UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER
Warner Graduate School of Education and Human Development

ED 461: Politics of Education
Fall 2005
Department of Education Leadership

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Class Sessions: Tuesdays, 4:45 to 7:25 (B-315)

Course Description and Objectives
ED 461 emphasizes K-12 educational politics and policy at the local level, focusing on how school systems operate as political systems. This course is designed to provide students with an understanding of the recurrent forces and competing values that shape educational policy, with an emphasis on public engagement, governance structures, and current policy issues and political contexts. In addition, the course is intended to provide students with conceptual and analytical skills that will be useful in their role as educational leaders.

The course objectives are:

- To increase knowledge about politics in education, including the power of various groups in shaping educational policy.
- To foster leadership in schools and districts through an understanding of political decision-making and influence.
- To provide students with the skills to employ formal and informal mechanisms to collectively solve problems in schools and districts.

Format
The course will be conducted in a seminar format, using readings, guest speakers, and videos to guide discussion.
Alignment with State Standards
It is my goal that students will be able to meet the following state standards:

Building Level Leaders:
1. Communicate and work effectively with parents, staff, students, community leaders, and other community members from diverse backgrounds, providing clear, accurate written and spoken information that publicizes the school’s goals, expectations, and performance results, and builds support for improving student achievement. [standard (iv)(c)]
2. Interact and communicate effectively with school board members in developing and implementing district policies, managing change, and managing district affairs. [standard (iv)(c)]

District Level Leaders:
1. Communicate and work effectively with parents, students, building and district leaders, teachers, support staff, state leaders, community leaders, and other community members from diverse backgrounds, providing clear, accurate written and spoken information that publicizes the district’s goals, expectations, and performance results, and builds support for improving student achievement. [standard (iv)(f)]
2. Interact and communicate effectively with local, state, and federal representatives, applying statutes and regulations as required by law, and implementing school policies in accordance with law. [standard (iv)(m)]

Student Expectations
1. All assignments are due when indicated; no incompletes will be granted. Please be sure to proofread your writing and use appropriate citations throughout your work. Appropriate use of the English language is expected. Rewrites of written assignments are permitted and may be required.
2. There are no right answers to political issues in education. Educational policy and politics involve diverse perspectives, investments, and costs. Active discussion and thoughtful disagreement are essential for all of us to learn. Respect for others’ opinions and points of view is a fundamental ground rule for this class. One aspect of respect is meeting on equal terms; thus thoughtful reading and preparation before class discussion is expected.
3. I wish to fully include persons with disabilities in this course. Please let me know if you need any special accommodations in the curriculum, instruction, or assessments of this course to enable you to fully participate.

Suggestions
1. Conversations regarding assignments and other course matters may be initiated at any time, either during class or during individual meetings.
2. In preparing for class, students are encouraged to make notes regarding the purpose, thesis, arguments, findings, and evidence of the readings and consider how the readings relate to the course topic and overall course aims. These notes will be particularly useful as you incorporate course readings into written assignments.
**Required Texts**

**Additional Required Readings**
Available on WebCT.

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**Course Schedule: Topics by Week**

**Sept. 6:** Introduction to Education Politics and Leadership
Introduction to course
Group activity

**ASSIGNMENT:** Choose Cases

**Sept. 13:** Governance and Power
Readings:
W&K, ch. 1 and 2

**ASSIGNMENT:** Choose Book for Critique
Sept. 20:  **Values and Ideology**  
Readings:  
W&K, ch. 3  
**ASSIGNMENT: Select District**

Sept. 27:  **The Role of School Boards**  
Readings:  
W&K, pp. 121-143  
**GUEST SPEAKER**  
[meet with superintendent case study groups at end of class]

Oct. 4:  **The Role of Superintendents**  
Readings:  
W&K, ch. 6  
**GUEST SPEAKER: Manny Rivera, Superintendent, Rochester City School District**

Oct. 11:  **Urban Districts and Interest Groups – Parents, Media, Citizens, Unions**  
Readings:  
**ASSIGNMENT: Student presentations of superintendent case study chapters.**
Oct. 18: Interest Groups – Unions (cont.)

