



Study on the Evolution Motivation and Logic of School District System in China

Dang Weng

Suzhou foreign language school

1811480834@qq.com

Abstract. School district system has been an important system in China's education policy since the founding of New China. It mainly refers to the principle that students are enrolled in the nearest place, and forms an educational governance unit composed of specific governance themes. In the policy context of China, the school district system is an institutional innovation aimed at promoting the co-construction and sharing of educational resources among schools for the purpose of inter-school balance. Since the founding of New China, the school district system has been constantly improved. From the perspective of China's policy on school district system, school district system has undergone two reforms. The first reform was after China's reform and opening up. The school district was a sub-educational administrative unit based on administrative logic to cope with the problem of limited management ability of local educational administrative departments. The second reform was in the millennium, when the school district system diluted the administrative features and focused on standardizing the allocation of educational resources to promote the balanced development of educational resources. In this regard, this study analyzes these two stages in order to discuss the basis for the evolution and reform of China's school district system.

Keywords: School district, Governance, Equity, Balance, Power.

1 Introduction

There are two understandings of the term "school district" in Chinese education policy: one is to regard it as a governance area (or governance scope), such as recruiting students according to school districts. In essence, this policy refers to the scope of school enrollment in the context of nearby enrollment. Another understanding is to regard it as a governance institution (or governance organization), which refers to an education governance unit composed of certain governance subjects, enjoying certain education governance power, assuming corresponding responsibilities and obligations, and operating according to a certain organizational logic. The school district described in this paper is the latter, and the common policy expression is school district system or school district management. The school district policy refers to the system design of the educational policy at all levels to the governing institution and its operating mechanism. The changes and logic of school district policies have always been influenced by the

overall planning of national education, which reflects the overall context and common laws of the evolution of China's education management policies.

According to the development of school district policies in China, this study tries to discuss the characteristics of school district policies in different stages and the basis for formulating such policies, in order to better understand the Chinese school district policy evolution and formulation of its basis and logic.

2 The historical evolution of school district policy

In the period of time after the founding of China, the main task of Chinese education is to rebuild order and stabilize the situation quickly, so the educational management system adopted a more centralized way. In 1949, the first National Conference on Education Work determined the general guidelines for national education work, this has made China's transition from semi-colonial and semi-feudal education to new democratic education. According to the general policy of education, since 1951, the "Interim Regulations for Secondary Schools", "Interim Regulations for Primary Schools (Draft)", "Decision on Reforming the School System", and many other policies have been promulgated successively, laying the foundation for the educational policy system of New China. In order to reverse the situation of a high illiteracy rate, the education policy in the 1950s and 1960s put universal education, especially universal primary education, as the top priority, with little discussion on educational organization units and management power [1]. After the reform and opening up, school districts, as innovative management measures to adapt to the new situation, formally appeared in local and national policies, and experienced two major transitions. According to the policy setting of the nature and function of school district, the historical evolution of school district since the reform and opening up of China is able to be separated into the period of sub-educational administrative organization and the period of educational resource governance community.

2.1 Sub-educational administration period

The exploration of the educational management system by reform and opening up has opened up space for the emergence of school district policies. In 1985, the "Decision of the CPC Central Committee on the Reform of the Educational System" established the principle that "basic education should be managed by local governments at different levels, opening a new stage of transition from direct management to overall planning and coordinated governance in the educational management system. In this context, school districts appear in some local policies and are endowed with certain administrative authority, which mainly refers to educational administrative institutions subordinate to district and county educational administrative departments, that is, the dispatched agencies of educational administrative [2]. For example, in 1985 some counties in Hebei Province set up school district headquarters to replace the original township central schools and implement some administrative functions [3]. In this period, school district can be regarded as a sub-educational administrative unit, which is mainly based

on administrative logic. Its policy significance lies in coping with the problem of limited management ability of local educational administrative departments, and playing the function of assisting educational management. It has high characteristics of educational administration.

2.2 Period of educational resources joint-governance

Since the beginning of the 21st century, educational policies have gradually downplayed the administrative characteristics of school districts, positioning them as a non-administrative unit to regulate the educational resource allocation, as well as promote the balanced development of educational resources, which can be regarded as a community of educational resources governance. In 2004, Dongcheng District of Beijing began the exploration of school district management with the implementation of the "Management Measures for School Districts in the Education System of Dongcheng District". Since then, China's provinces gradually began to implement the school district system [4]. These local experiences influence national policy from the bottom up. Subsequently, China's State Council affirmed the value of local exploration in education, and clearly pointed out that districts or districts should be delimited according to the actual conditions, to coordinate teaching and personnel management, and share high-quality educational resources. In 2012, China's State Council put forward a plan to balance compulsory education and put forward the implementation plans related to school district-based management [5]. At this point, the school district system has officially become the innovation of the national management system to promote the balanced development of educational resources.

