . . . and there was a young lady who had attended school in one of the larger . . . school districts [then] dropped out of school and ended up in a rural school. . . . And the amazing thing is that they both survived, [even though at one point] both dropped out of the school system.

In spite of all we talk about, all we hear that is wrong with schools, there were . . . three young African-American . . . [students] there that night, and I thought every one of them [was] just as impressive as could be. I appreciated that exposure.

Some policymakers, however, were disappointed in the diversity of their groups and felt that this detracted from their experience. The low participation numbers in the *Calling the Roll* program (see Part Two) limited the diversity of perspectives that were represented in some communities. One policymaker remarked that his study circle group was well-represented in terms of educators but lacked a diversity of perspectives from parents. Another noted the high predominance of people in his circle from what he termed the "education clique," individuals from the school and district who already have established themselves as active participants in community and education affairs:

[Ordinary] teachers don't get their story out, and there's not much way they can when there is not enough . . . involvement from any . . . [one] other than the education clique.

Another stated that the people in attendance at the study circle in her community were individuals with whom she already was in contact and did not include constituents outside her established personal networks:

The night I was there, there were maybe six people . . . including me. . . . I didn't have any constituents there. . . . I had supporters there but there were no constituents there and there was no general public to speak of.

These negative experiences should be weighed as significant sources of potential disappointment and disincentive for policymaker participation in study circles. Nearly all the negative comments regarding diverse perspectives, however, corresponded with community programs that had great difficulty in recruiting community members to participate in study circles. In the instance described in the preceding quote, for example, only six study circle participants were recruited from a large urban area. Also, while some policymakers noted that fewer constituents participated than expected, they reported that dialogue with a small, yet reasonably sized group did provide them access to individuals and perspectives they would not otherwise encounter.

Information Exchange

Well, one of the things that I enjoyed was being able to just sit down and talk . . . to other members of the community and get their viewpoint and their input and their

wisdom and to be able to share mine with them.

Policymakers in study circle dialogues observed and valued the exchange of information that occurred with their constituents. Two-way communication is often difficult to achieve between policymakers and citizens. Policymakers appreciated the study circles because group members were willing to engage in meaningful interaction:

Well, to me, anyway, the best part of it was the civility. I mean we could differ on our opinions and no one would get upset. Everybody was open to hearing what each person had to say. . . . I've had what some would call town hall meetings [where] some people would stand up and start hollering and then the meeting would just totally get out of control. At least [at] the study circles I thought . . . everybody knew that they were there to try to accomplish something.

Information exchange allowed policymakers to receive information from the public that they might not have had access to otherwise, especially local programs occurring in the policymakers' jurisdictions. These respondents felt they learned more about their local schools through dialogue:

I learned of some very good programs that we have in the . . . school system. Since I have no children there and have not been actively involved in [schools for] awhile, I didn't know about those programs.

I really didn't have an opinion about magnet schools and most of what they said was news to me because when my children

were in school, they did not have the magnet schools.

One policymaker specifically noted the information exchange that occurred among other members of the study circle, appreciating the expertise that specific group members brought to the discussions:

The social worker was good at getting [at] . . . child welfare and those kinds of things. . . . It was good for her to communicate to the other people that there's a real world out there and those things are occurring.

A few policymakers felt that information exchange was hampered by disruption and domination of the flow of communication by one or more members of the group. One policymaker explained:

We have a lot of, and I don't know any other way to put it, very right-wing folks as far as education and a few other issues are concerned. They had several people . . . [in the study circle] who were very difficult about public education.

In another community, a policymaker commented on the same phenomenon. In a previous dialogue program, this policymaker felt that one vocal individual was able to negatively impact the dialogue. He recounted, "We had a guy that was just disruptive. He wanted to talk, he was out of sync with the group, and he just was a pain in the neck." During the *Calling the Roll* study circle he attended, another disruptive individual participated in the policymaker's group. Although in his group the facilitator and group members were able to control that situation, the policymaker continues to struggle with what he sees as a common occurrence in public events such as study circles:

We had a guy in this . . . group that . . . wanted to be that guy that pounds on the table and tell[s] everybody what he . . . [thinks], but the group just kind of controlled him pretty well, and it wasn't a conscious decision that any of us made and maybe that's the way you do it, but that is the biggest problem with the study circle.

Reality check on Policy Directions

[Participating in study circles] . . . strengthens my position a bit in the sense that I can feel like I'm speaking more for my constituency.

As discussed in the previous section, policymakers value the input of their constituents and strive to achieve at least some level of alignment between the decisions they make and the needs, opinions, and values of their constituents. Study circles were able to provide a useful check on policy direction for many policymaker respondents. As one policymaker observed, study circles "tended to reinforce what . . . [he] already thought and believed." Another policymaker who has supported alternative education in state and local policy was able to hear personal stories from study circle participants, one of whom had graduated from an alternative school:

I questioned them a lot because I had been instrumental in bringing the alternative school [to the area. Their] experiences . . . [were a] treat . . . to listen to. I call them *survivors* because they could have fallen by the wayside, and they're pretty sharp, redirected kids.

Just as policymakers sometimes are able to have their senses of policy direction reaffirmed through dialogue, respondents also expressed

that they are able to tap the collective opinion of the public to point the way toward corrections in policy direction. The small-group format does not allow policymakers to gain a numerically broad consensus on issues; however, it does give them a sense of consensus on basic issues that they can consider along with other public opinion information. Policymakers indicated their appreciation of access to such opinion information:

I am not the person that has all the great ideas in the world and that's why I prefer to talk to my constituents because I can glean from them . . . what they would like to see happen.

Another thing that was pretty much consensus . . . was . . . people were very concerned that because of disruptive students . . . there is not a good environment for learning. On the other hand, you can't just kick those kids out.

As described in Part Two, program planners developed special discussion materials on accountability, an important state-level education topic. However, a few policymakers reflected that even this did not allow them to use their study circle experience to gain policy insights relevant to their state policy development work. One policymaker was disappointed in the range of issues that her group discussed and felt that the most pressing issues were not tackled by her group:

I did not see as much discussion on controversial issues. For example, if there was discussion about vouchers, I was never in on it. If there was discussion about charter schools, I was never in on it. If there was discussion about school choice, whether it is intradistrict or interdistrict, I was never

in on it. . . . I am looking for reasons . . . why these topics that are so hot all across the country . . . [were] never raised [in my study circle].

Interestingly, this same policymaker later reflected that her expectations of dialogue with citizens on policy topics that were relevant to her state policy work hampered her ability to gain the full benefit of dialogue and to listen to the concerns of the public. She was able to articulate the realization later, well after her study circle participation, that the reason she was not able to engage her group in discussions on vouchers, charter schools, and school choice was because they simply did not have a strong interest in these topics, which appeared to be the case overall with the constituents in her legislative district.

Reevaluation or Change in Perspectives

I think . . . [the study circles] increased my opinion of teachers, so I tend to be on their side a little more.

A less prevalent but existing impact is the learning process that policymakers experienced through study circles. A few respondents noted that as a result of the dialogue they changed their opinion or were able to see education issues from a new light. These new perspectives most often involved recognition of local efforts toward education and the teachers and parents who support these efforts:

I guess if there was one thing I came away with, it was to allow things that were positive. When parents wanted to be involved, [we should] do whatever we could do as policymakers to get bureaucratic restrictions out of the way so that they could volunteer in the schools and could help.

I'm . . . impressed with the fact that schools are more of a local issue than I thought. That is to say that the problems that people perceive: . . . discipline problems, teacher problems . . . are more local in nature and . . . you couldn't cure them if you wanted to from the state level.

Two other policymakers, however, felt that their background and expertise in education issues limited what they might learn from the study circle discussion with the public:

Had I not been an educator, it would have probably been a lot more beneficial to me. . . . I am an educator and I very closely attend to what is going on in education and in the school . . . [and there was] nothing new that was under the sun for me [from the study circle discussion].

I can't think of anything [I heard in the study circle] that I haven't heard before . . . I certainly won't say that I've heard everything that was mentioned there because that would be an exaggeration but generically it seems that it was somewhat similar.

Study Circle Impacts on Relationships

SEDL observed two areas in which study circles affected policymaker relationships with the public:

- personal networks and mutual credibility and
- personal commitments towards public education.

These impacts are relevant not only for demonstrating the usefulness of study circles on

individual policymakers, but also for exploring the usefulness of the dialogue process in addressing some of the concerns identified by policymakers with respect to broader civic engagement in democratic society. First is the increased interaction with the public in meaningful ways that broadens the personal human networks that policymakers rely on for their work and that helps build mutual credibility between policymakers and constituents. Second is a more generalized strengthening of personal commitments among policymakers and constituents toward public education and the decisions made in support of it.

Personal Networks and Mutual Credibility

[The study circle] increases that personal network we talk about so that I really would think of those three people in particular . . . to call and say, "What do you think about this?"

Policymakers often rely on key contacts that are able to provide information and expertise on various topics. In education, school superintendents or key school and district administrators often help policymakers interpret problems and consider solutions. These and other education representatives are easily accessible to the policymaker and create an informal network of resources.

Policymaker respondents expressed that they were able to expand the range of personal networks to a wider diversity of constituents in three ways. First, respondents felt that the study circle increased their connections to constituents:

One thing for sure that I have done is I developed a much closer relationship with three or four of those people that I will see

in the community and I have felt a bit more of an attachment to them.

Second, as a result of increased connections, respondents were able to bring the public's concerns into the policy arena:

This year I am on the [House] education committee . . . and I've spoken to several of the people on that education committee about some of the things that were brought up in the [study circle] discussion.

Third, the increased relationships establish the motivation for ongoing interaction between the policymaker and the public:

After . . . [the study circles], I felt like I really knew [some of the participants] and I have seen all of them since and we've had more in-depth communication. It was like two friends meeting rather than just someone saying hello.

Study circle dialogues also increased mutual credibility among policymaker respondents and constituents. Interviewees felt that they had a better understanding of the public's needs and concerns about education, and thereby were better able to represent their interests:

It was reassuring that others agreed with me that [community involvement in schools] was important and their presence . . . [in study circles] demonstrated that they believed that, that they were involved in something having to do with bettering the school system.

A number of respondents, however, expressed frustration at their lack of success in connecting with the public. Again, low participant levels in some communities implementing

the *Calling the Roll* program caused some study circles groups to be small or not representative of a policymaker's constituency. Of the 14 legislators who offered negative comments regarding their experiences with the study circles, eight identified low participation levels as a disappointment or factor that affected their ability to fully access the value of the study circles. For example, one policymaker felt that his study circle was generally positive, but when asked about negative aspects of the process, he stated that he wished that more people would have taken advantage of the opportunity to talk about education issues:

I would say it was unfortunately not well attended and therefore people missed an opportunity to voice their opinions whether they were pro or con about the school system or subject matter.

Another policymaker simply could not fully participate in his study circle due to lack of participation from the public. He felt that without at least a few people representing his constituency, the time spent in the dialogue was not worthwhile:

There ...[were] only about . . . one or two people from the district and the rest of them were kind of part of the process somehow. So, there was just no attendance . . . I mean, just zero.

Personal Commitments toward Public Education

It's just like anything else. Bring . . . people together, and there's a lot more understanding and a lot less misunderstanding and maybe even a lot more willingness to help if they can see what needs to be done, what can be done.

