

Interference Of The Political Class In Public Senior Secondary School Leadership In Rivers South East Senatorial District Of Rivers State.

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the Interference of the Political Class in Public Senior Secondary School Leadership in Rivers southeast Senatorial District of Rivers State. The study adopted a Descriptive research design. The population comprised 234 respondents (78 Principals, 78 Vice Principal Administration, and 78 Academics. Census was used to select the population. The questionnaire was used for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was obtained using test-retest method statistics. Twenty senior secondary school principals were administered the questionnaire, and a reliability index of 0.739 and 0.81 was obtained through Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer research questions 1-4, while an independent t-test was used to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 alpha significance level. The findings showed no significant difference between the mean ratings of principals and vice principals in the interference of politics on the appointment, promotion, posting of staff personnel, etc. From the findings, the study concludes that government should come up with acceptable criteria for appointing principals to ensure proper management of the schools, and the government should support the in-service training of staff to ensure teacher competency.

1. INTRODUCTION

Rivers State is highly politicalized with diverse ethnic, geographical, and political interests. For this reason, the political class in the state interferes in the leadership position in areas of interest; our educational institution is not left out. This is mainly because the government runs public schools. Politics is not restricted to political parties alone; it also exists in schools, markets, churches, banks, and social establishments, commercial and industrial sectors of our economy. Anywhere human beings live, there is politics due to interest. Different researchers have variously tried to define politics in different ways. Ogonnaya (2019) sees it as a subject concerned with attracting, securing, and maintaining a community's, state's, or nation's well-being. Okeke (2017) sees it as a device intended for finding solutions to social, economic,

political, and educational problems by political means. Therefore, politics involves laying down general principles and their application to concrete problems. The scope of politics is the temporal well-being of the community as a whole. These definitions imply that politics is concerned with attracting, securing, and maintaining the well-being of a community. The implication of the above is that politics is unavoidable in every society. Politics is all-embracing; it deals with power. Power involves decision-making, allocating resources, settlement of conflicts, provision of social amenities, and providing and managing education. Hence, no society can think about having an established government without politics. It is the interference of stakeholders, including the government, politicians in the area, pressure groups, community chiefs/leaders, e.g., Community Development Committee (CDC), members of the post-primary schools' board, and the Parent Teachers Association (PTA) in the appointment of leaders in public senior secondary schools that this research seeks to examine in Rivers southeast Senatorial District of Rivers State, Nigeria.

Politics cannot be separated from leadership in the secondary school system. The establishment of most secondary schools in the local government area arose out of increased political awareness and agitation for the rights of the indigenes of this area. For instance, during Mrs. Sarah Ntor-ue as commissioner of education, Rivers State, she influenced the citing of Community Secondary School (CSS) in Bori in 2007, thereby increasing the number of public secondary schools in Bori, the local government headquarters to two. For this reason, Okeke (2017) stated emphatically that politics plays a vital role in secondary schools' decision-making, control, and governance. Okeke went further to say that politics in education can be considered a process of control, decision-making, implementation, management, and governance and a method by which resources are allocated to different ethnic groups to achieve their aims. The role of politics is heightened because an educational system has political goals, which are essential to justify the system's existence and the political order of society. In other words, the political order initiates education provision. It has been observed that politics is capable of having some influence on the management and policies that guide education. Politics may influence policies on funding, staff-personnel administration, provision of basic infrastructure\equipment, and school-community relation (Ogbonnaya, 2019). When the political influence is favorable to the leadership structure in place, it is regarded as positive. Still, when this political class's interference is inimical to that school's rules and regulations, it is harmful because the state the objective of secondary school education will not be achieved. Therefore, teaching and learning will not be effective. Therefore, politics in the context of this study is a situation where political consideration is given preference rather than due process, in which case the running of a school is influenced by the wishes of those in power rather than by established guidelines.

In other words, it is a situation where due process is circumvented by pressure from groups of individuals in powerful positions. This undue influence results in the school leadership

deviating from common or formal administrative principles and guidelines; hence, political interference influences the leadership structure in public secondary schools. The question at this juncture is, what is educational leadership? There are many ways of looking at educational leadership and many interpretations of it.

