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Leadership and the Professional Learning Community

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LEADERSHIP AND THE

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY

by

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LEADERSHIP

AND THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY

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The purpose of this study was to describe the transformation of one small, rural school district's professional development program. The study focused on the actions that school leaders took to replace a traditional, workshop-based program that was deemed ineffective with a new professional development model. The new model was designed to create professional learning communities by taking advantage of and further developing teacher leadership.

Within this mixed-methods case study, both survey data and interview data were collected. The study describes (a) internal and external factors that influenced the change, (b) selection and implementation of the model, (c) the cycle of transformation that occurred, including interactions among school administrators, teacher leaders and other professional staff as the program became institutionalized, and (d) outcomes that resulted after three years of implementation.

Findings indicate there were positive outcomes from the change. The initial effectiveness of the new model may have been enhanced if teacher leaders had been more involved in decision-making processes relative to its adoption and launch. Findings also indicate that schools within the district are above average on a developmental continuum that measures the maturity of professional learning communities. The effectiveness of professional learning communities is dependent in part on democratic leadership with

teachers sharing power, authority and decision making. For schools within this district to continue maturing as professional learning communities, strengthening democratic leadership will be essential.

These findings have implications for the pre-service and in-service training of both school administrators and teacher leaders. They also suggest the potential for more inter-district sharing of successful change initiatives in the interest of improved learning for all students.

DEDICATION

To my late mother, Mavis Abraham Bacon,

whose courage and grace at the end of her life

filled me with gratitude

for who I am.

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I am grateful to my adviser, Dr. Marilyn Grady, for her patience and wisdom throughout my doctoral experience. In particular, Dr. Grady recognized the importance of commitment and passion as I explored prospective areas of research and engaged in the work. I learned a great deal, not only about my topic, but also about myself as an educator and writer.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background/Overview

A growing body of research suggests that traditional models of professional development for educators are largely ineffective. These models typically rely on short-duration workshops, school in-service programs and presentations by outside "experts" (National Staff Development Council [NSDC], 2001).

In 1999, the U. S. Department of Education commissioned a study on the preparation and qualifications of public school teachers (Lewis, L., Parsad, B., Carey, N., Bartfai, N., Farris, E. and Smerdon, 1999). The study showed that, although nearly all teachers participate in some kind of professional development, one-half to four-fifths of this training lasted one day or less. Fewer than eight percent of teachers said they obtained "strong results" from these short-term learning experiences.

Grounded in research that documents the connection between staff development and student learning, NSDC Standards (2001) affirm these findings: Historically, professional development programs have had little positive impact on teachers' instructional practice or student achievement in schools.

Despite this clear message, many teachers continue to experience in-service programs that feature a potpourri of "one-shot," disconnected workshops. These programs are often developed in response to federal mandates that call for multiple improvements under unrealistic timelines. They are frequently driven by the latest instructional innovations or fads with no attempt to link them to each other or to long-term, coherent school improvement plans or goals (Fullan, 2001). Typically, teachers are

allotted little time or opportunity for practice, reflection and professional dialogue. There are few opportunities for follow-up and little accountability for classroom implementation. Therefore, teachers seldom operationalize these "cutting edge" strategies and schools get little impact for their investment of time and money.

Teachers may be so inundated with training on different topics that successful implementation is not even feasible. For example, South Dakota's Educational Service Agency (ESA) 7 conducted a professional development audit in a South Dakota school district serving 2100 students. ESA personnel discovered that elementary teachers had been exposed to 23 different professional development initiatives during a three-year period (Lange, 2006).

These fragmented efforts compromise the credibility of professional development (Mizell, 2001). At best they have disappointed and frustrated teachers and administrators; at worst, they have alienated them. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) note that practices have "created waste in terms of human stress and burnout, as well as loss of deep and broad learning as the price of short term targets and results" (Mechanical Waste section, ¶ 6). Brock and Grady (2000) affirm that a factor contributing to teacher stress, burnout and lack of enthusiasm is a lack of meaningful, relevant professional growth. Although most schools require teachers to attend scheduled in-service activities, "these activities do not constitute serious and sustained professional development" (p. 64).

<div align="center">Statement of the Research Problem</div>

Professional development grounded in short-term in-service programs and workshops is counterproductive. It does little to improve instructional practice or student achievement. In fact, it often contributes to teacher burnout and frustration.

Traditional approaches to professional development also assume that if individual teachers become better within their "cellular structure," the school will become more effective in achieving its goals (DuFour, Eaker & DuFour, 2005). "This premise—that the development of individuals ensures enhanced organizational performance—is patently wrong" (p. 19). Fullan (2001) suggests it is the responsibility of school leaders to recognize that the development of individuals is not sufficient. As in business, producing greater overall capacity in the organization is what will produce greater results.

A report by the National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching (1999) suggests that quality professional development is grounded in a common culture of expectations. It is school-based, focused and sustained over time. It is intellectually rigorous and integral to the day-to-day work of teaching and learning. It is organized around collaborative problem solving. NSDC standards (2001) affirm the National Council recommendations: Leaders must create conditions so that "high quality staff development becomes an integral part of their schools' operations, not merely periodic events" (p. vi).

NSDC standards articulate a vision for high quality staff development. This vision promotes job-embedded professional learning in site-based "learning communities." These forms of professional learning take advantage of existing teacher expertise and rely less exclusively on outside consultants or trainers:

> These new forms of professional learning occur in ongoing teams that meet on a regular basis . . . for the purposes of learning, joint lesson planning and problem solving. These learning teams operate with a commitment to the norms of continuous improvement and experimentation. They also engage their members

in improving their daily work to advance the achievement of school district and school goals for student learning (p. 8).

Creating professional learning communities in schools is more likely to produce gains in student achievement than traditional forms of professional development (Fullan, 2001; Sather, 2005; Schmoker, 2005a; Schmoker, 2005b). In essence, learning communities transform teaching from private to public practice and foster collective teacher efficacy (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Reeves, 2006).

Scholars have developed theoretical models that define professional learning communities and describe their attributes or characteristics (Cameron, McIver & Goddard, 2008; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Garmston & Wellman, 1999; Hord, 1997a; Hord, 1997b). Common to all of these models is shared and supportive leadership. Without it, a professional learning community cannot mature and function well. Specific and detailed leadership behaviors that constitute shared and supportive leadership are rarely described in the literature, however. Few empirical studies have described leadership actions that are requisite for initiating, supporting and sustaining effective professional learning communities in schools (Hord, 2008; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Little, 2008).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study is to describe the transformation of one school district's professional development program. School leaders' actions in implementing a professional learning community model to replace the district's existing professional development program are reported. Actions that school leaders took to support and sustain the new model are reported.