The strengthening of commitments toward public education is another impact that respondents expressed. First, the study circle process builds understanding and respect for each other's roles in public education. One policymaker, whose view of teachers was improved after the dialogue, stated:

There is a lot of misperception about teachers . . . [which] I learned [at study circles] and I think that people, if they look a little closer, would find our teachers are doing a lot better than what they thought they were.

Along with building respect for the contributions of everyone is the expression of more overt support to enable teachers, schools, communities, and policymakers themselves to carry out those roles successfully. One policymaker recounts how her study circle group recognized the need to support parent participation in schools:

I know in one group, they were talking about if you don't really know the system, schools can be very user-unfriendly. We needed to work more on making parents feel more a part of the schools and like they were invited to be there. We also talked on the difficulty that parents who work have in getting to the schools and visiting with the teachers, and we talked about possible solutions for making that work better so parents could be more involved.

School teachers and students were also recognized as needing support and respect by districts and communities in order to succeed:

And respect ended up being a word in this first group I went to that was more the overriding concern than safety or discipline. . . .

we really did achieve a consensus [and] that was to have an atmosphere of respect for the teachers as well as for students.

Some policymakers saw other study circle participants gain a better understanding and respect for their unique role in supporting the state's commitment to public education. One policymaker's discussion with constituents about school finance helped citizens realize the constraints and tradeoffs that decision makers must account for:

I recall we talked about financing of schools. When people come to understand where the money comes from [and] where it goes, I think they're satisfied with it. There are some inequities involved [in school finance] and I think people, once they understand the process, they tend to see that what we're doing is not that bad.

Some policymakers felt, however, that they had one or more members in their study circle group who were highly vocal in a negative way and who dominated the group to the degree that it detracted from the positive benefits they drew from their experience. Study circles typically move from sharing of personal experiences to consideration of multiple viewpoints and then to planning for action or solutions with the goal of establishing areas of agreement and common concern. One policymaker observed that, in the study circle he attended, negative comments and complaints dominated the conversation and lessened the group's ability to forge positive relationships or progress in their deliberation process:

It seemed to me there were more complaints than solutions and I think the purpose of these, to my notion, should be,

"How can we fix this?" Not just continuing on the complaint path.

Another policymaker described what he saw as an imbalanced discussion due to the reticence of individual group members. The policymaker observed that the "introverted people" eventually stopped attending the study circle and by the end of the sessions, only the few outspoken participants were in attendance. Such an environment does not allow policymakers to build rapport with participants who are less comfortable in group discussions:

I know you need variety, but when you get somebody like me and . . . other guys who are very outspoken, then you get some very quiet introverted people, the introverts aren't going to speak up.

Strengthening the Bridge and Greater Civic Capacity

SEDL policy research suggests two preliminary findings regarding the impact of study circles on civic capacity. First, data indicate that study circles support the activation of a new and broader constituency for public education by providing a viable process for engaging the public. Second, policymakers revealed that study circles offered the initial steps that might eventually lead to the initiation or support of policy action.

Activating a New and Broader Constituency for Public Education

This [study circle] process . . . helps people have that connection to the school. . . . It gives them . . . a place for them to go where they really do have a chance to express their view and have some impact with policymakers, administrators, teach-

ers. And a lot of people are [asking], “How can I get involved?” and I think the study circle process is wonderful for that.

Study circles were judged by a number of policymaker respondents as a useful format for promoting and enabling greater participation by the public in public education. One policymaker remarked that the study circle effort is unique in bringing diverse perspectives together, and that “no one else is putting these people together.” The format, according to respondents, effectively connects citizens and legislators to talk constructively about education issues:

There was an effort being made through this study circle program to cause people to become involved and give thought to improving education. A lot of times people have got their own problems to worry with, and they never give any thought to how could we improve education, or it’s not part of their daily business. . . . Whoever came up with this idea gave these people an opportunity to come together and be asked, at least, for their opinions.

The dialogue shouldn’t be ignored. Just the dialogue has a lot, if you can get people involved, if you can get the parents and the citizens involved, you accomplish an awful lot because you bring closer together the educational process and the people they are serving.

Many respondents also observed dialogue through study circles as a process that has potential for making an impact on state legislation. As one respondent observed, “It may be that first step that leads to [civic action].” Other policymakers echoed this view:

The legislation we consider, for the most part, is not generated so much by the individual legislator but by the . . . wants, needs, or suggestions of their constituents or lobbyists or people with special interests. So if that type of [study circle] dialogue continues and the community gets more involved, then you will have more ideas coming to the legislature, many of which would be very good ideas [and] some of which would not be, but that is true in any situation.

Ideally, the end of this [dialogue process]—and I don’t mean an end in the sense that it’s final, it’s over—is that you get a broader group of people within a community having community meetings as they used to do many, many years ago, voicing their concerns and giving their input to the legislators, letting . . . [them] carry that back to the Capitol and put it into laws.

Initiating or Supporting Education Policy Action

I don’t think I come out of there with, “Hey, here’s an idea I want to introduce in legislature,” but when ideas are now introduced—for instance, there was one about dismissal of teachers—that overall [study circle] experience . . . has an influence on my decision.

This research was unable to probe the longer term impacts of study circles due to time constraints and program implementation effects that may have affected the full potential of study circles to have an impact on state education policy action. Evidence does show, however, that policymaker participation in study circles provided them with input from the public that initiated ideas for policy action and

increased or decreased support for certain initiatives. This action occurred at a basic level of verification or reinforcement of policy positions as the policymaker respondents express:

Well, it makes me feel stronger because . . . I opposed it already and so having been there and feeling like everybody else felt the same way about it . . . and had the same concerns makes me stronger in my opposition to it.

I'm going to have at least one education bill of my own that I'll be running with so I think when I discuss the issues or we talk about education, . . . I feel like I'll be able to speak with a little more authority.

Respondents also reflected on the value of study circles for providing information on the needs of schools and communities that may be translated into ideas for legislation. They found that the reality checks that local viewpoints offer are necessary for a balanced understanding of policy issues:

I think it's always nice to talk to the foot soldier about what's happening in battle. The generals always know the overall plan. We certainly need to know what the battle plan is and we talk to the generals all the time . . . But I think it's real important to hear from the person on the front line as to how it's working.

Also evident from respondents is the process some of them experienced in which they are able to internalize and apply local concerns to state policy positions, as one policymaker expressed:

The things I came away with [were] set high standards, respect kids' potential for

learning, but let the individual school sites, not the school district, but the individual school sites determine the best way to get the best results in meeting those standards.

Policymaker respondents express varied levels of dissatisfaction with the current role of the public in education processes and desire greater and better-informed participation by the participating and non-participating public. They also reveal a hope and expectation that dialogue through formats such as the study circles might create greater organization and participation at the school and community level. The role that policymakers desire of the public allude to structural changes in civic life that can only occur over the long-term. To policymaker respondents, deliberative dialogue represents the initial, individual-level steps towards increased public initiation and broad-based support of state education policy.

A Special Constraint: Time

Having to commit to six weeks . . . in this day and age is impossible for almost anyone to do, and it was certainly almost impossible for me. I made five out of the six. That was a great effort on my part to do that.

Study circles implemented as part of the *Calling the Roll* program generally followed a standard format of four to six sessions during one or more months. Discussion sessions were planned for two or more hours each and followed a progression from the sharing of personal experiences, discussion of different viewpoints regarding education issues, and an action planning session. Participants were encouraged to attend all sessions in order for the dialogue to build upon itself and for participants to build trust over time. The third session of the study

circles dealt with accountability in education, an issue that has state-level relevance and would be of interest to state policymakers. While the program was designed with an initial kick-off event to garner public interest and a final “action forum” to plan future events, only selected communities held these events.

Of major concern to policymaker respondents and of major relevance to SEDL’s research interest in assessing the usefulness of study circles for policymakers and the public is the issue of time. Study circle participation is a time-intensive activity that challenges policymakers to arrange their schedules in order to attend all sessions. In fact all but three policymaker respondents who attended study circles commented that time constraints hampered their full participation in the dialogues.

In both program states, state senators and representatives are elected as citizen legislators and usually run a business or are employed in order to earn a living. Beyond policymakers’ professional and personal commitments, other meetings and engagements compete for their attention. One respondent neatly summarizes what nearly all of the respondents expressed in different terms:

Tomorrow night am I going to be at the league study circle or am I going to be at the Kiwanis Club or am I going to be at the Chamber of Commerce reception or am I going to be down at the open house

at the school? You know, those are the kinds of decisions as a legislator you . . . are faced with almost every day. You have to choose where you’re going to spend the time.

The time commitment and the lack of time that some policymakers felt they were able to dedicate to study circle participation affected the positive impacts that the experience might have offered. A policymaker, after complaining that she did not feel that participants in her circle engaged in meaningful discussion of issues, reasoned that since she was only able to attend the first session, her lack of participation may have been the source of her negative judgment of the dialogue: “Maybe . . . it was a problem with me rather than with the [study circle] itself. . . . I wasn’t there enough.” Another policymaker who also only attended one session echoed that concern:

The answer is . . . mostly, my fault for not being there more often. . . . I think it takes a little more than just one [session] . . . because I think [the dialogue grows] with time.

The intent of this section was to present and discuss SEDL’s findings from research on policymaker participation in the *Calling the Roll* program. Part Four concludes this document, presents final discussions, and identifies areas of future inquiry.

PART FOUR

Conclusions

Policymakers make up one side of the decision making and governance process. The public, either as a presence active in affecting policy change or as an absent link between decision making and the policies that affect their lives, makes up the other side. As one policymaker stated regarding the public, “What we do for them or to them, one way or the other.” As SEDL researchers collected information for this study, it became increasingly clear that the public is not easily understood as a single, uniform political entity. The public, as revealed through interviews with policymakers, might be participating or non-participating and may become involved in political processes if they are members of the policy subsystem. Researchers were also able to identify two sources of disconnection and potential areas where policymakers and the public can work to bridge the gap: information flow and relationship-building. Finally, research data provided insights regarding the utility and feasibility of study circles as a way to help bridge the gap between policymakers and the public. Findings indicate that deliberative dialogue through the study circle process presents both opportunities and challenges for addressing the disconnection between policymakers and the public.

Below is a summary of findings from the *Calling the Roll* research, followed by brief discussions regarding the challenges and barriers to effective policymaker participation in study circles, implications of these findings for public education, and areas of future inquiry.

Summary of Findings

As the perceptions of policymakers indicate, deliberative dialogue through study circles did have a range of observable impacts for individual policymakers who attended *Calling the Roll*. Findings around two key areas of impact (information flow and relationship-

building) provide a glimpse at the way in which community dialogue might affect the disconnection between policymakers and the public. A summary of findings discussed in this report appears below.

Information. Research findings further confirmed researchers’ understanding of policymakers’ use of a wide range of information inputs that combine to create the policymakers’ understanding and stance on education issues. Information sources that policymakers utilize include expert information, the media, their personal work environment, schools, and their constituents. Policymakers gain expertise, opinions, and values from these outside sources and from their own experiences, which they apply to the decision making process. The public was perceived by policymaker respondents as a critical source of information for local needs and concerns, and for diverse perspectives and attitudes regarding current issues. Access to public input, however, is often limited by both the lack of an informed citizenry and the lack of opportunities to interact with the public. Policymakers expressed a desire for greater information interchange with their constituents in order to better inform the public of state policy issues, gain insights from the public, and draw from their local perspective. Four major categories of impacts of study circles on information flow between policymakers and their constituents were discussed in this report: 1) diverse perspectives, 2) opportunity for information exchange, 3) policy directions and collective opinion of the public, and 4) changing perspectives. Research results around these categories indicate that study circles do improve information flow in important ways. However, lack of diversity in study circle participation, disruptive group members, and lack of participant expertise of education topics can detract from the experience for policymakers.