Readings:
Excerpts from Rethinking Schools, *Transforming teacher unions: Fighting for better schools and social justice* (pp. 5-7; 11-19; 93-96; 128-132)

**In class – video (during 1st half of class): School Crusade the Dream**

Oct. 25: The Politics of Rural Districts

Readings:

**GUEST SPEAKER: Mike Wischnowski, School Board Member, Geneseo County School District**

[meet with urban case study groups at end of class]

Nov. 1: The Politics of Urban Districts (cont.) and Role of Mayors

Readings:

**ASSIGNMENT: Student presentations of urban district case study chapters.**

**In class – video and group activity: School Crusade the Reality**

Nov. 8: The Politics of Suburban Districts

Readings:

**GUEST SPEAKER: Jeff Crane, Superintendent, West Irondequoit Central School District**
Nov. 15: Analyzing and Solving Political Problems (part 1)
Environmental Scanning Project discussion in class.

**ASSIGNMENT: Environmental Scanning Project Due.**

Nov. 22: No Class – work on final papers

Nov. 29: Analyzing and Solving Political Problems (part 2)
Readings:

PRINCE case in class.

Dec. 6: Power, Negotiation, and Coalition-Building
Readings:
Fisher et al, Ch. 1-3, pp. 3-55.

Dec. 13: Power, Negotiation, and Coalition-Building (cont.)
Readings:
Fisher et al, Ch. 4-5 and “questions,” pp. 56-94; 151-187.

**ASSIGNMENT: Final Paper Due in Class**

Assignments

Attendance and Participation: 15 pts.
Presentation of Cases: 10 pts.
Written Critique of Book: 15 pts.
Environmental Scanning Project: 25 pts.
Final Project (Political Analysis): 35 pts.
For all assignments, please follow APA guidelines for your references. The following cites provide further APA style guidelines:
http://www.psywww.com/resource/apacrib.htm
http://www.crk.umn.edu/library/links/apa5th.htm
http://www.docstyles.com/apacrib.htm

Attendance and Participation: 15 pts.
◊ Due: ongoing
Given the nature of ED 461, it is important that all students participate fully in the course. My expectation is that students will attend each class and be prepared by reading all required readings. (Please notify me in advance by phone or email should you have to miss a class.) In addition, I expect that students will participate fully in classes, particularly during sessions with guest speakers and in-class group activities.

Presentation of Cases: 10 pts.
◊ Due: 10/11 or 11/1
Students will either choose superintendent case or an urban district case. Each student will be responsible for working with a group or individually to lead the discussion. To the extent possible, students should draw on other readings for the class in their presentation. Approximately 30 minutes will be allotted for each case (including presentation and discussion/questions). Students should provide handouts summarizing the important points of the case. More information will be provided in class.

Written Critique of Book: 15 pts.
◊ Due: 10/18 (approximately 5 pages)
Each student must select one of the following books to read and critique. You should draw upon course readings and discussions throughout this paper to the extent possible. The more thoughtful and analytical your paper is the better grade you will receive. The paper is expected to demonstrate coherent organization and reasoning and should be written as a formal critique. As part of your critique, please consider the relevance and implications of this book to different audiences, e.g., a district superintendent, school board, or interest groups.

Your paper should include the following sections:
1. Introduction. In this section pay particular attention to the following: The general focus of the book; the extent to which this problem/issue is widespread (across the country and in your region); overview of your paper.
2. **Summary.** In this section pay particular attention to the following: The problem the author (or authors) is addressing and the findings (if empirical) or main arguments; the solution the author (or authors) argue for; the study methods (if empirical research is involved), including study setting, type of data used, etc.;

3. **Critique.** In this section pay particular attention to the strengths and weaknesses of this book; the extent to which the arguments are convincing (why or why not); the strength of the evidence used by the author (or authors) to advance this position; related issues that the author (or authors) has not considered or limitations of the book or study.