According to the relevant policy texts, the policies of various regions and levels jointly indicate that the school district has evolved into a governance community with a balanced allocation of educational resources in the 21st century. Zheng et al. (2015) proposed that school district policies in this period had the following five characteristics: geographical proximity was the physical space principle to divide school districts; The main body of the school district is the school group, that is, the union of public education institutions; The policy goal of establishing a school district is to improve the overall benefit of the school district, and the word "overall" implies the value pursuit of educational equity [6]. The strategy to realize the policy goal is to change the organizational form of educational resource allocation, break the traditional inter-school barriers by creating a new governance unit for cross-organizational cooperation, and link up the resource interaction between school sections and between school and outside school. The main policy measures are to establish a variety of resource exchange mechanisms, including the co-construction and sharing of human resources, curriculum resources, facilities and equipment, such as organizing cross-school teacher teaching and research at the school district level, teacher mobility, sharing of featured courses, etc.

3 The evolving logic of school district policy

By systematically sorting out the policy text, the analysis framework of school district policy evolution logic can be refined, as shown in the following table:

Table 1. The framework of school district policy evolution logic (edited by the author)

	Core	Political motive	The value orientation of policy	Attribution and solution of policy problems
Sub-educational administration period	Management efficiency	Enhance management capability	Efficiency of administration	Imbalance of power structure - additional administrative agencies
Period of educational resources joint-governance	The balance of educational resources	Promote the balanced allocation of educational resources	Educational equality	Centralization of power - Diversified governance

The evolution of school district policies takes management efficiency and quality balance as the core discourse respectively, reflecting the attention to different educational issues in different historical periods, but the evolution is always driven by responding to practical issues. With the development of education, the focus of policy issues has gradually changed, reflecting the change in the value orientation of education policy, which determines the value change of school district policy from focusing on efficiency to emphasizing equity. In this process, the policy constantly attributed the real problems from the perspective of power allocation, and tried to solve the real contradictions by adjusting the power allocation scheme of education governance.

3.1 Oriented by governance practice problems

Although the specific forms of the problems are changing, the development of school district policies has always been oriented to the practical issues of governance and evolved in response to the needs of educational practice. Since China's reform and opening up, in particular, after the middle of the 80s, the reform of education management system and the change in education scale have posed challenges to local education administration [7]. On the basis of the "Decision of the CPC Central Committee on the Reform of the Education System" proposed by China's State Council in 1985, the "Compulsory Education Law" issued by the government in 1986 confirmed the power transfer between the central and local [7]. According to this policy, compared with the previous period, the scale of urban basic education was greatly expanded. According to statistics, under the background of structural adjustment of urban and rural schools, in 1978, the number of urban primary and middle schools in China was 33,183 and 6,027, respectively, and in 1985, it increased to 66,480 and 12262 [8], both increasing by more

than 100%. Under such circumstances, how to deal with the large span and large number of schools with limited human and financial resources by local educational administrative departments, especially urban educational administrative departments, became a policy issue at that time. Therefore, Shanghai, as a representative, tried to set up sub-educational administrative institutions such as school districts to share part of the management functions of the education bureau [9]. Therefore, in this period, this policy can enhance the rationality and coordination of educational administration, and adapt to the practical needs of improving the efficiency of educational management resources .

However, in the 21st century, the uneven development of education has become a major concern of our educational policy. According to Dong and Li (2019), school district policies have become an important deployment for the central government to balance the compulsory educational resources, which is particularly responds to the following practical problems [10]:

First, the purpose of the school district system is to solve the problem of "large class sizes". With the acceleration of urbanization, the floating population continues to pour into urban areas. As a result, the contradiction between the demand and supply of educational resources of high quality for urban residents is becoming increasingly prominent, and the pressure on urban schools is increasing. Therefore, the school district system focuses on solving the "large class size" problem with better educational resources, and tries to expand the coverage of educational resources with high quality, as well as reasonably divert students through the school district system.

Secondly, the school district system also tries to solve the problem of students' school choice. In 2013, the "Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening Reform" proposed by China's State Council stipulated that compulsory education is free of examination and nearby enrollment, so as to avoid the problem of school choice for students. In the past, school choice was defined as the use of parents' rights to choose the school they thought was most suitable for their children, because of the resulting imbalance in the distribution of student resources, which was alleviated by the district system requiring students to attend nearby schools.

Finally, the school district system tries to address the urban-rural gap. Several opinions of the Ministry of Education (2014) to promote the integrated reform, as well as the development of compulsory education in rural and urban areas put forward that, through the integration of compulsory in an urban and rural area, education and the implementation of school districts and collectivized schools, support for schools that are lack of resources should be increased, in order to promote balanced development [5].