Relationships. Policymaker interview subjects provided information that helped researchers better understand the nature of relationships between the public and state policymakers in order to fully interpret the impact of dialogue on the policy making process. What is evident from research data is that policymakers struggle with establishing strong relationships with their constituents. In fact, most respondents revealed that they believe that their constituents do not have a clear understanding of their views on education. Policymakers expressed the willingness to establish better relationships with the public and a desire for stronger linkages among schools, education leaders, and the community, which would improve their ability to represent the public. Two major categories of impact of study circles on policymakers' capacity to improve relationships with the public were expressed by respondents: 1) personal networks and credibility between policymakers and their constituents, and 2) personal commitments among individuals and towards public education. Policymaker informants recalled both positive and negative study circle experiences with regard to these two categories.

Challenges and Barriers

A number of policymakers expressed negative experiences with dialogue or were unable to participate fully in study circles. Four broad categories of these experiences were evident. First, low participation in certain communities affected policymakers' ability to interact with a range of their constituents. Second, the time required for study circle participation was difficult to accommodate for those with busy schedules. Third, in selected circles policymakers felt that certain individuals were unable to contribute to the conversation and instead acted as

instigators or "spoilers" to the deliberation or were too introverted. Fourth, a few policymakers felt that the discussions did not focus closely enough on high-profile education issues.

These experiences with study circles reveal challenges to implementation of the study circle process and also provide important insights into the barriers and motivations of potential policymaker participants in dialogue. While many of these negative experiences might be alleviated with a more successful study circle program implementation, feasibility concerns put to question the viability of study circles and deliberative dialogue for state policymakers who are unable to make time in their schedules to fully participate.

While further testing of policymaker participation in study circles is needed to validate or dispel the concerns raised in SEDL's experience, the following "lessons learned" should be considered in future applications of study circles:¹⁰

- Policymakers are not easily able to devote the time necessary for deliberative dialogue. Study circles generally take place in four two-hour sessions over four weeks, which is considered a significant commitment to most state policymakers.
- Scheduling of dialogue events must take into account the needs of the state policymaker. Election seasons, legislative sessions, and other meetings compete heavily for policymakers' participation.
- Policymakers value safe environments when interacting with the

¹⁰ This information, along with more detailed information learned from the process evaluation of the *Calling the Roll* program, appears in *Making the Connection: A Guide to Involving Policymakers in a Community Dialogue on Education*, (SEDL, 2000).

public. Engaging the public through study circles puts policymakers in a small-group setting with people who may or may not work productively towards the program goals.

- Policymakers value relevancy of discussion topics, and the general public often is not able to discuss education issues at the level of expertise policymakers would find most useful.

Implications for Public Education

The views expressed by policymakers as documented in this report not only reveal a willingness to participate in dialogue programs but also more profoundly identify a clear dissatisfaction with the current public presence in the education decision-making process and desire for improvement. Study circles as examined in this research offer a range of individual- and group- level effects that begin to address the perceived gap between state education policy and the schools and communities affected by such policy.

By increasing the flow of information between decision makers and the public; improving relationships among schools, communities, and policymakers; and by facilitating greater civic participation in education issues, many of the problems with regard to the education reform process identified in the introduction of this document are addressed. The successful integration of these processes at the school, community, and state levels have obvious implications for public education.

Broader Input for Decision Making. Broader input involves the opening of lines of communication for better understanding of

complex community issues that impact children and education.

Increased Support for Public Education. As the viewpoints of the public and the schools are exchanged, greater alignment of education initiatives with community priorities can be achieved. Further positive results include the strengthening of trust and credibility on both sides of the issues.

Community and School Partnerships. Greater interchange increases the potential for collaborative, active involvement in schools of teachers, parents, businesspeople, students, administrators, and policymakers. It maximizes human, physical, and financial resources in the school and community. It can also foster civic participation and community building at the school level and beyond.

Areas for Future Inquiry

The results of this exploratory study of the impacts of dialogue on the state policy making process contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of the public in education decision making. However, much is still unknown regarding the longer term and broader scope impacts of dialogue on policymakers, schools, and communities. Areas of future research identified by this research include the following areas and questions.

- Dialogue can be seen as an effective initiator of change in public life for individuals and groups. What is the role of dialogue beyond the initial phase of change processes? How might other group processes (leadership development, strategic planning, etc.) be integrated with dialogue for sustained progress toward education reform?

- Can the study circle process, implemented on a wider scale, result in direct impact on education reform at the school level? Can it initiate or change state education legislation?
- What is the potential for negative effects of increased civic participation in education policy over the long term, such as heightened political turf conflicts and emergence of power elites at the school and community levels? How might dialogue and other strategies be applied to avoid divisiveness?
- What motivates the public to become actively involved in education reform? What are the limits of their involvement?
- How does the study circle format compare with other public engagement formats for bringing the public and policymakers together?
- Do the values that policymakers in the current research express, such as increased involvement of community in schools, truly reflect the needs and emerging trends in public education (privatization, vouchers, etc.)?

In summary, the findings of SEDL's policy research on deliberative dialogue indicate that state policymaker participation in dialogue with the public has important observable individual-level impacts. These impacts are especially interesting given the state policy making context (information access and knowledge, representation, civic participation) that policymakers describe and were asked to reflect upon. SEDL's research observed that not only were policymakers, in general, positively affected by their participation in study circles, the positive effects addressed the needs and desires of policymakers regarding the public on multiple levels. On the practical level, policymakers gained new information to help them assess needs. On a strategic level, they earned credibility from constituents and established relationships that may be tapped for future policy support. Finally on a philosophical level, they participated in the support of democratic principals by acknowledging and valuing citizen participation. SEDL's research also suggests that policymakers might have less favorable experiences with study circles in cases where problems with program implementation or feasibility of participation occur. Based on the findings of this exploratory research, researchers encourage further application and study of deliberative dialogue for enhancing and improving the state education policy making process.

APPENDICES

Figure A.1.
Calling the Roll Program Time Line

1997 <i>September through December</i>	1998 <i>January through March April through June July through August</i>		
<p>Coordination Form multistate partnership, establish time lines, develop staffing plans</p>	<p>Coordination Finalize state coalitions, identify possible sites</p> <p>Communications Decide program name, schedule SEDL state visits, develop national communications plan</p> <p>Materials Prioritize preferred Session 3 topics, select and frame issue, comment on Session 3 draft and identify reviewers</p> <p>Research Schedule evaluators' meeting</p>	<p>Coordination Finalize sites, schedule SCRC visits</p> <p>Communications Develop state communications plans, coordinate and implement plans</p> <p>Materials Complete Session 3 draft, develop and draft fact books, pilot materials</p> <p>Research Finalize and coordinate research designs, draft data-collection tools, identify data-collection sites, recruit policy participants and data collectors</p>	<p>Coordination Train study circle facilitators</p> <p>Materials Revise and publish Session 3 guide and fact books</p> <p>Research Hold evaluation meeting, produce data collection tools, collect baseline data, train data collectors</p>

1998

1999–2000

September through November

December

January through May 1999

June 1999 through 2000

Study Circles

Coordination and communications

Hold kick-off events, study circles, and action forums

Research

Collect data

Communications

Publicize results in states

Research

Continue data collection and analysis, share data among partners

Communications

Share results in states

Research

Produce preliminary report, continue follow-up data collection and analysis

Communications

Convene state, regional, and other forums

Research

Produce final policy research report, develop guidebooks for policy-makers and practitioners

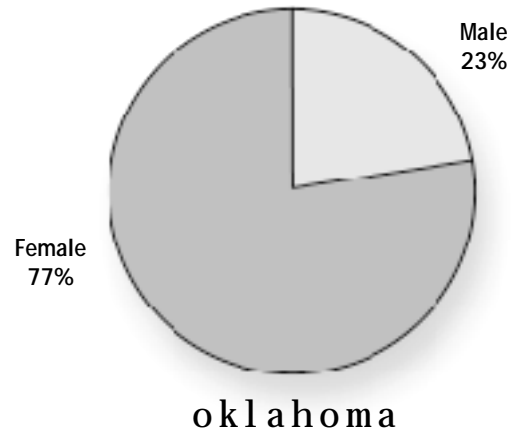
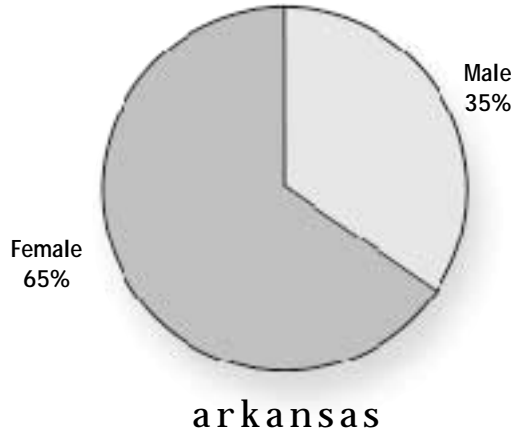
Table A.1.
Calling the Roll Partner Responsibilities and Roles

<i>Responsibility or Role</i>	SEDL	SCRC	AFBS	LWVO
Coordinate at multistate level	•	•		
Coordinate at state level			•	•
Coordinate at community level			•	•
Engage policymakers	•		•	•
Provide resources	•	•	•	•
Provide technical assistance		•		
Conduct or support research study*	•	•	•	•
Publish report on research results*	•	•	•	•
Develop products for dissemination*	•	•		