See additional handouts that I provide in class regarding writing a book critique. The purpose of this activity is to enable you to develop the skills necessary to analyze a political problem (or multiple problems) in education and develop strategies to this problem. This is a critique, and not just a summary of the author’s points.

Each of you will individually write a short review of the book (approximately 5 pages). You are required to acquire the book on your own either through the library or from any other source (e.g., amazon.com). Check with me (as soon as possible) if you are having difficulty getting your book.

Select **ONE** of the following:
Environmental Scanning Project:  25 pts
◊ Due 11/15

The technique of environmental scanning provides an administrator with an “early warning” system for problems or issues that may confront the local school district. (Special thanks to William Boyd at Penn State for allowing me to adapt his project.) The completed assignment includes the following: 1) form with descriptive data on school district; 2) form with rankings of current and potential issues facing the school district; 3) one-page summary of analysis of issues from other sources. (See additional information attached.) This assignment will be turned in on 11/15 and discussed in class on that date.

Final Paper - Political Analysis of School District:  35 pts.
(20 pages MAX)

This assignment is intended to help students see how concepts discussed in class are manifest in “real-world” settings.

For this assignment you will build on the work you completed for the Environmental Scanning Project. You should ask additional questions during your discussions with individuals in your local district for this final project (these do not need to be included in the Environmental Scanning Project write-up). These questions may include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Who participates in decisions facing the district?
- Who sets the agenda for school board meetings and who proposes policy decisions?
- Who has power in your district (e.g., parents, school board members, superintendent)?
- Does the locus of power vary by the type of issue at hand?
- What is a recent event that was political in nature? What were the different sides of the issue? Who was involved (and what sides were they on)? How was the issue resolved? Would they have recommended a different approach or strategy?

As part of this assignment you must observe at least one (two is desirable) school board meetings for the district you are studying. Before doing so you should read the following to give you background information about studying school boards:


You should also consider reading the assigned readings for 9/27 prior to your observation if the board meeting occurs before that date. Throughout this paper you should draw upon course readings and discussions to the extent possible. The more thoughtful and analytical your paper is the better grade you will receive. The paper is expected to demonstrate coherent organization and reasoning, using observational and interview data to support your analysis.
Your paper should have the following sections:

1. **Overview of district.** In this section pay particular attention to the following:
   - Type of district (urban, suburban, rural), size, etc.
   - Student/teacher demographics. (Note: you may draw from the Environmental Scanning Project but this section should be in paragraph format.)
   - Discussion about superintendent (background of sup., how long in office, etc.).
   - Discussion about school board (composition of board, e.g., gender, occupations).

2. **Political culture of district.** In this section pay particular attention to the following:
   - Issues/problems faced by district in past.
   - Issues/problems faced by district now and in future.
   - Person (or people) who have power in the district.
   - How problems are resolved in the district, e.g., degree of citizen and interest group involvement.

3. **School board observation.** In this section pay particular attention to the following:
   - Date of meeting and major agenda items/issues. (Note: students should attach a copy of the school board meeting agenda to the paper)
   - Nature of communication (including to what extent political values, such as quality, efficiency, or equality, are discussed or inferred).
   - Type/extent of citizen participation (are these individuals or formal groups?).
   - Type/extent of educator participation (e.g., teachers or principals)
   - Involvement of board members and superintendent (in what issues, to what extent, in what manner).
   - Political strategies used.
   - Overall analysis of meeting (including who had power, resources, etc.).

4. **Conclusion and implications.** In this section pay particular attention to the following:
   - Overall analysis of district politics, including political issues facing the district now and in the future, power relationships, etc.
   - Implications of analysis of district and board observation for influencing political decisions (Note: it may be helpful here to discuss a particular problem/decision facing your district discussed previously and identify strategies for influencing this problem/decision).