In Adiele (2020), the term describes all those who occupy one leadership position or another in an educational setting. Secondly, it is seen as a process; thirdly, it is seen as a specialized field of academic study. There are several reasons why leadership is essential in every educational institution. The first among these reasons is to direct educational actions toward goals. Educational leaders ensure that members' actions are geared towards attaining educational goals. Educational leadership is also essential because it is used to maximize the use of resources, coordinate educational activities, facilitate the evaluation process, and help set educational targets, amongst others. All these are towards the achievement of the goals and objectives of the school. Leadership generally can be seen as influencing by guiding, leading, and controlling a group of people's efforts toward realizing their shared goals and objectives. Different types of educational leadership can be identified using different classificatory approaches. There is educational leadership by the level of operation, where the leader is classified based on his level of operation, the macro and micro-level leadership. At the macro level are the Ministers of Education, commissioners of education, National Universities Commission, Universal Basic Education Authority, National Board Of Technical Education, etc.; at the micro level are the vice-chancellors, principals, headmasters, etc. (Adiele, 2020)

In addition, educational leadership at the decision-making level is classified into strategic and management educational leadership. Examples at the strategic level include the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB), West African Examination Council (WAEC), etc. At the same time, educational leadership management refers to a group or team of educational leaders who, by law, are involved in the leadership of educational institutions or agencies.

Statement of the Problem

The political class is very vital in every society. They seek to interfere in matters of interest in which the educational sector is not left out. Because secondary education has a link with society, these political classes try to interfere in public schools' leadership and administration. This interference can be in areas such as appointment, posting, or transfer of principals, vice principals, provision of infrastructures, etc., to schools of their choice within the state. The belief that the political class influences this appointment and posting of principals, vice principals, and teachers is shared among the state's people.

Interference of the Political class has positive and negative impacts on teaching and learning in public schools. In society, it seems that the management of secondary schools is a fertile ground for politicking, and politicians influence the leadership of these secondary

schools. At the same time, the principal, teachers, and other staff members obey them because they perceive that they can be reposted to a rural area, demoted, etc., if they disobey. This humble attitude makes it impossible for principals and teachers to stand their ground to make demands for their salaries, allowances, promotions, and a conducive teaching/learning environment. They embark on strike actions that often yield nothing worthwhile. Teachers, principals, and even members of a society observe that the political class influences secondary school leadership in areas: the transfer of principals, promotion of principals, distribution of facilities, upgrading of schools, etc. These observations have no empirical backing so far. Some public secondary schools in the state are known to be doing well with good facilities and adequate infrastructure, while others suffer severe deprivations. Some examples of schools with dilapidated structures are Government Secondary School Lumene Bangha, Government Secondary School, Buako, in Khana Local Government Area; Community Secondary School, Nwe-ol, Government Secondary School, Bua Yeghe, in Gokana Local Government Area, to mention but a few.

Aims and Objectives

The main aim of this study is to investigate the extent to which the political class interferes with Educational Leadership in Public Secondary Schools in Rivers State. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. To ascertain the extent to which the political class interferes in appointing, promoting, and posting staff personnel in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.
2. To ascertain how much the political class interferes in providing basic infrastructures and equipment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The research questions guide the study.

1. To what extent does the school leadership perceive the political class's interference in appointing, promoting, and posting staff personnel in public senior secondary schools the Rivers State?
2. To what extent does the school leadership perceive the political class's interference in providing basic infrastructure and equipment in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

H₀₁. There is no significant difference in the interference of the political class in the appointment, promotion, and posting of staff personnel in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Ho₂. There is no significant difference in the political class's interference in providing basic infrastructures and equipment to public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Theoretical Framework

This study is also anchored on the situational theory of leadership or the Situational Leadership Model propounded by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard (1969). The theory was developed while working on the Management of Organizational Behavior (Rabarison. K. et al., 2013). Cherry K. (2020) suggests that no single leadership style is best. Instead, it depends on which type of leadership and strategies are best suited to the task. According to this theory, the most influential leaders can adapt their style to the situation and look at cues such as the type of task, the nature of the group, and other factors that might contribute to getting the job done. This theory is relevant to the present study because it shows how the leader can be flexible in assessing the situation and adopt a leadership style that best fits it.