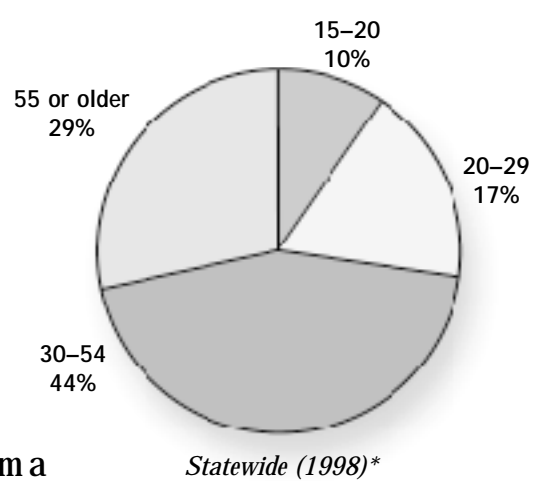
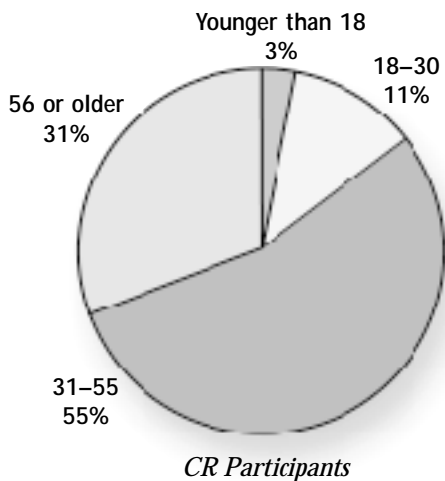
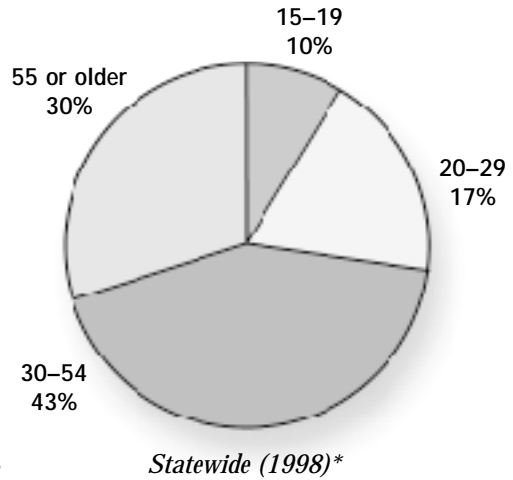
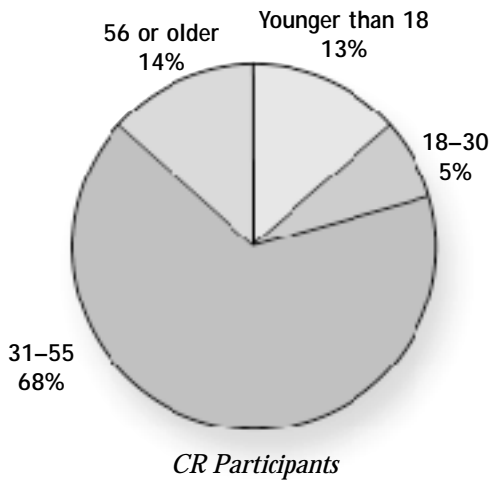
**Includes post-program activities.*

Figure A.2.
Calling the Roll Participant Survey Data
 Arkansas (N=262) and Oklahoma (N=338)

GENDER

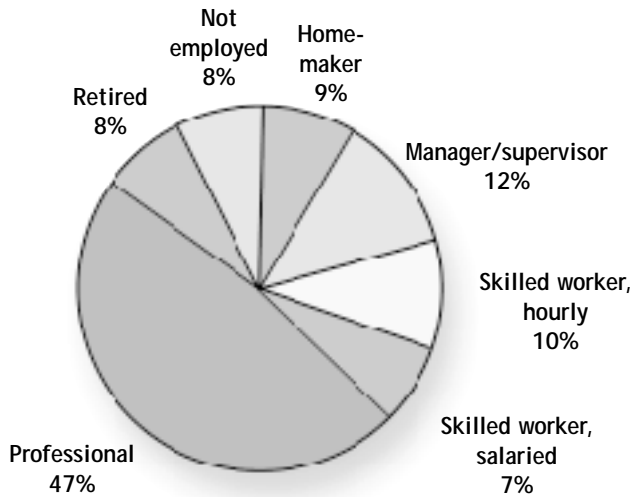


AGE RANGE

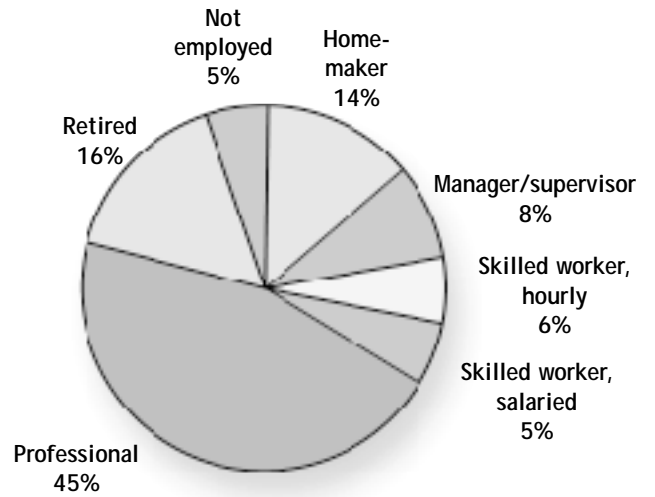


* From U.S. Census Bureau (2000) *Population Estimates for the U.S. Regions, Divisions, and States by 5-year Age Groups and Sex: Time Series Estimates, July 1, 1990 to July 1, 1999 and April 1, 1990 Census Population Counts*. <http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/state/st-99-3.txt> (12 March 2000).

OCCUPATION

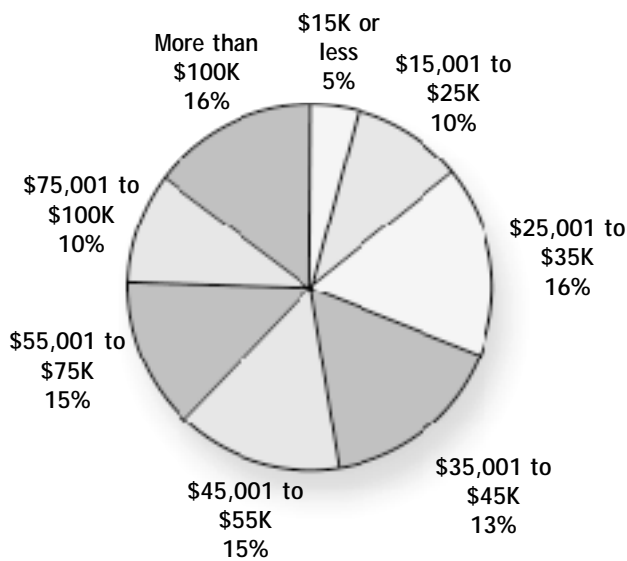


arkansas

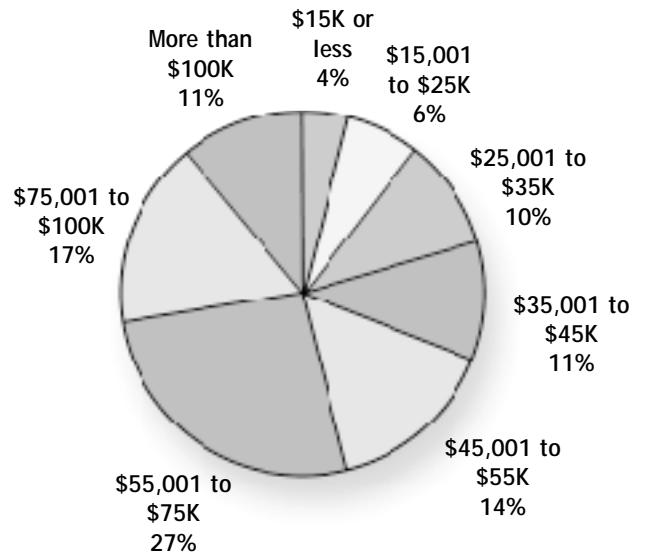


oklahoma

HOUSEHOLD INCOME



arkansas



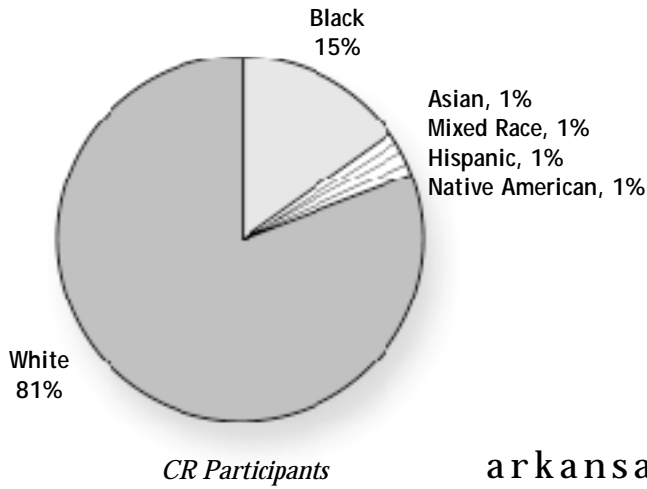
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Arkansas median household income (1998):
\$28,276*

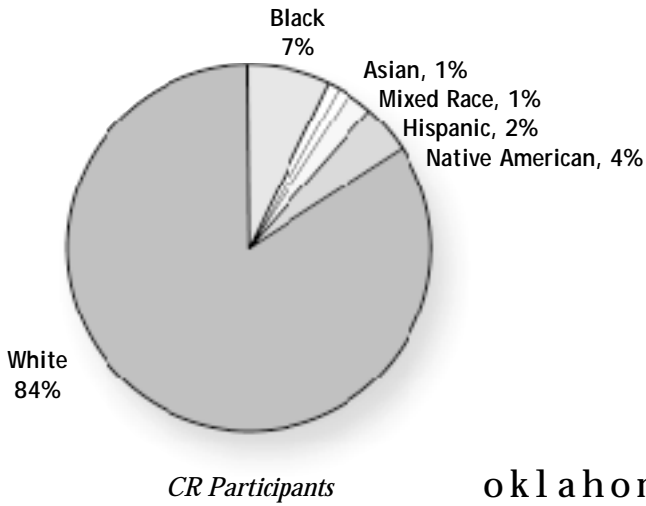
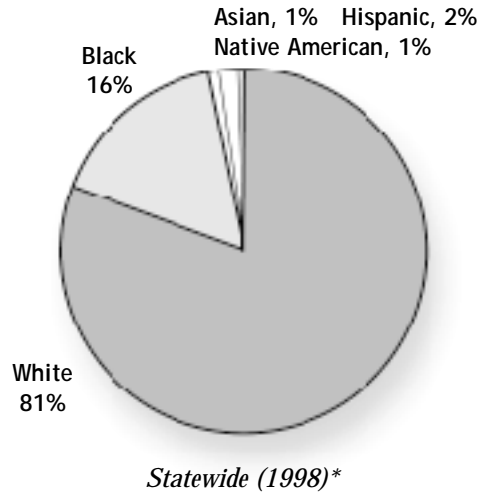
Oklahoma median household income (1998):
\$34,472*

* U.S. Census Bureau Table H-8 Median Household Income by State: 1984-1999. <http://www.census.gov/hhes/income/histine/ho8.html> (20 November 2000).