Research Questions

Grand tour question:

How do school leaders initiate, support and sustain a professional learning

community within a district accustomed to more traditional models of professional

development?

Subquestions:

What factors influence school leaders to select and apply a professional learning

community model?

Which individuals' commitments are essential to initiating change in the school

district?

What are the sources of leadership that enable transformation of a professional

development program?

What actions among school leaders are necessary to support and sustain the

change?

What effects does leadership have on the maturity level of a learning community

within a district?

What preparation experiences are necessary to develop leaders to replicate this

change effort in another school district?

Definition of Terms

Antelope School District: a fictitious name for the school district described in this case

study. This name was assigned to protect the anonymity of individuals

interviewed for this study.

Collaboration: A systematic process in which educators work together, interdepend-

ently, to analyze and impact professional practice in order to improve individual and collective results.

In-service days: Designated days within the school district calendar when students are dismissed and staff members participate in required professional development activities.

In-service training: Workshop-based professional development conducted on designated in-service days. This training is designed to convey new knowledge or teach new skills. It is generally of short duration with little follow-up or accountability for teacher implementation of information or strategies learned.

Professional development (used interchangeably with staff development): According to the National Staff Development Council (2001), the means by which educators acquire or enhance the knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs necessary to create high levels of learning for all students (p. 2).

Professional learning community: in schools, a community of professionals caring for and working to improve student learning together by engaging in intentional and continuous collective learning (Hord, 2008). Hord (1997a, 1997b) describes five dimensions of professional learning communities: 1) supportive and shared leadership; 2) collective learning and application of learning; 3) shared values and vision; 4) supportive conditions; and 5) shared personal practice.

School administrators: the superintendent, the curriculum director, the director of special services, principals and assistant principals.

School leaders: the superintendent, the curriculum director, the director of special services, principals and assistant principals and teachers on building leadership

teams.

Traditional professional development: In-service training and other short-duration

models of professional development. These models focus on developing the

knowledge and skills of individual teachers and school leaders and are usually

delivered by outside experts. These models do not generally claim to improve

organizational capacity or change systems.

<div align="center">Study Limitations and Delimitations</div>

A delimitation of this study is that leadership practices, professional development

structures, and professional development activities can vary widely. This study focuses

exclusively on the professional development program in one school district as an

individual case. The actions of school leaders to initiate, support and sustain professional

learning communities may be different in other schools and districts. The research

findings described here are not generalizable to other cases. In this mixed methods case

study, the findings reported here are subject to other interpretations.

A limitation to this mixed methods study is that interview data were collected

only from school administrators and identified teacher leaders within the district. Survey

data were collected only from professional staff within the district who chose to

participate.

<div align="center">Need for the Study</div>

Scholars have defined professional learning communities and created theoretical

frameworks to describe their characteristics. They have linked them to post-modern

learning theory and systems theory (Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton &

Kleiner, 2000). They have proposed the scope and nature of their work. They have

advocated for their creation as a powerful school improvement strategy. Although a growing number of empirical studies describe professional learning communities in action (Bergevin, 2006; Johnson, 2006), the overall body of research to date remains small.

Few studies have described what specific actions school leaders take to initiate, support and sustain professional learning communities. During this process, districts typically move away from workshop-based formats of in-service training to create new organizational cultures, structures and processes. Exactly how school leaders create the conditions needed to support these new cultures, structures and processes remains largely unstudied.

Further research is needed to inform the practice of school leaders who wish to create professional learning communities within their organizations. When they are functioning well, professional learning communities show promise as an alternative to more traditional, less effective models of professional development.

<div align="center">Significance of the Study</div>

Research to support the need for a change in professional development for educators is abundant in the literature. Despite these research findings, traditional professional development practices continue in schools and districts throughout the nation.

Many professional development providers and school leaders recognize the promise of creating professional learning communities in schools but do not know how to begin. This study will contribute to the professional literature by describing the actions of leaders in one school district. These leaders created a professional learning

community that replaced the district's traditional professional development program. A description of leadership actions that led to this transformation will contribute to the knowledge base for other school leaders considering a similar change in their schools and districts.

Every year, the U. S. Department of Education, state Departments of Education and local education agencies collectively spend billions of dollars on professional development. According to the National Staff Development Council (2001), much of it is only tenuously linked to increasing student achievement. "Those who are responsible for conceiving, planning, and implementing staff development often do so with good intentions, but devote more attention to the activity than to how well it will benefit students" (p. vi).

In an age of accountability, all educators are expected to be wise stewards of taxpayer dollars and wise stewards of that most precious commodity—time. The personal and professional health and well-being of educators are jeopardized when we are not wise stewards. In addition, we risk compromising the intellectual and academic growth of our students.

Little (1993) reminds us of the importance and far-reaching implication of this mission:

. . . the most promising forms of professional development engage teachers in the pursuit of genuine questions, problems, and curiosities, over time, in ways that leave a mark on perspectives, policy, and practice. They communicate a view of teachers not only as classroom experts, but also as productive and responsible

members of a broader professional community and as persons embarked on a career that may span 30 years or more. (p. 133)

Researcher's Perspective

My job responsibilities for the past 21 years have included professional development planning and delivery in small school districts and educational cooperatives in a western state. I have been an active member of the National Staff Development Council since 1989. I have followed with enthusiasm the development and evolution of standards for staff development.

For the past ten years, I have served as an Education Specialist for an intermediate service agency that serves the Antelope School District. This agency's mission is to be a source of professional development for all schools in the state. During the period of this study, the agency was under contract with the state's Department of Education to provide additional services to school districts. I served as the leader of this project when the Antelope School District requested technical assistance to transform its professional development program beginning in the summer of 2005. At that time, I had colleagues within the intermediate service agency who were leading the same process in a larger, neighboring district. On many occasions, both formal and informal, they reported on the progress of this initiative (personal communication, ongoing).