The situational leader should evaluate team performance by simply asking about the current situation, which will determine the approach or model to adopt. Situational leadership theory and skills are effective in understanding the leadership required to effectively guide the leadership in the public senior secondary school on how to handle external interference. This theory of leadership is an appropriate approach for leaders in such a process due to its flexibility, given the novelty and complexity of the situation. Using situational leadership will ensure leaders in public senior secondary schools successfully develop an ongoing improvement and performance standards plan to prepare them against external interference.

Conceptual Review

The concept of Leadership

Good leaders develop through a never-ending process of self-study, education, training, and experience. Therefore, understanding the concept of leadership will require an individual to understand the behavior and characters that leaders exhibit. To be a leader, you must be, know, and do certain things. These do not come naturally but are acquired through continual work and study. Good leaders continually work and study to improve their leadership skills; they are not resting on their laurels. Respected leaders concentrate on what they are (such as beliefs and character), what they know (such as job, tasks, and human nature), and what they do; such as implementing, motivating, and providing direction).who have a clear sense of direction. To gain respect, they must be ethical. A sense of direction is achieved by conveying a robust future vision. There is no one definition of leadership. Different authors and scholars have several definitions of leadership. Kasi in Nwiyi (2019), Kasi defines leadership as the ability of a person or group to show others how and what to do. At the same time, Tracy in Adiele (2020) opines that leadership is the ability to elicit extraordinary performance from ordinary people. Stogdill in Nwiyi (2019) noted that leadership is a process of influencing the activities

of an organized group toward goal setting and achievement. In all, leadership is a process by which a person influences others to accomplish a common goal or a task and directs the organization/people in a way that makes it more organized, cohesive, and coherent. It is convincing and influencing others to believe in your ideas and suggestions enough for the followers to lay down their lives to attain goals, vision, and objectives.

A leader that has the desire and willpower can become an effective leader. Influential leaders develop through a never-ending process of self-study, education, training, and experience. A dedicated leader inspires his workers into higher levels of teamwork; there are certain things that an effective and dedicated leader must be, know, and do. These do not come naturally but are acquired through continual work and study. Influential and dedicated leaders continually work and study to improve their leadership skills, meaning they are not resting on their success. While leadership is learned, the skills and knowledge processed by the leader can be influenced by his or her attributes or traits, such as beliefs, values, ethics, and character. Knowledge and skills contribute directly to the process of leadership. At the same time, the other attributes give the leader specific characteristics that make them unique, meaning skills, knowledge, and attributes make the Leader more effective and dedicated.

In a profession of administration based upon organizational science, the task of a leader is to bring people and organizations together in a fruitful and satisfying union. In so doing, the work of a school leader is to oversee day – to day activities in the school. In senior secondary schools, the leadership may be the principal or Vice Principal, year head, or class head. The school's leadership requires one to have the requisite knowledge to help them mobilize group effort toward achieving school goals. The leader must be conversant with relevant administrative rules and procedures in line with fundamental theories of school management in general. The school leader must exert intelligent leadership, which calls for grounding in the job's demands.

Present-day hardship in our schools demands knowledgeable leadership that can apply administrative processes to effective school management. Three factors are responsible for effective leadership to take place in any school:

1. Knowledge and understanding of the job,
2. Administrative preparation and experience, and
3. Demand on time from constituents (Koko & Nwiyi, 2019).

A school leader should possess adequate administration knowledge to become efficient and effective. They should be able to study leadership and administrative theories adaptable to situations and environments.

Concept of Politics

Educators and social scientists have well-articulated the term politics. They have both agreed that politics is not just restricted to political parties. Still, it also exists in the Nigerian banks, markets, educational institutions, churches, sports, business, military establishments commercial and industrial factors of our economy. According to the American political scientist Harold Lasswell, politics is defined as who gets what, when, and how. This definition can easily be remembered because it is in the form of a slogan. Furthermore, it represents reality to a reasonable extent, especially in Africa. Politics involves allocating scarce social, economic, and cultural resources to individuals, groups, regions, and classes.