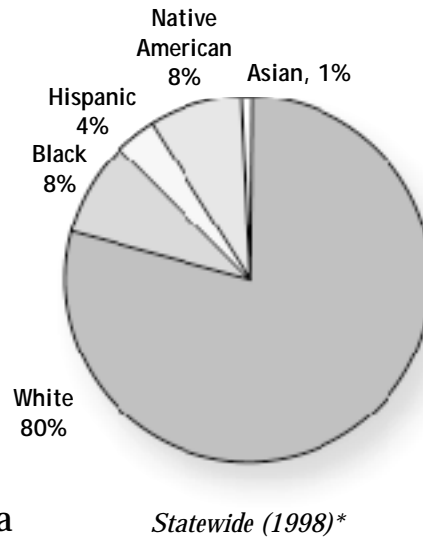
RACE/ETHNICITY



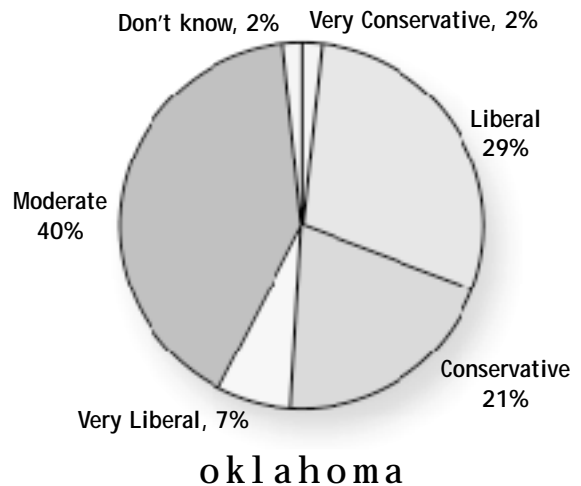
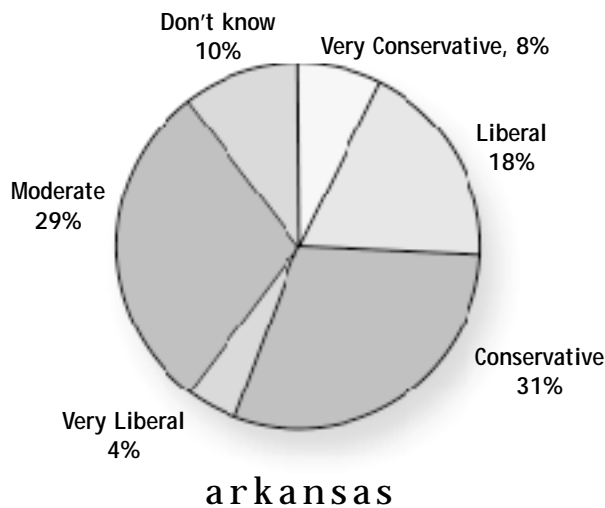
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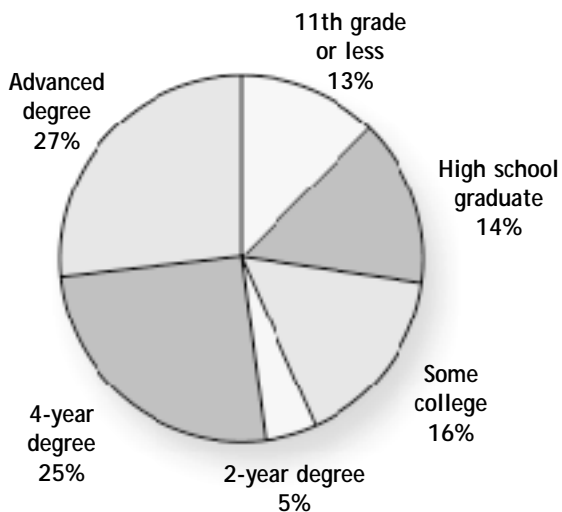


POLITICAL VIEW



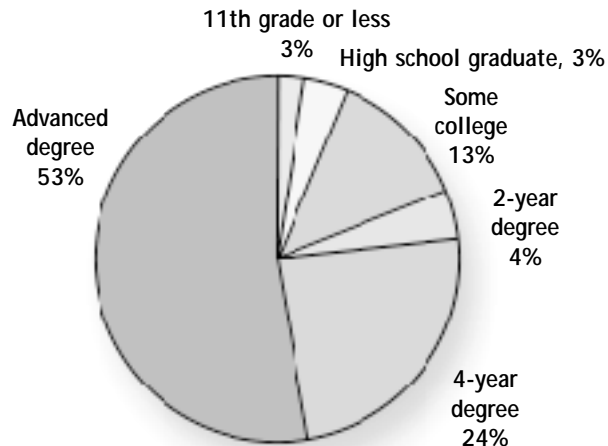
* From U.S. Census Bureau. (1999). *Population estimates for states by race and Hispanic origin: July 1, 1998*. <http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/state/srh/srh98.txt> (12 March 2000).

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT



arkansas

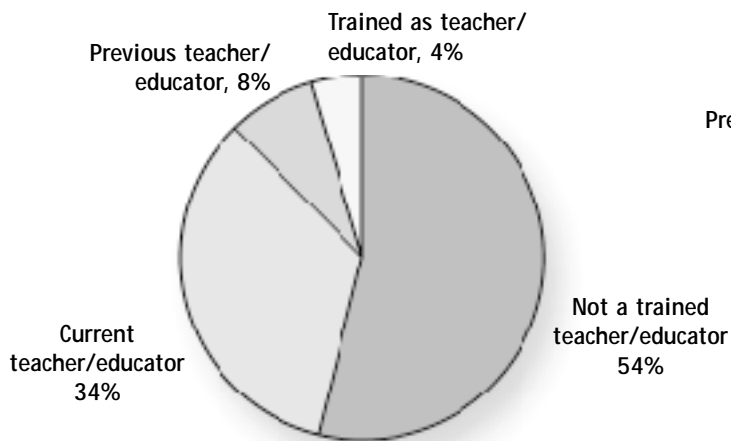
*In Arkansas, 23% of adults age 25 years and older do not have a high school degree. Only 16% hold a 4-year degree or more.**



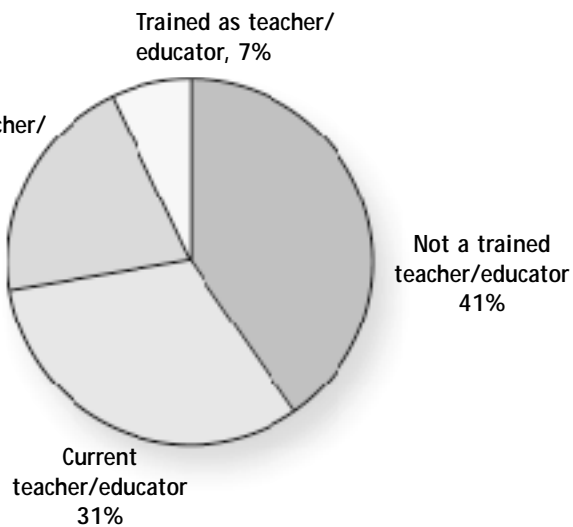
oklahoma

*In Oklahoma, 15% of adults age 25 years and older do not have a high school degree. Only 21% hold a 4-year degree or more.**

TEACHER TRAINING OR EXPERIENCE



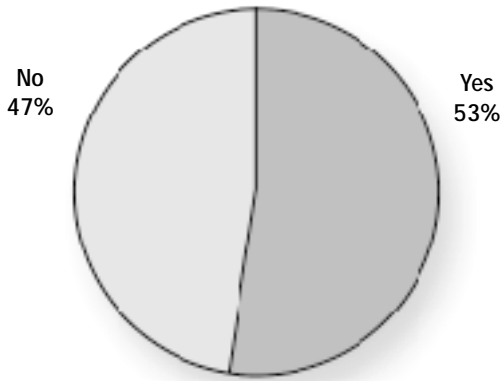
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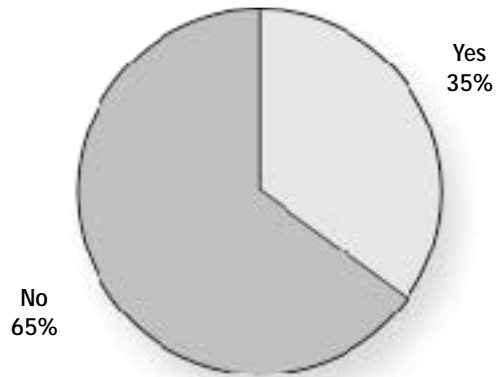
oklahoma

* U.S. Census Bureau. (October 1998). *Educational Attainment in the United States: March 1998*. <http://www.census.gov/prod/3/98pubs/p20-513.pdf> (12 March 2000).

PARENT OF SCHOOL-AGE CHILD

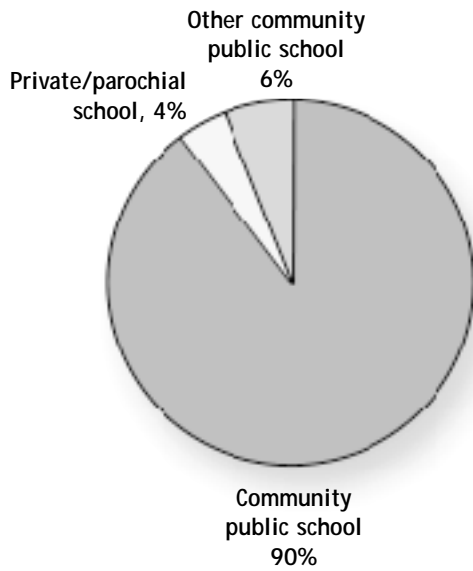


arkansas

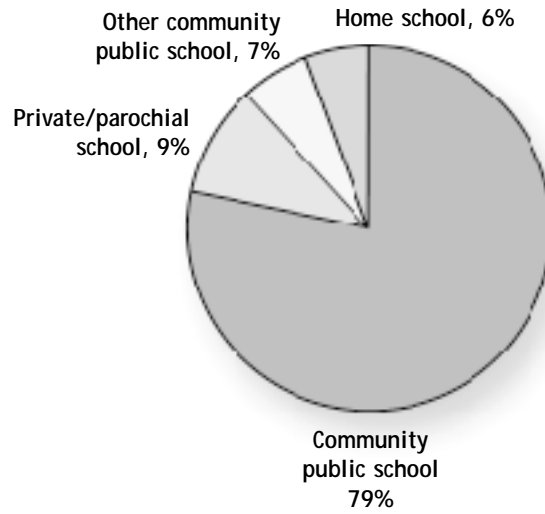


oklahoma

TYPE OF SCHOOL CHILD ATTENDS



arkansas



oklahoma

Methodology

The SEDL policy project's primary interest in the *Calling the Roll* program was the opportunity that the program presented for learning about the study circle process and how it might affect state policy making. Toward this end, SEDL's policy study of the CR program examined both the impact of such a program on state education policy making and the process of implementing study circles on education that include state policymakers.

Figure B.1. summarizes major elements of the SEDL research study, including research goals, key questions, design approaches, data sources, and expected products. As the graphic shows, SEDL pursued two primary research goals and followed two distinct research approaches. The first goal and corresponding approach allowed SEDL to uncover policy-relevant impacts of the program. The second goal and corresponding approach allowed SEDL to examine the process of CR implementation. An appropriate mix of data-collection methods were used to explore these questions.

Research results of program impacts are the focus of the preceding discussion. Research findings from the process evaluation (research goal two) were used to help provide an understanding of the program implementation context around study circle impacts on policymakers. Process results will also be used to develop

planning and implementation guides for program sponsors and policymakers.