I negotiated the consultant contract with Antelope School District on behalf of the intermediate service agency. I have received regular progress reports, both formal and informal, from consultants who have been working there since 2005 (personal communication, ongoing). I have also received regular, informal reports from the district's superintendent, who said he is pleased with the services being provided

(personal communication, ongoing). I have had regular professional contacts with the superintendent over the past 32 years and with other administrators in the Antelope School District during the past 14 years. My experiences will shape interpretation of the data.

Bryant (2004) says, "There is little point in going through all of the complexity and effort of designing a doctoral dissertation if you already know the answer to your research question" (p. 18). He explains how strong beliefs can inhibit the objective work of the researcher and adulterate the study. Despite my indirect involvement with the Antelope School District as a project leader, I was removed from the day-to-day work of project consultants so as not to be unduly invested in the outcomes described in this study. As of this writing, I am no longer employed by the intermediate service agency.

I was eager to learn about the perceptions and understandings of teachers and school leaders relative to the new professional development program in the Antelope School District. I learned a great deal, not only about successes in launching this new model of professional development, but also about mistakes made and lessons learned.

In the fall of 2007, I began leading a new project. This project calls for replicating the building leadership team model to initiate professional learning communities in ten high-needs school districts comprising forty schools across the state. The project includes the design of professional development for building principals, as well as for building leadership teams. The results of this case study will be used to inform the content and processes delivered in the project's Leadership Academy. It is my hope that findings reported in this case study will help us discern what school leaders

need to know and be able to do to initiate, support and sustain professional learning

communities in their schools and districts.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The phrase "professional learning community" is ubiquitous in education

literature and expressed frequently among educators at all levels. An internet search will

yield millions of hits. Hundred of books have been published on the topic. Numerous

training kits, seminars, workshops and conferences invite school leaders and professional

developers to create professional learning communities in their schools. Scholarship on

professional learning communities remains largely theoretical, however. Conclusions

drawn from the small but growing body of research being conducted on professional

learning communities merit further study.

Traditional Professional Development

Since the 1983 Nation at Risk Report and subsequent Goals 2000 initiative,

educators have been under increasing pressure to improve student achievement. The

standards movement of the 1990's called for large scale reform in curriculum, instruction

and assessment. Scholars and policymakers acknowledged that many teachers were ill-

prepared for these increased expectations (Fullan, 1991; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman

and Suk Yoon, 2001; National Staff Development Council, 2001; National Partnership

for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching, 1999).

Response to the need for increased teacher efficacy came through mandates for

professional development embedded in federal programs, such as Title I. When the No

Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was passed into law in 2001, professional development

was also required for schools identified as in need of improvement. Thus, educators in

most schools have an increasing number of opportunities to improve their professional skills. Professional development is widely regarded as essential to the process of school reform, innovation and overall educational improvement (DuFour, 2001; Fullan, 2001; Hord, 1997a & 1997b; National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching, 1999; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997; Sparks, 2005).

Traditional models of professional development focus on building the capacity of individuals to become better teachers or school leaders. These models rely primarily on outside experts, often consultants, who have specialized knowledge they "deliver" to school staff, often in quite didactic and fragmented ways (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Sparks & Hirsch, 1997). The assumption is that individuals will learn new knowledge and skills and apply them in the school setting. In turn, schools will become better because individuals within them are better at what they do. There is rarely an expectation that individual teachers or leaders communicate their understandings of new strategies and innovations with one another in systematic and focused ways. "In the absence of such communication, there is little likelihood that changes will be implemented or sustained by individuals and a great likelihood that initiatives intended to promote widespread school or district wide reform will fail" (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 106).

Veteran educators often view traditional professional development programs negatively, perceiving them to be decontextualized and contrived (Brock and Grady, 2000; Hargreaves and Fink, 2006; Mizell, 2001). Wilson & Berne (1999) cite findings from a survey conducted by Smylie (1989) that ranked district-sponsored workshops last out of 14 possibilities in terms of what teachers considered most valuable opportunities to learn.

Scholars affirm that most schools foster a culture of individualism and privatized practice.   They do not nurture collaborative cultures. Nor do they create well-structured forums for discussing teaching practices, solving problems or focusing on school-wide issues related to curriculum, assessment and instruction (Sarason, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 1995; Haslam, 1997; Poplin & Weeres, 1992). Lortie (1975) interviewed hundreds of teachers. He found that they worked in almost total isolation relative to other professions. Rarely did they interact with colleagues or receive feedback on their own practice.

Senge (1990) reminds us that, although personal mastery is an important "discipline" in learning organizations, it alone will not enable ongoing organizational improvements.   School reform or the successful adaptation of any system to unpredictable changes in its environment requires more than individual growth. Professional learning must focus both on personal mastery and team learning if organizations are to improve.   Rogers reviews research suggesting it is much more likely that innovations will diffuse throughout a system when individuals engage in the social process of learning together, rather than learning in isolation (1995).

A New Vision for Professional Development

Scholars and educational organizations have articulated a new vision for professional development for educators (DuFour, Eaker & DuFour, 2005; National Staff Development Council, 2001; Snow-Renner & Lauer, 2005). There is now general agreement that the most powerful forms of staff development are different from programs traditionally offered to educators. Traditional programs typically include loosely connected, short-duration workshops that may have little or no connection to the daily

work of educators. Newer models include more job-embedded practice—teachers or school leaders learning together as a part of their daily work routine.

In 1999, The National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching, a voluntary association of 29 national organizations, released a landmark report. It is titled *Revisioning Professional Development: What Learner-centered Professional Development Looks Like.* The report was funded primarily by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U. S. Department of Education. It is a guide to action based on more than two dozen presentations of research findings and exemplary practice featured at a working conference in Washington, D. C. in April, 1999. It identifies the characteristics of effective professional development. In addition, it examines how to address some of the challenges to implementing new and promising strategies to facilitate teacher learning that enhances student learning.

In contrast to traditional forms of professional development, "revisioned" professional development has the following characteristics, according to the report:

- It is ongoing.

- It includes training, practice and feedback.

- It includes opportunities for individual reflection and group inquiry into practice.

- It includes coaching or other follow-up procedures.

- It is school-based and embedded in teacher work.

- It is collaborative, providing opportunities for teachers to interact with peers.

- It focuses on student learning, which should, in part, guide assessment of its effectiveness.

- It encourages and supports school-based teacher initiatives.

- It is rooted in the knowledge base for teaching.

- It incorporates constructivist, rather than transmission-oriented, approaches to teaching and learning.