Okeke (2007) sees politics as a civilizing agent and a way of ruling a divided society without violence. Therefore, whether defined in terms of man being a political animal; the art of the possible who gets what, where, and how the struggle for power; or the authoritative allocation of resources and values, politics has the state as its centerpiece.

The political class determines who gets what and the allocation of values. Emphasis is put on how the system of authorities in society allocates resources. The political class could also be defined as all those groups of individuals belonging to a political party and consciously involved in activities directly or indirectly associated with the emergence, consolidation, and use of state power.

The term "politics" mean different things to different people. Generally, because of the experience of the citizens in most countries of the southern world (developing countries) as well as in some of the so-called developed countries, where we seem to have groups of men who seem to have an unbridled love for power, politics have come to be associated with the uncontrolled struggle for power and lack of integrity among individuals and groups. To some, politics is a "dirty game," while to others, it is a quick gateway to richness and comfort. Therefore it is not surprising that politics is too "dirty" to be associated with education, which has been traditionally regarded as one of the hopes of humankind. It is, therefore, necessary at this juncture to state some more acceptable definitions of politics by some authorities in the field. We shall then see whether politics and education are not partners in elevating man to a more acceptable state and, therefore, a more promising society. Finally, you cannot discuss education and not talk about politics because they are inextricably related. The government usually formulates the educational policies of any government in power. Every government is conscious that to ensure its political, social, and economic success, the schools must promote the interests of the governed. On the other hand, educators need the support of the ruling power, the public, and other governments to carry out their functions. Ikegbusi (2016) said that no educational system could survive without financial support and the protection of the government in power. In Nigeria, the educational policies of successive governments have always reflected and often betrayed the political creed and social views of each government at the state and federal levels. According to him, education contributes to politics, a basic form of political socialization.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The study population comprised two hundred and thirty-four (234) staff (78 each of principals, vice principals administration, and principal vice academics) drawn from all the public senior secondary schools in the senatorial district. Census was used to select the population.

The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire titled; "Interference of Politics on School Leadership scale" (IPSLs). The researcher developed the items. It was a structured self-reporting questionnaire consisting of section (A) personal data and section (B) a four-point scale response format of Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE), and Very Low Extent (VLE) for indicating the perceived interference of politics on the educational leadership in public senior secondary schools in the area under study. To ascertain the validity of the Questionnaire, the items were given to three experts from the department of Educational Management. The study's title, purpose, research questions, and hypotheses were attached to the instrument to guide the evaluators. To determine the instrument's internal consistency, the test-retest method was carried out using 20 respondents (10 Principals and 10 Teachers) outside the population within two (2) weeks and scored. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistics was used to determine the internal consistency of the items. The overall reliability index was 0.739 and 0.81, indicating the instrument's reliability.

The instrument was administered to the respondents through hand delivery, personally by the researcher. Mean, and standard deviation was used to answer the three research questions. Based on the response format of the four-point Likert scale, mean scores of 3.50-4.49 was taken as VHE, 2.50-3.49 was taken as HE, 1.50-2.49 was taken as LE, and 0.50-1.49 was taken as VLE. The independent sample t-test was used at a 0.05 level of significance in testing the null hypothesis.

Presentation of Results

Research question 1: To what extent do school leadership perceive that there is the interference of the political class in the appointment, promotion, and posting of staff personnel

Table 1. Mean rating(x) and Standard deviation (SD) of the respondents on the perceived interference of politics on appointment, promotion, and posting of staff personnel.

S/N	N=234	M	Std.	Remark
Appointment, Promotion, and Posting of Staff Personnel.				
1	Political interference in appointing public secondary school principals generates conflict. It causes bitterness among colleagues	2.89	0.96	High Extent
2	Political interference in the appointment of public secondary school principals makes some principals autocratic	3.01	0.91	High Extent
3	Appointment of under-qualified principals as school head show bias in favor of relations of politicians leading to inefficiency and mismanagement of school affairs	2.95	0.92	High Extent
4	Favoritism employed in the promotion of staff leads to mediocrity	3.01	0.93	
5	The inability of the government to support in-service training of staff affects the competency of such staff	3.08	0.90	
Grand Mean		2.98	0.94	High Extent