The purpose of this activity is to enable you to develop the skills necessary to analyze political problems facing a school district and develop strategies to solve these problems. An additional purpose is to have you understand the political culture of your local school district and school board.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Meetings</th>
<th>Discussion Topics</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Session #1: 9/6</td>
<td>Introduction to Education Politics and Leadership</td>
<td>Select cases</td>
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<tr>
<td>Session #2: 9/13</td>
<td>Governance and Power</td>
<td>Select book</td>
</tr>
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<td>Session #3: 9/20</td>
<td>Values and Ideology</td>
<td>Select district</td>
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<td>Session #4: 9/27</td>
<td>The Role of School Boards GUEST SPEAKER</td>
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<tr>
<td>Session #5: 10/4</td>
<td>The Role of Superintendents GUEST SPEAKER: Manny Rivera</td>
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<tr>
<td>Session #6: 10/11</td>
<td>Urban Districts and Interests Groups – Parents, Media, Citizens, Unions</td>
<td>Students present superintendent cases in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session #7: 10/18</td>
<td>Interest Groups – Unions VIDEO – School Crusade the Dream</td>
<td>Book critique due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session #8: 10/25</td>
<td>The Politics of Rural School Districts GUEST SPEAKER: Mike Wischnowski</td>
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<tr>
<td>Session #9: 11/1</td>
<td>The Politics of Urban Districts and Role of Mayors VIDEO – School Crusade the Reality</td>
<td>Students present urban cases in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session #10: 11/8</td>
<td>The Politics of Suburban School Districts GUEST SPEAKER: Jeff Crane</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session #11: 11/15</td>
<td>Analyzing and Solving Political Problems (part 1)</td>
<td>Environ. scanning project due. Note: Discuss in class</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/22</td>
<td>No Class – work on final papers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Session #12: 11/29</td>
<td>Analyzing and Solving Political Problems (part 2)</td>
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<td>Session #13: 12/6</td>
<td>Power, Negotiation, and Coalition-Building</td>
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<tr>
<td>Session #14: 12/13</td>
<td>Power, Negotiation, and Coalition-Building (cont)</td>
<td>Final paper due in class</td>
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ENVIRONMENTAL SCANNING PROJECT:
Assignment

The technique of environmental scanning provides an administrator with an “early warning” system for problems or issues that may confront the local school district.

1. Direct Survey: Contact ten to fifteen individuals in the following categories and ask them to identify no more than five key issues now facing the local school district you choose to study. Ask them to rank them in importance. Also, ask them if they can identify two to three issues likely to face the district in the next few years.

   a. Members of the school board
   b. Superintendent or other district administrators (leaders)
   c. Principals
   d. Classroom teachers (elementary or middle)
   e. Classroom teachers (high school)
   f. Teacher union representative
   g. PTA/PTO leaders
   h. Instructional administrator(s)
   i. Business manager
   j. Community leaders
   k. Others of your choosing

(Note: no more than two may be from the same category; you must include at least one individual from each category, a-g)

Total the ‘votes’ that each issue gets and rank the issues by total votes, indicating the topics of the issues and the category of individuals. Use the format shown in the form provided for this purpose.

2. Descriptive Data on School District: Complete attached form from website, other district materials, or interviews (note sources of information).