- It recognizes teachers as professionals and adult learners.

- It provides adequate time and follow-up support.

- It is accessible and inclusive.

A research synthesis on standards-based professional development conducted by scholars from Midcontinent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) produced similar findings (Snow-Renner & Lauer, 2005). Fifty-four studies, based on pre-established quality criteria for meta-analysis, were reviewed as part of the study. Although most of the studies were descriptive, many used both quantitative and qualitative data. Five studies used quantitative quasi-experimental designs. Data from comparison groups were analyzed to try to attribute changes in teacher instruction or student achievement to a particular professional development intervention. Most studies lacked comparison groups, however. Ten of the studies used mixed methods and 13 were quantitative, non-experimental studies. Nine qualitative studies provided insight on how teachers structure their learning in professional development opportunities.

McREL researchers note difficulty in directly linking professional development to improved student achievement. They are able to describe professional development most

likely to positively affect instruction, however. That professional development exhibits the following characteristics:

- It is of considerable duration.

- It is focused on specific content and/or instructional strategies rather than general content or pedagogy.

- It is characterized by collective participation of educators. This participation is in the form of grade-level or school-level teams that can provide a broader base of understanding, create school-level support groups and create a "critical mass" for instructional change.

- It is coherent.

- It is infused with active learning, rather than a stand-and-deliver model.

Findings from this meta-analysis suggest that for classroom practice to change, professional development should be (a) grounded in the curriculum that students study, (b) embedded within an aligned system and connected to several elements of instruction, and (c) extended in time, with time built in for practice, coaching and follow-up.

Wilson and Berne (1999) conducted a cross case analysis of six disparate professional development programs. Among "some of the best in the country," they were highly regarded in the professional community and expertly researched for effectiveness (p. 193). Each case involved intensive qualitative research that examined teacher talk through discourse analysis in group conversations. In addition, each case included interviews and observations of teachers' classroom behaviors.

Several themes emerged from the analysis:

- All of the projects involved communities of learners that were redefining teaching practice. Many of the projects started as funded professional development or research projects. Most of them continued to exist after funding ended because participants chose to continue working with each other, offering mutual support.

- Teacher learning ought not be delivered, but rather activated. Traditionally, professional development has been viewed as a dissemination activity. The research showed that it is only when projects help teachers understand their own knowledge that changes in professional practice occur.

- The development of "critical colleagueship" within a context of trust and community enables professional dialogue that includes and does not avoid critique.

Notable studies have suggested that this view of professional development is more congruent with approaches found in other countries, specifically China, Japan and Germany. Stigler and Hiebert (2009) draw this conclusion from an ongoing analysis of data presented in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Studies (TIMSS). TIMSS regularly assesses the mathematics and science achievement of U. S. students in comparison with their peers around the world. It also collects information of schools, curricula, instruction and demographic data on students and teachers.

The Stigler and Heibert studies suggest that professional development in schools should be reorganized to focus on career-long learning among teachers. This learning should take place in the context of the classroom as learning laboratory. Video taping and subsequent pattern analysis of mathematics classrooms in countries around the world document distinct differences in instructional approaches and methods. These

differences are linked to ongoing collaborative lesson study and routine joint planning among teachers. U. S. teachers will improve student achievement, they argue, if they are provided time during the school day for collegial dialogue, collaborative lesson study and planning.

Effective professional development improves the efficacy of individual teachers. Effective professional development also improves the capacity of the school as an organization (Abdal-Haqq, 1996; Fullan, 2001).   Research and best practice suggest that effective professional development addresses the shortcomings of traditional approaches. These approaches are often criticized for being too short in duration, for lacking coherence and rigor, and for being unproductive, inefficient, and decontextualized.

<center>The Promise of Professional Learning Communities</center>

The model of schools as professional learning communities is grounded in research and theory on diffusion of innovation. According to this theory, learning is social and situational, and knowledge is socially constructed (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999).   Rogers (1995) defines diffusion as the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system: "The diffusion of innovation is essentially a social process in which subjectively perceived information about a new idea is communicated. The meaning of an innovation is thus gradually worked out through a process of social construction" (p. xvii).

Rogers's definition contains four elements that are present in the diffusion of innovation process: (a) innovation--an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual, group or organization, (b) communication channels--the means by which messages get from one individual to another, (c) time factors, including

innovation-decision process, relative time with which an innovation is adopted by an individual or group, and innovation's rate of adoption, and (d) social system--a set of interrelated units that are engaged in joint problem solving to accomplish a common goal.

Rogers reminds us of a seminal study on diffusion of innovation done in the 1940's. Two sociologists, Bryce Ryan and Neal Gross, published results of their study of the diffusion of hybrid seed among Iowa farmers. The study resulted in the classification of Iowa farmers relative to the amount of time it took them to adopt the innovation, planting of the hybrid corn seed. The farmers themselves influenced diffusion of the innovation among their peers more than the outside university experts who developed the hybrid or extension agents who promoted it. According to Rogers, "interpersonal networks are important in the adoption and rejection of an innovation. The diffusion of innovations is a social process" (p. 4).

Rogers notes that most individuals do not determine the value of an innovation on the basis of scientific studies. Instead, they depend mainly upon other individuals like themselves who have previously adopted the innovation. "This dependence on the experience of near peers suggests that the heart of the diffusion process consists of modeling and imitation by potential adopters of their network partners who have adopted previously. So diffusion is a very social process" (p. 18).

<div align="center">Professional Learning Communities in Schools</div>

Scholars and change agents have begun to advance the idea of the professional learning community as a preferred strategy for school reform (Darling-Hammond, 1995; DuFour, 2001; Fullan, 2001; Hord, 2008; Little, 2008; Louis, Marks & Kruse, 1996; Mitchell & Sackney, 2001; Sather, 2005; Sparks & Hirsch, 1997). Schmoker (2005a,

2005b) calls for new school cultures that eliminate teacher isolation and address the frequent lack in coherence among improvement strategies. He says these ineffective practices should be replaced by the collective autonomy of teaching teams that are willing to accept responsibility for results. Hord (1997b) states that, "as an organizational arrangement, the professional learning community is seen as a powerful staff development approach and a potent strategy for school change and improvement" (p. 1).