Table 1 shows the mean ratings and standard deviation of principals' opinions on how much they perceived the political class's interference in appointing, promoting, and posting staff personnel in public secondary schools. The table shows that the principals in the senatorial district gave a high rating to items 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 with mean scores of 2.89, 3.01, 2.95, 3.01, and 3.08 as representing their opinion on the interference of the political class in appointment, promotion, and posting of staff personnel in public senior secondary schools. It is because all the mean scores exceed the criterion mean of 2.5. The items in the cluster had a grand mean of 2.98, rated above the criterion mean. Therefore it can be concluded that the principals agreed that the political class has a high interference in the appointment, promotion, and posting of staff personnel in public Secondary senior schools in Rivers State.

In answer to research question one, it can be deduced that:

- Interference in the appointment of public secondary school leadership generates conflict and causes bitterness among colleagues
- Political interference in appointing public secondary school principals makes some principals autocratic.
- Appointment of under-qualified principals as school head show bias in favor of relations of politicians leading to inefficiency and mismanagement of school affairs
- Favoritism employed in the promotion of staff leads to mediocrity.
- Inability of the government to support in-service training of staff affects the competency of such staff

Research question 2: To what extent does school leadership perceive that the political class is interfering in the provision of basic infrastructure and equipment?

Table 2. Mean and standard deviation on the extent of political class's interference in providing basic infrastructure and equipment.

S/N	N=234	M	Std.	Remark
Basic infrastructure and equipment				
6	The political class in government determines where public secondary schools are sited	2.97	0.91	High Extent
7	Public secondary schools are rehabilitated only in communities where the politicians are in government	3.01	0.91	High Extent
8	Public senior secondary schools located in communities where the politicians are not in government suffer from the decay of dilapidated structures	2.92	0.97	High Extent
9	Laboratory equipment, computers, and other stationeries are distributed to public senior secondary schools located in the communities where politicians are in government	3.23	0.91	High Extent
10	The political class influences the distribution of science laboratory equipment to public senior secondary schools leading to poor academic performance.	3.18	0.80	High Extent
Grand Mean		3.09	0.90	High Extent

Table 2 shows the mean ratings and standard deviation of vice principals' opinions on the extent of interference of the political class in the provision of basic infrastructure in public secondary schools in Rivers State. The table shows that the principals gave a high rating to items 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 with mean scores of 2.97, 3.01, 2.92, 3.23, and 3.18 as representing their opinion on the interference of the political class in the provision of basic infrastructure and equipment in public senior secondary schools. It is because all the mean scores exceed the criterion mean of 2.5. The items had a grand mean of 3.09, above the 2.50 criterion mean. Therefore, it can be concluded that the principals agreed that there is a high interference of the political class in providing basic infrastructure and equipment in Rivers State.

In answer to research question two, it can be deduced that:

- Political class in government determines where public secondary schools are sited
- Public senior secondary schools are rehabilitated only in communities where the politicians are in government
- Public senior secondary schools located in communities where the politicians are not in government suffer from the decay of dilapidated structures
- Laboratory equipment, computers, and other stationeries are distributed to public secondary schools located in the communities where politicians are in government
- The political class influences the distribution of science laboratory equipment to public senior secondary schools leading to poor academic performance. Thus, to a large extent, secondary school leadership perceives political interference.

Test for Hypotheses

Table 3. Summary of t-test of the mean and standard deviation of principals and vice principals on the interference of the political class in the appointment, promotion, and posting of staff personnel in the public senior secondary schools in Rivers southeast Senatorial District of Rivers State.

Variable	Status	N	M	Std.D	Std. E.	df	T	Sig.	Remark
Appointment, promotion, Posting of staff	Principal	78	3.230	.149	0.028	232	0.109	0.914	NS
	V.principal	156	3.227	.220	0.24				
Grand Mean			3.23	0.18					

Table 3 above revealed that t-test the mean and standard deviation of principals and teachers on the interference of the political class in the appointment, promotion, and posting of staff personnel in the public senior secondary schools in Rivers southeast Senatorial District, Rivers State was 3.23 and 0.18, correspondingly. From the above Table, the t-test calculated value was 3.651 ($p > 0.05$). Hence, there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of principals and vice principals on the interference of the political class in the appointment, promotion, and posting of staff personnel in the public senior secondary schools in Rivers southeast Senatorial District, Rivers State. The null hypothesis was retained at a 0.05 level of significance.