Research Goals

As listed in Figure B.1., the primary goals that have guided SEDL staff throughout the research study are as follows:

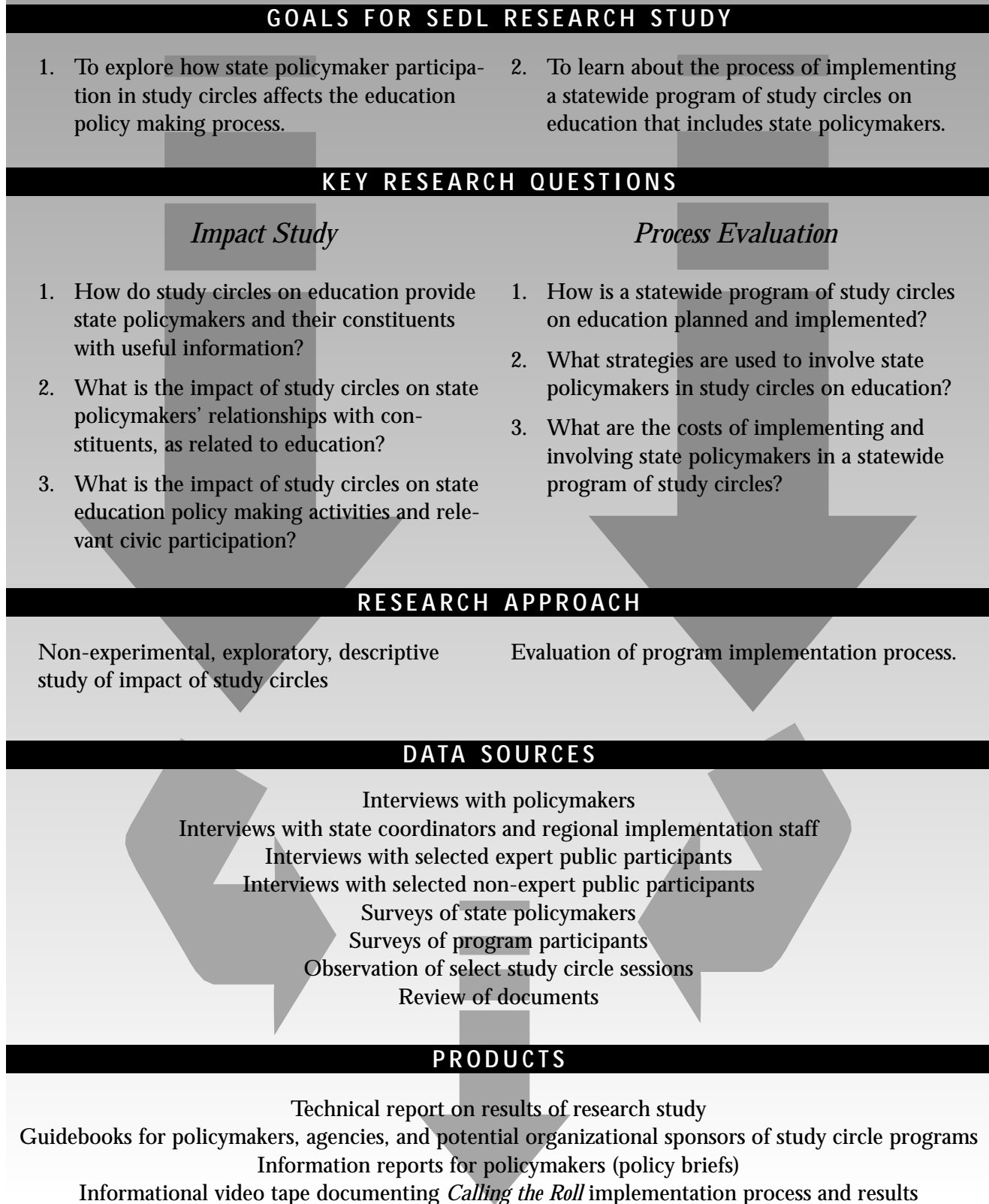
- Goal One: To explore how state policymaker participation in study circles affects the education policy making process.
- Goal Two: To learn about the process of implementing a statewide program of study circles on education that includes state policymakers.

A discussion of the research goals appear in Part Two of this document and are further discussed in SEDL's research plan (Pan, Mutchler, and Knox, 1998).

Description of Data Sources and Collection Procedures

A description of each data source and the actual procedures used to collect them appear below. Site and sample selection criteria are presented next.

Figure B.1.
Overview of the SEDL Research Study



Interviews

Guided interviews with individuals were used to document both program impacts (Goal One) and the implementation process (Goal Two). Interviews with *Calling the Roll* participants, including state policymakers and selected community members, helped inform Goal One research. Interviews with program staff, including state coordinators (AFBS and LWVO) and regional implementation staff (SCRC and SEDL), informed Goal Two research.

SEDL developed written guides to structure the interviews. Face-to-face and phone interviews with state policymakers and program staff were conducted by SEDL researchers. Nonpolicymaker participants were interviewed by local interviewers in both program states. Interview guides were developed for preprogram and post-program interviews with state policymakers, periodic interviews with program staff, and post-program interviews with nonpolicymaker participants. The guides allowed for semi-structured question-and-answer sessions. When possible, interviews were audio-taped. Policymaker and program staff interviews were fully transcribed. Notes from nonpolicymaker participant interviews were recorded manually.

Interview guides allowed interviewers and interviewees the flexibility to pursue a wide range of themes. Also, as the study progressed, questions were added or modified to explore constructs of interest that emerged from earlier data. This approach put much of the responsibility on SEDL staff to prioritize and develop research themes throughout the study.

Preprogram interviews were conducted before study circles began in the fall of 1998. Twenty-one state legislators and two other state-level education policymakers participated

in preprogram interviews. Of these, 17 policymakers attended the *Calling the Roll* program and were interviewed a second time after the program ended. An additional two policymakers attended study circles and provided information through post-program interviews (one newly elected legislator and one legislator who were unable to grant preprogram interviews). Policymakers were recruited and interviewed on a volunteer basis. Four selected policymakers were also interviewed a third time to assess any mid- and long-range impacts of the CR program.

Fifteen nonpolicymaker study circle participants in each state were interviewed after the program ended. During the study circle sessions, all participants were invited to be interviewed and to provide contact information for use by SEDL. Interviewees were selectively sampled from those who participated in study circles in which a state policymaker was present. Face-to-face and telephone interviews documented constituent perceptions regarding their interactions and information sharing with state policymakers.

Surveys

A variety of survey instruments were developed to collect demographic and attitude information from program participants and policymakers and to corroborate information obtained through interviews. Three surveys were administered for this research:

Policymaker Surveys. Thirty state legislators who represent the proposed CR communities in both states provided responses to a survey administered prior to the start of the CR program. This baseline data informed SEDL's general knowledge about public engagement relative to the legislative policy making process. This information-gathering activity helped

frame the direction of the in-depth interviews conducted with *Calling the Roll* participants.

Participant Surveys. *Calling the Roll* research partners, including SEDL policy staff, worked to collect survey data from all participants who attended study circles in the 15 program communities. The survey documented a range of topics (satisfaction with the process, changes in opinion and behavior as a result of participation, and demographic information). SEDL relied on survey results primarily for understanding the characteristics of participants, including demographic information and civic participation tendencies. Surveys were administered to participants at the beginning of the study circle program and again at the final study circle meeting. Researchers collected 615 completed preprogram surveys and 366 post-program surveys.

Session Three Surveys. A smaller survey data collection effort was conducted by SEDL staff with assistance from local program coordinators and facilitators. SEDL identified *Calling the Roll* study circle groups that included a state policymaker and distributed surveys to participants in these groups. Group facilitators were instructed to ask participants to fill out survey forms immediately after their third discussion session, which focused on an education policy issue of state relevance (accountability). A total of 39 surveys were returned.

Observation

SEDL performed observations of study circle meetings to gather information about the study circle process and format and to gain firsthand knowledge of the range of interaction that occurs within the study circle. A total of six study circle groups were observed; each included a state policymaker participant.

Activity Logs

Monthly activity records were collected from the two state coordinators to gain insight on the implementation process in a more immediate and tangible fashion than was possible through periodic interviews. State coordinators provided copies of related artifacts along with their monthly logs, including memos, letters, meeting agendas, and press releases.

Document Review

SEDL staff collected and reviewed documents that provided information on the educational context that might have a bearing on the analysis of impact data. Three major sources were tracked:

- information from Arkansas and Oklahoma newspapers on issues that relate to education or the study circle process. SEDL used an on-line, searchable, full-text news service (Lexis Nexis) to collect this information.
- program reports that were generated by *Calling the Roll* recorders and coordinators. These reports provided further primary and secondary data on the program implementation process and local and state-level impacts.
- legislative updates made available by legislative staff in electronic or hard-copy format.

Data Analysis

Data analysis techniques were selected to help develop a dependable, credible, and accessible accounting of both the impact of the pro-

gram on the state education policy making process and the factors involved in successfully implementing and including state policymakers in a statewide program of study circles on education.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Three types of coding methods suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990) were used to analyze the qualitative data collected through the interviews. For the sake of clarity in description, the analysis is described as occurring in discrete stages. In reality, however, the analysis of the data did not occur in a linear fashion but moved back and forth among the different coding methods throughout the process of analysis.

In the first stage of analysis, interview transcripts and secondary sources of data were analyzed using open-coding methods. The data was examined line by line and broken into discrete events. Conceptual labels were attached to each event or happening. Next, concepts were grouped into broad thematic categories and the properties and dimensions of each category was explored.

In the second stage of analysis, data were analyzed using axial coding methods. This phase emphasized elaboration of the major areas of inquiry (information, relationships, civic capacity) as well as exploration of newly emergent themes and categories. Validation techniques described by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) were used to confirm findings and exceptions to both the themes, and the emergent categories were sought through selective (purposeful) sampling methods to dimensionalize the findings. The conditions that gave rise to various phenomena identified by open coding and the context in which these phenomena occur were also examined during this phase. New data continued to

be collected and analyzed to further elucidate the dimensions.

In the third stage, selective coding methods were used to explicate the central or core themes present in the data, termed the “story line” by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Also as recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1990), “process” or movement that is present in the data were analyzed by identifying why and how actions and interactions changed, stayed the same, or regressed; why events progressed in the face of changing conditions; and what the consequences of these events entailed.

Finally, utilizing “member-check” procedures, internal and external reviewers were asked to review the findings of the coding processes several times during the course of the analysis and again at the end of the analysis to confirm the face validity of the findings.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Basic frequency and central tendency calculations were used to analyze the numerical survey data.

Monitoring and Internal Quality Control

Given the size and complexity of the program, it was important for SEDL staff to assess the quality and effectiveness of its research activities on a regular basis. The methods that were used to ensure the quality and appropriateness of the research are presented in a separate document (Pan, Mutchler, and Knox, 1998). Briefly, researchers implemented the work with processes in place to attend to investigator bias, internal audits, external peer review, instrument development and testing, confirmation of reliability of findings, confidentiality, and informed consent.

Dissemination of Results

One of the primary tasks of SEDL's policy project is to develop a mix of products that will inform state and local policy audiences about the usefulness and feasibility of deliberative dialogue processes and how the particular method tested—the study circle process—could be

implemented in their communities or states. Products related to this research, in addition to this document, include an informative video about the *Calling the Roll* program, information for policymakers in the form of policy briefs, and two guides that provide assistance to state policymakers and groups interested in replicating the program elsewhere.

Public Engagement Survey

Instructions: This survey should take less than ten minutes to complete. Please answer all of the questions below. Also, read the confidentiality agreement on the attached page, indicate your preference, and sign the agreement. If you have any questions or comments, contact SEDL, 211 East Seventh Street, Austin, TX 78701-3281, (512) 476-6861. Please use the enclosed postage paid envelope to return this form to SEDL. Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

1. Among the various sources of information (listed below) that may help you make informed policy decisions, how would you allocate percentages that reflect their relative importance to you? The percentages you indicate should add up to 100 percent.