McLaughlin and Talbert (1993) conducted research from 1987-1992. This research combined intensive case studies of 16 public high schools and teachers with analyses of national survey data to assess factors which enabled the best work of teachers and students. Findings from this research suggest that "teachers' responses to today's students and notions of good teaching practice are heavily mediated by the character of the professional communities in which they work" (p. 8).

Marzano's (2003) meta-analysis of 35 years of educational research concludes that collegiality and professionalism is one of five school-level factors that must be present if schools are to be highly effective in enhancing student achievement. Marzano used results of five previous attempts to synthesize the research on school-level factors and rank-ordered them according to their relative impact on student achievement. Comparing school-level factors across researchers, Marzano identified leadership, cooperation, shared vision and goals, *a learning organization, and practice-oriented staff development* [emphasis added] as common among the five research syntheses.

The literature suggests that characteristics of professional learning communities in schools are similar to those in non-educational settings. Schein (1996) identified seven basic elements of a learning culture:

- a concern for learning.

- a belief that people will and can learn.

- a shared belief that people have the capacity to change their environment.

- some amount of time set aside for learning.

- a shared commitment to open and extensive communication.

- a shared commitment to learning to think systematically.

- interdependent coordination and cooperation.

Hord (1997a) focuses on research studies which link teachers' workplace factors with teaching quality. She cites the research findings of Rosenholtz (1989) and McLaughlin and Talbert (1993): when teachers have opportunities for collaborative inquiry, they learn more and are more committed to students and to the profession.

Schmoker (2005a, 2005b) suggests that a professional learning community begins when a group of teachers meets regularly to "identify essential and valued student learning, develop common formative assessments, analyze current levels of achievement, set achievement goals, share strategies, and then create lessons to improve upon those levels" (p. xii).

Professional Learning Community Models

DuFour and Eaker (1998) suggest that the traditional factory model of education is no longer relevant in a post-industrial, knowledge-based society and that educators must embrace ideas and assumptions that are much different from those that informed

schooling in the past. In order to do that, they argue, schools "must embrace the concept of continuous improvement, which requires continuous learning" (p. 23). They describe six characteristics of professional learning communities: (a) shared mission, (b) vision and values, (c) collective inquiry; (d) collaborative teams, (e) action orientation and experimentation, (f) continuous improvement, and (g) results orientation.

Louis, Marks and Kruse (1996) conducted survey research with 900 teachers in 24 nationally restructured elementary, middle and high schools. They also examined case study data from the same 24 schools in order to study the development of school-focused, interdisciplinary professional community. Data for this study were collected between 1991 and 1994 as part of the School Restructuring Study of the Center on Organization of Schools (CORS). Eight elementary, eight middle and eight high schools were selected through a national search. These public schools had made substantial progress in organizational restructuring in the areas of student experiences (a) the professional life of teachers, (b) school governance, (c) management and leadership, and d) the coordination of community resources.

Based on this comprehensive body of work, Louis, Marks and Kruse outline five elements of professional community that produce a collective sense of responsibility for student learning in restructured schools: (a) shared norms and values, (b) collective focus on student learning, (c) collaboration, (d) deprivatized practice, and (e) reflective dialogue. They suggest that "school-wide professional community demands at least a minimal level of each of these elements" (p. 760). They conclude that, "while the cultural context arising from school demographics is likely to prove important,

professional community, according to our hypothesis, is the primary influence on teacher responsibility for student learning" (p. 771).

Hord's framework (1997a, 1997b) is similar to the Louis, Marks and Kruse framework. Hord outlines five dimensions of professional learning communities: (a) supportive and shared leadership, (b) collective creativity, (c) shared values and vision, (d) supportive conditions, and (e) shared personal practice.

Mitchell and Sackney (2001) present a model which suggests three pivotal capacities that must be built if schools are to function as learning communities:

- building personal capacity—the search for one's "personal narrative."

- building interpersonal capacity, which shifts the focus from the individual to the group and collective learning.

- building organizational capacity, which allows for shifts in culture from norms of privacy and individualism to collegiality and collaboration.

This model is derived from the literature on learning organizations. The authors point out that outcomes of importance for learning organizations are organizational growth, productivity, efficiency and effectiveness. Outcomes for a learning community are the development of people.

The Work of Professional Learning Communities in Schools

There is a growing recognition that school-based professional communities hold great promise for the support of teacher development and increased student achievement (Hord, 1997a; Schmoker, 2004; Schmoker, 2005a). Garmston and Wellman (1999) suggest that for a professional community to exist, it is important not only for teachers to talk but to talk about the right things. These things include real students, real student

work, and ways to reinvent instruction to support greater student learning. Teachers used to privatized practice, they argue, must learn new communication techniques and strategies to building community and make it functional.

The research affirms teachers' inexperience with these kinds of critical dialogue. Wilson and Berne (1999) cite two clear findings from their cross-case analysis on different forms of professional development:

> Teachers enjoy talking about materials relevant to their work, be that subject matter or theories of student learning. Teachers embrace these opportunities to be intellectuals. Yet, they bring little by way of experience to professional conversations. The norms of school have taught them to be polite and non-judgmental, and the privacy of teaching has obstructed the development of a critical dialogue about practice and ideas. Each research project finds itself struggling to support the development of such a culture. (p. 186)

Hord, Meehan, Orletsky and Sattes (1999) developed and tested an instrument to measure the maturity level of learning communities. Initially titled "Descriptors of Professional Learning Communities," this 17-item questionnaire was designed as a series of three statements structured along a continuum that would reflect most desirable or more mature practice of the descriptor to least desirable or less mature. The higher the overall score, the more positively the school is viewed by respondents as a learning community (Cowley & Meehan, 2001). The instrument was field tested for validity and reliability with a small pilot group (n=28) and later with a large national sample for the purpose of drawing conclusions about its use in educational improvement efforts at the school level. After testing was completed, developers concluded that the instrument "is

very useful as a screening, filtering, or measuring device to assess the maturity of a school's professional staff as a learning community" (p. 13).

<div align="center">Leadership and the Professional Learning Community</div>

Leadership actions required to initiate, develop and sustain learning communities are grounded in conceptual models of instructional leadership and transformational leadership (Heck & Hallinger, 1999; Stewart, 2006). These are two of the most frequently studied models of modern school leadership. They differ from other leadership models because they focus on how administrators improve teaching and learning. Instructional leaders focus on improving curriculum, instruction and assessment and the school environment in pursuit of school goals. Transformational leaders focus on restructuring the school by improving school conditions.