Ho2: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of principals and teachers on the political class's interference in providing basic infrastructure and equipment of public senior secondary schools in Rivers southeast Senatorial District, Rivers State.

Table 4. Summary of t-test of the mean and standard deviation of principals and teachers on the political class's interference in providing basic infrastructure and equipment of public senior secondary schools in Rivers southeast Senatorial District, Rivers State.

Variable	Status	N	M	Std.D	Std. E.	df	F	Sig.	Remark
Basic infrastructure & equipment	Principal	78	3.16	0.24	0.032	232	0.927	0.355	NS
	V.principals	156	3.19	0.23	0.033				
Grand Mean			3.18	0.24					

Table 4 shows that the t-test of the mean and standard deviation of principals and vice principals on the interference of the political class in the provision of basic infrastructure and equipment of public senior secondary schools in Rivers southeast Senatorial District, Rivers State was 3.16 and 0.24, respectively. In the above Table, it can be observed that the t-test calculated value was -0.927 ($p > 0.05$). Therefore, there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of principals and teachers on the interference of the political class in the appointment, promotion, and posting of staff personnel in the public senior secondary schools in Rivers southeast Senatorial District, Rivers State. The null hypothesis was retained at a 0.05 level of significance.

The summary of the study findings shows that:

1. Principals agreed that there is a high interference of the political class in the appointment, promotion, and posting of staff personnel in Rivers State.
2. Principals agreed that political class has a high interference in providing basic infrastructure in public Secondary senior schools in Rivers State.

Summary of Hypotheses

There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of principals and Vice Principals on the interference of the political class in the appointment, promotion, and posting of staff personnel in the public secondary schools in Rivers Southeast Senatorial District of Rivers State.

There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of principals and vice principals on the political class's interference in providing basic infrastructure and equipment of public senior secondary schools in Rivers Southeast Senatorial District of Rivers State.

3. DISCUSSION

Interference of the political class in the appointment, promotion, and posting of staff personnel in public secondary schools

Based on the findings from this work, the result revealed that the interference of the political class in appointing public secondary school principals causes bitterness among colleagues. The principals' appointment, promotion, and posting have been governed by politicians (godfathers). The study's finding aligns with Ogunnu's (2006) idea that policies influence appointment, promotion, transfers, and principals. Oboegulem (2003) also highlights the interference of politics in teachers' promotion. This has led to bad leadership in the school administration, preventing educational achievement.

Interference of the political class in the provision of the basic infrastructure of public secondary schools

The findings show that the political class in government determines where public secondary schools are situated. Books, laboratory equipment, and other facilities are distributed to schools in communities where politicians are in government. This study agrees with Okeke (2017), who opined that politics influence the provision of basic infrastructure. He further asserted that schools are rehabilitated only in communities where politicians are in government.

4. CONCLUSION

Education is essential for any nation's social, economic, and political advancement. Its importance cannot be over-emphasized as it is the backbone of human capital development, a role of practical education, including secondary school. Despite the importance of

education, political interference in public secondary school administration has led to the poor management of secondary schools across the state. Politics is part and parcel of human endeavors as it proffers solutions to a nation's social, economic, scientific, technological, and educational problems. The public secondary school management structure consists of principals and vice principals. Conversely, the administration of the school is carried out by politicians. The continuous intruding into secondary school affairs regarding controlling, making decisions, using powers, and implementing policies have caused more harm than good in the school administration. There is a need for government to check the activities of politicians in appointing principals, provision of infrastructure/equipment, and student enrolment to ensure equal distribution of all the necessary materials needed to achieve the educational purpose.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of this study

1. Government should state acceptable criteria for appointing principals to ensure transparency and fairness.
2. Government should ensure that all the public secondary schools in the senatorial district receive equal attention regarding dilapidated structures.

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