3. Other Information Sources: Provide a summary (1 page max.) of issues facing the district based on the following data sources.

   a) Newspaper article: As background information for your study, set up a file folder for clippings of articles or news items discussing issues that, in your judgment, that currently relate to/affect or have the potential to influence the public schools in the district you are studying at some time in the future.

   b) Board meeting agendas: Obtain copies of recent board meeting agendas and minutes from the board secretary (these may be found online in some districts). Establish a file for these items.
ENVIRONMENTAL SCANNING PROJECT:
Descriptive Data on School District

Your name:      District name:

**District Demographics:**
Type (urban, rural, suburban or some combo)
County location & number of square miles
Census information about district, including total population; estimate of % of population in working class, middle class & wealthy categories
Main industries in district
District sources of income (e.g., taxes, donations, etc.)
Average expenditure per student per year

Number of schools at each level
Total enrollment for district & enrollment by buildings
Student demographics (Percentage of students in racial/ethnic & social class categories)
Student achievement scores
Plans of typical graduating class

**District Personnel**
Number of administrators (by title) and demographics
Number of teachers and demographics
Longevity of superintendent and others in leading positions
Superintendent background (e.g., taught in the district)
Extent to which district personnel are district residents
Average years of teacher experience
Average tenure of teachers (i.e., turnover rate)
Average salary

**School Board**
Composition of board (gender, occupations, longevity, etc.)
ENVIRONMENTAL SCANNING PROJECT:  Ranking of current & potential issues facing the school district

Your name:      District name:

CURRENT ISSUES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic of Issues (brief description)</th>
<th>Code for persons identifying issue</th>
<th>Total # of 'votes'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rank issues from 1-5 in importance</td>
<td>(&amp; number within category mentioning it, e.g., 3 board members = 3a)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.  

2.  

3.  

4.  

5.  

ENVIRONMENTAL SCANNING PROJECT: Ranking of current & potential issues facing the school district (continued)

Your name: District name:

### POTENTIAL ISSUES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic of Issues (brief description)</th>
<th>Code for persons identifying issue</th>
<th>Total # of 'votes'</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rank issues from 1-5 in importance</td>
<td>(&amp; number within category mentioning it, e.g., 3 board members = 3a)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.

2.

3.
ED 461: Politics of Education  
Final Project – Political Analysis of School District  
Grading Rubric (Total pts. = 35)

Important things to remember:
- This is an analytical paper, not just a summary.
- You must relate your findings from the data to the course themes and readings.
- This is a formal paper (compared with the environmental scanning project you turned in.). You may include figures/tables as attachments. Note: these do not count in the page limit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Performance</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General requirements:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper is divided into major sections.</td>
<td>Yes  No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pages are numbered.</td>
<td>Yes  No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper includes a list of sources that includes interviewees (title, category, brief description) and board observations (date, agenda items – include agenda as attachment).</td>
<td>Yes  No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper is clear, organized, and uses appropriate language that is precise and engaging with an awareness of audience and purpose.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper exhibits conventional spelling, grammar, etc., and conforms with APA bibliographic style.</td>
<td>U  SC  C  HC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper relates the findings from this district to specific course themes and readings.</td>
<td>U  SC  C  HC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of district:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper adequately summarizes the background of the district (type, demographics, superintendent history, school board composition, etc.)</td>
<td>U  SC  C  HC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political culture of district:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper adequately summarizes/analyzes political culture of the district, including identifying issues faced by district, as well as degree of power and interests of various groups.</td>
<td>U  SC  C  HC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper indicates the sources of this analysis as evidence, e.g., interviews with individuals, newspaper articles, etc.</td>
<td>U  SC  C  HC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School board observation:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper adequately summarizes the school board relationships/nature of communication/type of participation from observation of school board.</td>
<td>U  SC  C  HC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper involves a critique/analysis of the school board relations and district political culture, including an indication of strategies used and an overall analysis of groups with power, resources, etc., if evident at the school board meeting attended.</td>
<td>U  SC  C  HC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion and implications:</td>
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<td>Paper provides an overall analysis of district politics that follows logically from the previous discussions of the district overview, political culture, and school board observations.</td>
<td>U  SC  C  HC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper involves an analysis/critique of the strategies for influencing decisions in the district that follows logically from the previous discussions.</td>
<td>U  SC  C  HC</td>
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<td>Activity Summary Score</td>
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