School district and school-level leaders play a critical role in forging conditions that give rise to the growth of professional learning communities in schools (Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996; Sparks, 2005; Hord, 1997a & 1997b). As Fullan suggests (1991), school leadership is about creating the best conditions for learning, and creating collaborative cultures. Good leaders stimulate serious intellectual interaction around issues of reform and improvement. Paradoxically, they relinquish power through democratic decision making processes and exercising strong authoritative leadership in the articulation of organizational goals (Marks & Louis, 1999).

Louis and Kruse (1995) cite supportive leadership of building principals as necessary for the effective organizational restructuring of staff into professional learning communities. Hord (1997a) states that a professional learning community is one in

which both the teachers and administrators in the school learn together continuously, share their learning with each other, and act on their learning.

Nearly all models and frameworks for professional learning communities advocate for shared decision making among teachers and those in formal leadership roles. They also encourage the deliberate distribution of leadership functions (DuFour, Eaker & DuFour, 2005; Fullan, 2001).

Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis of research on school leadership. This analysis led to the identification of 21 leadership responsibilities of school principals that are positively correlated with student achievement.   The study's authors suggest it would be a rare individual who would possess the wide array of skills that would be necessary to assume all responsibilities and do them well. In fact, a plan for effective school leadership includes "developing a strong school leadership team" that focuses school leadership from a single individual to a team of individuals and has as its core the crafting of a "purposeful community" (p. 99). Twelve of the 21 responsibilities should be distributed to the leadership team, the authors suggest.

Other scholars agree that the new face of educational leadership demands that leaders recognize they cannot do it alone and must distribute leadership for maximum effectiveness. Reeves (2006) suggests that the days of the heroic leader are over. Effective leaders today create a team with complementary strengths. The greatest challenge of the leader is not attaining perfection but "acknowledging imperfection and obtaining complementarities. Rather than developing what they lack, great leaders will

magnify their own strengths and simultaneously create teams that do not mimic the leader but provide different and equally important strengths for the organization" (p. 23).

Kouzes and Posner's (2002) groundbreaking studies in leadership led to the development of a conceptual framework which consists of five practices of exemplary leadership. A Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) delineates specific behaviors related to each of the practices: (a) modeling the way, (b) inspiring a shared vision, (c) challenging the process, (d) enabling others to act, and (e) encouraging the heart. The framework was developed through a triangulation of qualitative and quantitative research methods and studies. Data included hundreds of in-depth interviews, as well as "personal best" case studies. The "Ten Commandments" of school leadership include fostering collaboration by promoting cooperative goals and building trust. Strengthening others by sharing power and discretion, and celebrating values and victories by creating a spirit of community are also among the ten.

Marks and Louis (1997) found that teacher empowerment is a necessary but insufficient organizational condition for the high performance of schools. In high-performing schools, democratic processes were the vehicle for school decision making. Teachers focused their empowerment on the core technology of schools: teaching and learning. Professional community and collective responsibility for students were more likely to flourish in these schools. A subsequent study used survey and field data from 24 site-managed schools involved in significant restructuring activities. Researchers found that the strength of these schools lies in their capacity for organizational learning.

Barth (1990) suggests that, in a community of learners, the principal need not be the all-knowing headmaster or instructional leader. Instead, the principal should be the

"head learner," engaging in the most important enterprise of the schoolhouse—experiencing, displaying, modeling, and celebrating what it is hoped and expected that teachers and pupils will do" (p. 46).

DuFour (2001) describes things principals must do as staff development leaders to assure that professional development efforts will have an impact on the school. The most important thing principals can do, he says, is to create an appropriate context that fosters job-embedded professional development. This context includes programs, procedures, beliefs, expectations, and norms. Principals must also create a collaborative culture within their schools, structuring teams to assure that everyone is a contributing member and providing the focus, parameters and support to help teams function effectively. Specifically, principals should (a) provide time for collaboration in the school day and school year (b) identify critical questions on teaching and learning to guide the collective inquiry of collaborative teams, (c) ask teams to create products as a result of their collaborative inquiry, (d) insist that teams identify and pursue specific student achievement goals, and (e) provide teams with appropriate data and information. He notes that principals must insist on results—improved student achievement backed up by data—and that they must model a commitment to their own ongoing professional development.

Zepeda (2004) conducted a case study that examined the work of a principal of a Midwestern urban elementary school. The principal used instructional supervision as a means of developing a learning community for adults. The study revealed that, while learning communities cannot exist without formal leadership that facilitates teacher growth, leadership solely by the principal is not enough. Rather, "the supervision that

promoted the development of a community of learners at Plymouth Elementary School centered on changing leadership paradigms that lead to inquiry, generative problem solving, dialogue, and reflection" (p. 146).   The school had previously used a traditional supervision/evaluation model that consisted of a single observation by the principal to evaluate teachers at year end. This model was replaced by a more inclusive and collaborative form of supervision that included the following: (a) voluntary peer coaching, (b) peer or administrator observation at least four times per year, (c) supervision tied to staff development (d) creation of a school-wide committee to link professional development activities to school improvement processes and plans, and (e) site-based governance by a board that made critical decisions affecting the school.

Teachers engaged in "talk about teaching," that provided the "glue' that held the community together. Although principals struggled to release control of traditional responsibilities, data revealed that their shift in roles and their efforts to build trust were critical in creating the conditions necessary to build a learning community.

Tompson, Gregg and Niska (2004) conducted a mixed methods study of six middle schools, three urban and three suburban. The purpose of the study was to describe the relationships among professional learning communities, leadership and student learning. Researchers postulated that true learning communities understand and practice the five disciplines of learning organizations, as outlined by Senge (1990). These disciplines include personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning and systems thinking. They further theorized that leadership plays a significant role in the ability of a school to become a professional learning community that enhances student learning.

Data were gathered from teachers and principals through surveys, interviews and focus groups. Most teachers and principals self-reported a high level of understanding of the learning organization disciplines and consider their schools to be learning organizations. Researchers concluded that all of the schools under study were, in fact, functioning as learning organizations. They drew these conclusions because all six schools followed a school design model comprising an interacting and interdependent group of practices that could not be separated into self-contained components. In addition to reporting research findings on the five disciplines, researchers likewise reported separate data on informed decision making, relationships and risk-taking behavior, all concepts/variables that did not appear in the original research design. In addition, only self-reported data links the schools' espoused structure as a learning organization with positive student achievement: "Every principal said that they felt students were learning in their school and they know this by looking at various assessments, i.e., test scores, student work, and portfolios" (p. 11). No statistically valid correlations between professional learning communities, leadership and student learning were reported.