_____% a. staff analysts or advisors
_____% b. lobbyists or special interest groups
_____% c. constituents
_____% d. experts in the specific policy topic
_____% e. other (specify)_____

= 100 %

2. How do you obtain information about the views and needs of your constituents to help you make informed policy decisions? (Circle all that apply.)
- a. Letters, phone calls, or e-mail received from constituents
 - b. Formal or informal conversations with constituents
 - c. Formal or informal conversations with community leaders
 - d. Materials sent by community groups
 - e. Updates from staff advisors or key informants
 - f. Formal or informal information from lobbyists or special interest groups
 - g. Public opinion polls (state or national)
 - h. Public opinion polls (local)
 - i. Participation in town meetings or other public forums
 - j. Sponsoring focus groups
 - k. Participation in small group dialogues such as issues forums or study circles
 - l. None
 - m. Other sources, specify:_____

3. Considering all of the items you circled in question 2 above, indicate on a scale from 1 to 4 how much you agree with the following statements:

	<i>disagree</i>		<i>agree</i>		
	<i>strongly</i>		<i>strongly</i>		
3a. The information represents diverse viewpoints.	1	2	3	4	not sure
3b. A sufficient quantity of information is available.	1	2	3	4	not sure
3c. The information is reliable and up-to-date.	1	2	3	4	not sure

4. Do you see a need for different or better ways of finding out the views of your constituents? YES NO Not Sure
 If possible, describe some features of what you see as a better source.

5. Use the scale from 1 to 4 (below) to indicate how much you agree with the following statements about your constituents and education policy and programs.

5a. Generally, my constituents are very <i>interested</i> in education programs and policy.	1	2	3	4	not sure
5b. Generally, my constituents are very <i>active</i> in local schools.	1	2	3	4	not sure
5c. Generally, my constituents are well <i>informed</i> about education issues.	1	2	3	4	not sure

The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory is investigating the use of “study circles” as a potentially important tool to assist policymakers and constituents in sharing information and experiences. The study circle is a public engagement model which encourages diverse members of the community to meet in an informal, non-partisan setting and discuss issues in small groups with the assistance of a trained facilitator.

6. How likely would you be to attend a study circle session to discuss education if one were organized in your community?

	not at all likely				very likely	
	1	2	3	4	not sure	

- 6a. Do you have any suggestions for encouraging other legislators to participate in community study circles that organizers of the program might find useful?

7. Do you have any further comments or questions regarding this survey or the study circles on education?

Interview Guide

Policymaker Baseline Information

[Notes for the interviewer:]

This is the first of a series of interviews that will be conducted with selected policymakers who participate in the *Calling the Roll* program in Oklahoma and Arkansas. At this phase of program participation, policymakers have been recruited and will attend one or more study circle sessions. The questions and themes presented below should be used as general guides for promoting discussion with the interviewee, they should not be considered requirements, nor should they be considered to represent an exhaustive list of processes to track. Subsequent interviews with these same policymakers will build upon the themes that are identified and discussed using this guide.

[Introduction and consent information to be read aloud or explained before the interview:]

The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, a private nonprofit organization that works to improve education through research and development, is conducting research on the study circle program in which you have decided to participate. We are conducting interviews with you and other policymakers to gain a better understanding of how public engagement methods such as study circles can help you with your work. The purpose of this interview is to find out some of the ways you give and receive information from the public and your expectations for the study circles on education in [your community] this fall.

Please review and sign the consent form, indicating your preference for our use of the information you share with us today. (Get signature on consent form)

Do you have any questions?

May we proceed with the interview?

I would like to record our conversation so that I can refer back to it later for analysis. Is it all right if I record our conversation?

[If “yes,”— if at any time during this interview you want me to turn off the tape, just let me know. Also tell me if you decide after the interview that you’d like part of our conversation erased from the tape or considered “off-the-record.” — begin audiotape.]

[If “no,” — do not begin audiotape, take notes manually instead.]

[Begin with a broad inquiry regarding the relationship of the policymaker with his/her constituents: lines of communication, information resources, role of constituents in decisionmaking, etc. Use the following questions to help guide your conversation.]

1. What do you consider the most important sources of public opinion information for you as a policymaker?

- relative importance of different sources (e.g. staff analysts or advisors, lobbyist or special interest groups, constituents, experts in the specific policy topic)
- strengths, weaknesses
- frequency of use
- need for other sources
- opportunities available for interaction with community
- impact of this information on decisionmaking

2. How do you think that the average person gets information about education programs and policy?

- format of information that is available (individual, local or state; results, plans, test

scores, rankings, analyses, etc.)

- need for better or different information
- ways to provide information

3. Do you think the public has a clear understanding of your views on education?

- how achieved?
- process of trust building

[Probe the expectations that the respondent has about the upcoming study circles. Try to identify what is most important to the policymaker in regard to the study circle process. Use the following questions to help guide your conversation.]

4. Have you ever participated in study circles or a similar discussion format with constituents? If so, tell me what happened during that experience.

- description of past experience
- role in process (observe, lead, share)
- general comfort level with format
- outcomes

5. What do you expect to gain from your participation in study circles on education?

- motivation for participation, personal and professional motivations
- general comfort level with format, contrast with previous experiences (e.g. town meetings, hearings)
- potential outcomes (new information, relationship-building, express opinions)
- concerns
- role in process (observe, lead, share)
- impact on process
- important issues to bring up
- expectations on level of participation (number of sessions)

[Try to gain sense of the major education issues that the policymaker is concerned with or that he/she expects to talk about during the study circle sessions. Use the following questions to help guide your conversation.]

6. What do you think will be the major education issues that will be on people's minds at the study circle discussions?

- local vs. state concerns
- significant current events or policy shifts

7. What education policy issues most concern you right now?

- local vs. state concerns
- drafting or supporting new legislation for 1999
- pet projects or initiatives

8. Do you think that the study circle discussions will help you or your constituents resolve the issues you have identified?

- discussions as source of feedback for new legislation
- need for community to hear diverse viewpoints

[Use this last question to find out about policymaker recruitment for study circles in general.]

9. What should organizers of study circles consider when they try to involve policymakers in their programs?

- why you became involved
- how to encourage more participation
- barriers to participation for policymakers

Interview Guide

Policymaker Post-Program Perceptions

[Notes for the interviewer:]

This is the second of a series of interviews that will be conducted with selected policymakers who participate in the *Calling the Roll* program in Oklahoma and Arkansas. At this phase of program participation, policymakers have attended one or more study circle sessions. The questions and themes presented below should be used as general guides for promoting discussion with the interviewee; they should not be considered requirements, nor should they be considered to represent an exhaustive list of processes to track. Subsequent interviews with these same policymakers will build upon the themes that are identified and discussed using this guide.

[Introduction and consent information to be read aloud or explained before the interview:]

The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, a private nonprofit organization that works to improve education through research and development, is conducting a research study of the study circle program on education in which you have agreed to participate. We are conducting interviews with you and other public officials to gain a better understanding of how public engagement tools such as study circles can help policymakers with their work. The purpose of this interview is to find out your experience with the study circles on education that you attended in the fall.

If you have not already done so, please review and sign the consent form, indicating your preference for our use of the information you share with us today. (Get signature on consent form)

Do you have any questions?

May we proceed with the interview?

I would like to record our conversation so that I can refer back to it later for analysis. Is it all right if I record our conversation?

[If “yes,”— if at any time during this interview you want me to turn off the tape, just let me know. Also tell me if you decide after the interview that you’d like part of our conversation erased from the tape or considered “off-the-record.” — begin audiotape.]

[If “no,” — do not begin audiotape, take notes manually instead.]

[Use the first two questions to let the respondent know that you are interested in pursuing very open-ended responses and that you are interested in what he/she feels to be the most important part of his/her study circle experience. Also use this as an opportunity to note some of the events and issues that you should refer back to or explore more fully as the interview progresses.]

1. What was the best part of your experience with study circles?

- How did it compare with other opportunities you have to interact with the public?

2. Were there any negative aspects of your experiences with study circles?

- What did you like least?

[Now, try to find out the respondent’s perception of what happened during the actual study circles and any related events/activities that

happened when study circles were also going on.]

3. What were the issues that your group seemed to talk about the most?

(Probe some issues identified during preprogram interview)

- Tell me about some of the most interesting things you heard about these issues.
- What were some issues that you shared with your group?
- Did you learn anything new from the discussions?
- Did your viewpoint/opinion on any issue change because of the discussion?
- Did you hear anything that will help you with your work in the upcoming legislative session?
- Do you think that these were primarily local concerns, or are they also relevant to state education policy?

4. Tell me about the people who participated in your study circle group.

- Can you tell me about anything you may have heard from an individual that was particularly interesting to you?
- How would you compare attendees with the constituents you normally hear from?
- Whose views were missing from the conversations?

5. Tell me about how you felt about the study circles themselves.

- comfort with the process
- attitudes/dynamics of the group
- positive/negative experiences
- comparing the different sessions he/she may have attended
- space/physical environment and location
- facilitation

6. Now that the study circles have ended, did your experience match your previous expectations for the program?

- positive and negative expectations

7. Can you think of any examples of how you may have been able to use your experiences in the study circles in another context, such as at other events, or in other meetings or conversations?

- Did experience prompt other informal conversations with other study circle participants during or after sessions?
- Were you able to use the issues discussed in study circles in other meetings or events about education?
- Did your experience prompt you to find out more about an issue or problem?

[Use the following questions to help you identify program results.]

8. Do you think the study circles program was beneficial for you and your work? For the community? For the schools?

- action vs. talk
- resolution of problems/conflicts
- community-building

9. How would you compare study circle discussions with other ways you might communicate with your constituents?

- in terms of relationship-building
- in terms of public relations and advertising your views

[Use the following questions to prompt the respondent to reflect on the value of public engagement.]

10. Do you think that it is important for the community to come together to discuss education issues like they did in the study circles? Explain.

[Use the following questions to probe expectations for future impacts.]

11. Do you think that community discussions such as those you experienced in study circles are important for the policy making process?

- state vs. local level decisionmaking
- information
- relationships
- civic capacity

[Questions regarding policymaker participation]

12. On a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being “not at all useful” and 10 being “one of the most useful things I’ve done,” how would you rate your experience? What would need to happen to make it a ten?

13. What advice would you give program organizers to help them get more policymakers involved in discussions such as study circles?

- What was your primary motivation for attending study circles? How did you first hear about it? Did you know anyone else involved in program?
- What facilitated your ability to participate in the groups?
- What barriers were there to your participation?
- What information is important for policymakers to know about participating?

SEDL Research Study of "Calling the Roll"

Study Circle Observation Guide

Policymaker Observation Questions

The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) is conducting research to find out how state policymakers affect and are affected by participation in study circles. Please make sure that you are observing a session with a policymaker in attendance. Fill out this form after each session you observe. **Please return your completed forms to SEDL, 211 East Seventh St., Austin, TX 78701-3281 after the sessions are over. THANK YOU!**

Your name: _____ Your group number: _____

Policymaker's name: _____ Session (circle one): 1 2 3 4

Think about the following questions after the session you observed today, and respond to them as completely as possible. You may use another sheet of paper or the back of this form if necessary.

(1) How would you describe the interaction you observed between the policymaker(s) and other participants? In particular, please tell us if you observed any interactions that were different from what you expected to see.

(2) Please give an example of an interaction between the policymaker(s) and participants that you viewed as **positive** or **productive**.

(3) Please give an example of an interaction between the policymaker(s) and participants that you viewed as **negative** or **counterproductive**.

(4) What education related issues seem to be most important to the policymaker? Compare or contrast those issues with the issues that the other participants seemed most concerned about.

(5) What, if any, benefits appeared because the policymaker(s) was in the group?

(6) What, if any, **problems** or **conflicts** resulted because the policymaker(s) was in the group?