In fact, the above problems are the characteristics of the unbalanced allocation of educational resources. Vickers (2009) pointed out that, entering a new age, the principal contradiction of society after socialism with Chinese characteristics has been transformed into contradictions between unbalanced and inadequate developments and the citizen's increasing demands for better lives. With the transformation of the principal contradiction in society, the principal contradiction in education transforms into the contradiction between the citizens' increasing demands for high-quantity educational resources [11]. At this time, the people's demand for education changed from receiving

education to receiving a better education. Therefore, this puts forward higher requirements for the balanced development of high-quality educational resources. However, Wu and Shen (2006) believe that the long-term education management system has created resource barriers between schools, and weak schools and high-quality schools have respectively entered a vicious and virtuous cycle of educational resources, which has aggravated the imbalance of educational development [12]. In this context, the school district policy tries to promote the balanced flow of high-quality educational resources among schools through cross-organization cooperation, so as to deal with the policy problem that people are difficult to receive better education.

3.2 The change of value orientation: from paying attention to efficiency to emphasizing fairness

Through the analysis of the policy problems of the school district, it can be found that the primary purpose of the school district policy in the first stage is to solve the problem of administrative efficiency, it tries to improve the efficiency of administrative management through professional management or adjustment of the administrative structure. However, the school district system in the 21st century mainly aims at promoting the balanced development of educational resources, which highlights the pursuit of educational fairness and the change of the value orientation of China's educational management policy. In this stage, China takes the balanced development of compulsory education as the policy orientation and values pursuit of basic education development. For example, the new "Compulsory Education Law" issued in 2006 clarified for the first time the equal rights of Chinese citizens to receive compulsory education, and made it clear that balanced development is the strategy to achieve educational equality [13].

In this context, school district policy has become a specific plan to remedy the historical problems. At the beginning of the founding of the People's Republic of China and the beginning of the reform and opening up, the value-oriented policy of giving priority to efficiency focused on how to maximize the utility of limited educational resources. In the historical period of resource difficulties, China adopted this approach to designing education management policies and established a number of key schools to meet national development needs [14]. However, after the 1990s, with the intervention of market-oriented factors, the gap between key schools and general schools has become wider and wider, and the trend of school choice has become more and more fierce, which has greatly damaged educational equity. Therefore, the Ministry of Education requires that every key school and school with a higher educational level must undertake the task of helping or leading one or several weak schools, supporting and helping these schools to gradually improve their educational level, trying to play an exemplary role of superior schools, and narrow the gap in school development [13]. This shows that the purpose of the new school district policy is to change the development gap between schools caused by the education resources confined to individual schools, so as to promote the overall improvement of education quality in the region.

3.3 The contradiction and adjustment of power allocation

According to the two stages of school district policy in China, the contradiction between school district policy goal and reality causes the motivation of policy change, while the attribution of contradiction affects the plan of solution and determines the policy change of school district. Therefore, problem attribution from the perspective of educational management power is the core motivation of promoting school district policies. Before the 1980s to the 21st century, with the increase of the number of schools, many of the local administrative department of education carries on the effective management of these schools, the dilemma because of the education management institution system of structural imbalance, creating additional education administrative agencies to expansion and extension of administrative power network policy options. In this period, the governance power of the school district belongs to a single subject - the educational administrative department, and the power attribute is equivalent to the educational administrative power, so it adopts the top-down power operation mode. Therefore, such management pattern is not the optimal solution to promote the increment and balanced allocation of high-quality education resources, but it is the excessive administrative power that leads to the closure of education governance power [12]. Its consequence is to block the power of society to participate in educational governance and restrict the support of social resources to education. At the same time, it restricts the freedom of inter-school interaction and impedes the vitality of inter-school resource flow. From this point of view, the new school district system has changed the strategy of centralizing and expanding administrative power one by one, and adopted the new scheme of releasing the governance space and establishing the open governance structure. It reflects the attempt to reform the governance mode, and tries to form the power allocation pattern of multiple co-governance by moving down the management center of gravity and activating the main body of running schools.

The new school district system reflects that the professional power of allocating and using educational resources no longer belongs to the educational administrative agency, but belongs to the school-running unit, which is decided and exercised by the school alliance through consultation, which makes the operation of school district power different from the traditional top-down management mode, and presents the network governance relationship. This multi-governance power allocation mode endows schools and society with more autonomy and participation rights, which is conducive to realizing the increment of educational resources, promoting the balanced allocation of resources, and improving the quality and efficiency of resources.

4 Conclusion

In educational management policies, school districts, as different types of educational governance institutions, have undergone changes since China's reform and opening up, reflecting the logical commonality in the evolution of China's educational management policies. From the perspective of historical evolution, school districts have appeared in local policies as dispatched institutions of educational administrative departments after the reform and opening up. The policies since the 21st century have positioned the

school district as a community of educational resources governance and have downplayed the administrative characteristics. This process of change reflects that the development of school district policy has always been driven by the governance practice, showing the value orientation from focusing on efficiency to emphasizing equity. At the same time, the policy has been taking the contradiction of power allocation as the attribution of practical problems, adjusting the attribute, scope and operation mode of power in school districts.

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