Boyd and Hord (1994) conducted a case study of Cottonwood Creek School, a suburban pre-K-5 school with 500 students and a teaching faculty of 36. The purpose of the study was to describe factors and events that encouraged and supported its progress toward becoming a professional learning community. Data were collected from 38 interviews of teachers, current and former school administrators, parents, university faculty and central office staff. Hord's five dimensions of a professional learning community (1997a & 1997b) were used as the conceptual framework:

Of particular interest in this study are the premises/propositions relative to leadership that the authors identified based on the research findings:

- In combination, an external force and an internal force can provide the support and guidance for the development of a community of professional learners. In this case, the external force was a partnership with a university and the opportunity to pilot a new curriculum. The internal force was the leadership of the principal.

- The climate of democratic participation generated the energy and enthusiasm to reach shared goals. All constituents in this school—administrators, teachers, other staff, students, parents—shared authority and decision making.

- The school's administration must provide the schedules and structures for initiating and maintaining organizational learning and its application by the professionals in the school.

<div align="center">The Need for Further Research</div>

The body of research knowledge relative to professional learning communities is still small (Hord, 2008; Little, 2008). A few, mostly qualitative studies have described the emergence and early development of these collegial organizations. Fewer studies have addressed schools operating as mature communities of reflection and inquiry. Fewer still have specifically addressed the roles, responsibilities and behaviors of school leaders as they initiate and develop learning communities in their schools and districts as an alternative to more traditional models of teacher professional development.

Wilson and Berne (1999) suggest that little is known about the specifics entailed in systematically constructing opportunities for teachers to learn in professional learning communities. "Researchers interested in studying teacher learning within these new environments find themselves researching a phenomenon while they (or others) are trying to build it" (p. 197).

There is still much to learn about how school leaders initiate and develop professional learning communities in schools. More studies that follow the development of professional learning communities and their outcomes on student performance are also needed.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Research Paradigms

Creswell (2005) describes qualitative research in education: ". . . the researcher relies on the views of participants, asks broad, general questions, collects data consisting largely of words (or text) from participants, describes and analyzes these words for themes, and conducts the inquiry in a subjective, biased manner" (p. 39). In contrast, the quantitative researcher "asks specific, narrow questions, collects numeric data from participants, analyzes these numbers using statistics, and conducts the inquiry in an unbiased, objective manner" (p. 39).

Qualitative research is conducted through in-depth contact with individuals or situations in the field. The role of the researcher is to uncover meaning in context from the perspectives of the people being studied (Creswell, 1994 & 2005; Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). According to Hatch (2002), objects of study in qualitative design are the "lived experiences" of real people in real settings. Through this type of inquiry, researchers seek to understand how individuals make sense of their everyday lives. In contrast, the quantitative researcher remains distant and detached from that being researched; reality is viewed as objective. The quantitative researcher's role is to present evidence gathered through the use of a questionnaire or instrument that provides numerical data (Creswell, 1994).

In a qualitative study, the researcher becomes the primary data-gathering and analysis instrument. Hatch (2002) suggests that data have no significance until they "are processed using the human intelligence of the researcher" (p. 7). In collecting and

analyzing data, the researcher can be responsive to the context and adapt techniques to the circumstances. The researcher can be sensitive to nuance and non-verbal cues, process data instantaneously, and explore contradictions and anomalies (Firestone, 1987; Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Erickson (1986) says the most distinctive characteristic of qualitative inquiry is its emphasis on interpretation. Quantitative data, in contrast, are viewed as factual. While the qualitative researcher acknowledges that data are inherently value-laden, the quantitative researcher's omits value-laden language from the study report. Instead, the quantitative researcher uses impersonal language and reports findings and conclusions based only on evidence.

The qualitative research process is inductive, building abstractions, concepts, hypotheses and theories, rather than testing existing theory (Merriam, 1998). Patterns and theories illuminate understanding and may suggest the need for further research. A qualitative researcher tests the accuracy and reliability of research findings through verification of the information from informants or through triangulation among different sources of information. The quantitative research process is deductive (Creswell, 1994). It tests theories and hypotheses in a cause and effect order.

<div align="center">Mixed Methods Designs</div>

Creswell (1994, 2005) defines "research designs" as "the specific procedures involved in the last three steps of the research process: data collection, data analysis and reporting writing" (p. 51). He lists criteria for selection of the quantitative or qualitative paradigm as a framework for research. Criteria are 1) researcher's worldview, 2) training and experience of the researcher, 3) researcher's psychological attributes, 4) nature of the problem, and 5) audience for the study These criteria become a decision screen, enabling

the researcher to articulate reasons why one paradigm is more appropriate than the other to guide the research design.

Creswell (2005) suggests that combining quantitative data with qualitative data enables a better understanding of the research problem than a single data set. He defines a mixed methods research design as a "procedure of collecting, analyzing and 'mixing' both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study to understand a research problem" (p. 510). Quantitative data can enhance, elaborate or complement qualitative data and vice versa.

In their review of the literature on data analysis, Miles and Huberman (1994) cite several advantages to linking qualitative and quantitative data in a research study. Creswell (2005) suggests that the researcher must determine which research paradigm is of the highest priority and "nest" the data of less importance within the data that are more important. Through nesting, the researcher emphasizes one research paradigm over the other while still reaping the advantages of a mixed methods design.

Sieber (1973) suggests that quantitative data nested within a qualitative study can supply background data, provide overlooked information and help avoid "elite bias"-- talking only to high-status respondents.

Rationale for a Case Study Using Mixed Methods of Data Collection

Many scholars recommend case study methodology for researchers seeking to describe persons or situations in a field-based context. Yin (2003) defines a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p.13). Merriam (1998) defines a case study as "an intensive, holistic

description and analysis of a single, bounded unit" (p. 193). Hatch (2002) suggests a case study is a method of qualitative research that investigates a contextualized phenomenon within specified boundaries.

In a case study, the researcher collects detailed information on a single event or phenomenon within a specific period of time. Generally data collection is extensive, time-consuming and directly linked to a specific person, event, organization, or project. The phenomenon is contemporary, as opposed to historical. Merriam (1998) cites individuals, programs, events, groups, interventions, or communities" as examples of bounded phenomena. Stake (1995) narrows the definition of bounded phenomena to people and programs.