(7) What would you suggest program planners do in the future to better accommodate the participation of policymakers in study circles?

Self-administered Questionnaire for Study Circle Participants

SESSION 3 Group #: _____ Location: _____

Anonymous ID for follow-up surveys. Please write-in the *last 4 digits* of your social security number:

1. **Did you get a chance to talk about your opinions during this session?** (circle one)
 1. A great deal 2. A moderate amount 3. Not very much 4. Not at all

2. **Did this session help you understand other people's opinions better?** (circle one)
 1. A great deal 2. A moderate amount 3. Not very much 4. Not at all

3. **Did this session cause you to change your opinion(s)?** (circle one)
 1. Yes 2. No 3. I'm not sure

4. **Thinking about the four viewpoints that your group talked about during the first part of this session (listed below), how would you rank the views in order of their personal importance to you?**
 (Please put a rank order number from 1 to 4 next to each viewpoint below, with 1 being most important)
 - ___ "We should give schools and students specific, high standards to aim for."
 - ___ "We should involve parents and community members in the process of making decisions about education."
 - ___ "We should make information about students and schools easy to find, understand, and use."
 - ___ "We should give educators more support and more freedom to make decisions."

5. **Using the same ranking order as above, tell us who you think should have the most responsibility for making sure that all children get the best education.**
 (Please put a rank order number from 1 to 6 next to each category below, with 1 being the most important)
 - ___ Teachers and School Administrators
 - ___ Parents
 - ___ All Citizens
 - ___ Local School Board
 - ___ State Government and/or Legislators
 - ___ Local Education Organizations (for example, PTAs or Teacher's Association)
 - ___ Other (Specify: _____)

6. **How responsible do you feel personally for making sure that all children get the best education?** (circle one)
 1. Very responsible 2. Somewhat responsible
 3. Not very responsible 4. Not at all responsible

7. For each of the additional four discussion topics that you might have discussed today (listed below), think about the three questions below and mark the boxes that best answer each question.

	Which <i>two</i> topics did your group spend the most time talking about?	Did you contribute your opinions to this topic?	Did your group come up with any ideas to address these topics in your community?
a. School Choice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
b. School Funding	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
c. Diversity in Schools	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
d. School Safety	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

8. Did your group talk about ideas for “next steps” or projects and programs that you or others might do after the study circles are over?

1. Yes 2. No 3. I’m not sure

8a. If yes, please list some of those ideas:

9. Did you use the “Resource Guide” to help you during this session?

1. Very often 2. Occasionally 3. Not very much 4. Not at all

10. Do you think you will use the “Resource Guide” after the study circles are over?

1. Very often 2. Occasionally 3. Not very much 4. Not at all

11. Did you feel that you needed more information to talk about the topics in this session?

1. Yes 2. No

12. Do you think you will try to find out more about one or more of the topics that your group talked about today?

1. Yes 2. No

12a. If yes, please list the topic(s) you want more information about:

13. Was there a public official or policymaker in your group?

1. Yes 2. No 3. I'm not sure

13a. If yes, please circle the category that best describes his/her position.

- 1. State-level public official or education policymaker** (such as state senator or representative, state school superintendent, secretary of education, etc.)
- 2. Local-level public official or education policymaker** (such as mayor, county judge, school board member, school superintendent or principal, etc.)
- 3. Candidate for any elected office**

13b. If you responded "Yes" to question 13, read the following statements about the public official and circle a number next to each one to show how you feel about the statement.

Use a scale from 1 (agree strongly) to 4 (disagree strongly):

(circle your choice from 1 to 4)

	Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly
a. He/she was an equal participant in the discussion.	1	2	3	4
b. He/she dominated the discussion.	1	2	3	4
c. He/she shared personal experiences.	1	2	3	4
d. His/her presence helped better inform the discussion.	1	2	3	4
e. His/her presence made me feel like my opinions had more importance.	1	2	3	4

Thank you very much for participating in this most important survey!

Interview Guide

Participant Post-Program Interviews

Interviewer: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Respondent: _____ City: _____

Policymaker in Respondent's Study Circle (name and title): _____

Introduction and consent information to be read aloud or explained before the interview:

The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, a non-profit education research organization, is working to learn more about the study circles on education that you attended in the fall of 1998. We are talking with participants to find out how study circles can help schools, communities, and people like you. All of the information you share today will be kept completely confidential. Do you have any questions before we start?

Is it all right if I record our conversation so that later I can better remember what we talked about?

If "yes," — *if at any time during this interview you want me to turn off the tape, just let me know* — begin audiotape.

If "no," — do not begin audiotape, take detailed notes.

* * * * *

Sometime during the interview, find out the following information about the respondent:

Which study circle sessions did he/she attend? (circle all that apply)

1 2 3 4 5 6 Action Forum
(if applicable)

Is he/she a parent of school age (K-12) children? YES NO

Is his/her occupation related to K-12 education or the schools? YES NO

If yes, what is his/her occupation? _____

Use the first two questions to help the respondent feel that you are interested in pursuing very open-ended responses and that you are interested in what he/she feels to be the most important part of his/her study circle experience. Also use this as an opportunity to note some of the events and issues that you should refer back to or explore more fully as the interview progresses.

1. What was the best part of your experience with study circles?
 - How did it compare with other ways that you participate in the community?
(Ask for examples or detailed description of the elements the respondent liked.)

2. What did you like least about the study circles program?
 - Were they as useful and interesting as you expected/hoped they would be?
 - Any disappointing parts of the process?
(Ask for examples or detailed description of the elements the respondent liked least.)

Use the questions below to find out the respondent's perceptions of the study circles.

3. What were the education issues you remember your study circle group talking about the most?
 - Tell me about some of the most interesting things you heard about these issues.
 - Did you learn something new from the discussions?
 - Did your opinions on any issue change because of the discussion?

4. Tell me about the people who participated in your study circle group.
 - Did you know any of the other participants?
 - Were there people from diverse backgrounds in your group? (i.e. more than one race/ethnicity, gender, economic background, education level)
 - Did the people in your group seem to have a wide range of opinions about the issues?
 - Are there other people or perspectives that you feel were missing from your study circle discussions?

5. Tell me about how you felt about the study circles themselves. *(Ask for examples.)*
 - comfort with the process
 - attitudes/dynamics of the group
 - positive/negative experiences
 - comparing the different sessions he/she may have attended
 - facilitation/role of discussion leader

Now try to find out the respondent's perception of the participation of the policymaker.
(Ask for examples or detailed description of the perceptions the respondent shares.)

6. Tell me what it was like having the [insert policymaker title] in your study circle group.
7. What did you like the most about having the [insert policymaker title] in the study circle discussion? Please provide examples or describe in detail.
8. What did you like least about having the [insert policymaker title] in the study circle discussion? Please provide examples or describe in detail.
9. How do you think the experience would have been different if the [insert policymaker title] were not present?
(If policymaker did not attend all sessions, ask respondent to compare sessions with and without the policymaker)
10. Do you think the issues your group talked about are important for the [insert policymaker title] to consider for his/her work as a legislator? Explain.
(Remind the respondent about the issues he/she mentioned in response to question #3.)
11. What do you think is the most important thing that the [insert policymaker title] heard from *you* during the study circles? Please explain.
12. Have you ever discussed your local schools or other education issues with an elected official or policymaker outside of the study circles? Please tell me about that experience.

Use the following question to prompt the respondent to reflect on the value of public engagement.

13. Do you think that it is important for the community to come together to discuss education issues like they did in the study circles? Explain.
14. On a scale from one (not at all important) to ten (extremely important), how important would you say it is to include state policymakers such as the [insert policymaker title] in these discussions? Tell me what you think could make it more important for state policymakers to be there.

Questions regarding recruitment/publicity

15. What do you think organizers of the program can do in the future to get more people involved in study circle discussions on education?

16. Do you have any final comments or questions before we end the interview?

Thank you for sharing your time with me today. We might like to contact you again in a few months to see if you have become involved with activities that come about because of the study circle discussions. Would it be all right for someone to contact you again in about six months?

YES

NO

If *yes*, confirm that contact information will still be current six months from now. If respondent is unsure whether he/she can be contacted at present address/phone, obtain secondary contact information (relative, close friend, work) that can help locate the respondent.

SECONDARY CONTACT PERSON:

Name _____
Address _____
City, State, Zip _____
Telephone _____
Relationship _____

Glossary

Arkansas Friends for Better Schools

(AFBS)—An alliance of advocates for public education representing education, business, civic, and religious organizations, and sponsored by the Arkansas Interfaith Conference, Arkansas Friends was founded in late 1993 and funded by the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation through March 1997. It also enjoys substantial in-kind support from Southwestern Bell Telephone. Arkansas Friends was originally founded to provide information to its members and to the public about systemic school reform, particularly as defined under Act 236 of 1991. A key interest of the alliance is building support for reform and for public schools in the state.

action forum—A community-wide event at the conclusion of the study circle program that informs participants about future action opportunities or provides the opportunity for groups and individuals to form new coalitions and plan more study circles. This forum is also an opportunity for participants to share experiences with each other and officials or policymakers.

Calling the Roll—A collaborative program featuring multiple community-wide study circles on education in Arkansas and Oklahoma from September through November 1998.

deliberative dialogue—A mode of communication that enables individuals to constructively discuss an issue of shared concern with the purpose of increasing understanding of diverse perspectives and coming to a

common sense of direction and potential action.

facilitator—The designated discussion leader for a study circle session. Facilitators are not necessarily experts in the topic of discussion but do receive training in helping people listen and engage in constructive dialogue.

focus group—Structured public gathering in which the sponsoring entity solicits the opinions of participants on a single issue. Generally used as a method to extract opinions from a specially chosen group of participants who are screened using established criteria.

issues forum—A model that puts into practice concepts of deliberative dialogue. Issues forums are similar to study circles; however, issues forums are planned as large group discussions that occur in a single event, whereas study circles emphasize a series of small-group dialogues over time.

kick-off forum—A community-wide event that initiates the study circle program. The kickoff helps draw media and community visibility to the study circles and helps recruit potential sponsoring organizations.

League of Women Voters of Oklahoma (LWVO)—A nonpartisan political organization that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

policymaker—Elected and appointed representatives whose jobs as state legislators, state board of education members, or other state-level officeholders place them in a position of accountability to the citizens of their state.

public engagement—An interactive process that provides an opportunity for the public to participate in dialogue pertaining to decisions that will impact community structures and systems.

study circle process—A specific approach to achieving broad engagement of community members in small-group deliberation. As described by the Study Circles Resource Center, study circles are groups of between five and fifteen people who agree to meet several times to discuss an issue of public concern in a democratic, nonpartisan, and collaborative way. The process is structured (open and equal participation, group ground rules, facilitation) so that participants of diverse backgrounds and varied expertise levels can address complex issues,

and controversial topics can be discussed in an atmosphere of respect.

Study Circles Resource Center (SCRC)—A project of the Topsfield Foundation to promote the study circle model. SCRC provides technical assistance, materials development, and research to help states and communities implement their own study circles. **Congressional Exchange** is another related Topsfield project that applies the model at the national level.

state coordinator—Designated individual who is responsible for the state-level coordination of *Calling the Roll* in each of the two states.

state policymakers—Policymakers and state-level decision makers.

statewide study circle program—A program coordinating the implementation of community-wide study circles in multiple communities across a state.

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