A case study is designed to produce an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved, not to generalize findings to a population (Stake, 1995). Yin (2003) notes that, in doing case studies, the researcher's goal is to expand and generalize theories and not enumerate frequencies. According to Merriam (1998), a case study focuses on process, rather than outcomes, context rather than specific variables, and discovery rather than confirmation. She suggests that case studies "can directly influence policy, practice, and future research" (p. 19). Case study is especially useful for studying educational innovations.

Defining the boundaries of the phenomenon or specifying the unit of analysis is the key decision point in case study design (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1988). Otherwise, data analysis procedures are similar to those of other qualitative approaches.

Yin (2003) suggests that case study methodology is distinctly advantageous when "how" or "why" questions are being asked about a contemporary set of events, over

which the investigator has little or no control. The end product of a case study is a rich, "thick" description of the phenomenon under study, including the individuals involved, the context and the activities of interest (Creswell, 1994; Merriam, 1998). The language is often personal, informal, and based on definitions that evolve during the study. Case studies are often more literary than exclusively quantitative studies and may use prose and literary techniques to describe, elicit images and analyze data.

Merriam (1998) states that case study "does not claim any particular methods for data collection or data analysis. Any and all methods of gathering data, from testing to interviewing, can be used in a case study. . . . . (p. 28). While case study reports focus primarily on narrative description based on observation, document review, or interviews, they may also include data from other methods such as surveys or quantitative analysis of archival data.

Yin (2003) advocates using multiple sources of data in a case study. He suggests that structured questionnaires or surveys can be designed as part of a case study and produce quantitative data as part of the case study evidence. In particular, he notes that a survey may be appropriate if a researcher is doing a case study of an organizational phenomenon and a survey is administered to workers and managers. The role of data collected in this manner is considered within the context of other data that are collected in the case study.

Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that linking qualitative and quantitative data help the researcher elaborate or develop analysis, provide richer detail, and cast new light on qualitative findings.

The Case

This study is a descriptive, single case study design that collected questionnaire and interview data. The study nested the data collected through the questionnaire within qualitative data collected through interviews. As suggested by Yin (2003), the questionnaire data was gathered first and used to analyze and illuminate contextual conditions in relation to the case. It informed and complemented the qualitative data gathered subsequently through the interviews.

The qualitative research paradigm is appropriate for this study for two main reasons: 1) because of the nature of the problem; and 2) because of my training and experience. The term "professional learning community" is ubiquitous in the literature. Scholars have described characteristics of professional learning communities and advocated for them as a preferable alternative to traditional professional development programs; however, few empirical studies have described how leaders create such communities within a school or district. The rich and detailed description that has emerged from this case study is congruent with the qualitative research paradigm.

I wished to understand how school leaders initiated, supported and sustained professional learning communities within a district accustomed to more traditional models of professional development. As Merriam (1998) suggests, the findings presented here will expand existing theory and influence future research, policy and practice. She states that "research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education" (p. 1). In particular, the

leadership actions described here may provide guidance for other school leaders considering a similar change in their schools and districts.

I have academic credentials and experience grounded in literature, writing, and school innovation and improvement. My background is, therefore, more aligned with the qualitative than the quantitative research paradigm. In this study, I have nested quantitative data from the questionnaire within the description of the case; the collection of qualitative data was the primary research methodology.

<div align="center">Participants and Site</div>

The "bounded phenomena" for this case study is the professional development program in the Antelope School District headquartered in a rural, western state. "Antelope School District" is a fictitious named assigned to the district for the purpose of protecting the anonymity of those interviewed for the study. Specifically, the study describes how school leaders initiated professional learning communities within a district accustomed to more traditional models of professional development. The study also describes how school leaders support and sustain the new program.

According to the district's 2006-07 annual report (2007), Antelope School District is a geographically large school district. It covers a total of 3,121 square miles. K-8 students were dispersed among seven rural schools, formerly referred to as "country schools," with a combined enrollment of only 92 students. One of these schools is eighty miles from district's central attendance center. Three larger elementary schools had enrollments of 116, 429 and 530, respectively. In addition, the district had one middle school with an enrollment of 617 and one high school with an enrollment of 857. Total K-12 enrollment in 2007 was 2641 students.

Table 1

Antelope School District Enrollment Numbers 2006-07

Attendance Center	Location	Student Enrollment
K-8 Elementary	Rural	92
K-8 Elementary	Rural	
K-8 Elementary	Rural	
K-8 Elementary	Rural	
K-8 Elementary	Rural	
K-8 Elementary	Rural	
K-8 Elementary	Rural	
K-4 Elementary (two schools)	Community-based	429
High School	District Headquarters	857
Elementary	District Headquarters	530
Middle School	District Headquarters	617
K-4 Elementary	Community-based	116
	Total	2641

The district's annual total budget was $20,581,203. It employed 367 people, including 14 administrators, 213 teachers and 45 paraprofessionals. Among certified staff, 70.6% had bachelor's degrees and 29.4% had master's degrees. Pupil-teacher ratios were 12.20 students per teachers in K-8; 6.9 students per teacher in rural K-8; and 14.5 students per teacher in 9-12. Students attended school five days per week, exclusive of holidays. The school year ran from the last week in August through the third week in May.

The U. S. Census (2000) reported a total population in the county of 24,253 with a median age of 33.4 years. Ninety-three percent of the population was white. Median household income was $36,992, about $2,000 below the national average. Students eligible for free or reduced school lunches ranged from 22.5% at the high school to 41.4% at the smallest community-based elementary school. Lunch was served in all schools; breakfast was also served in the three largest elementary schools.

Like many rural schools districts, Antelope's professional development program until the fall of 2005 was similar to that in neighboring districts (curriculum director, personal communication, September 9, 2005). It included designated in-service days scheduled throughout the year. The district's curriculum director planned in-service activities with the intent of meeting the needs of teachers with diverse roles and teaching responsibilities. On some in-service days, workshops on specific topics required the attendance of all staff K-12. For example, a district focus on improvement of writing led to several day-long workshops for all teachers on the 6 + 1 Writing Assessment model. Other in-service days featured a wide variety of sessions and more teacher choice. In 2003, for example, programs featured the following hour-long options: NCLB: Testing Questions and Answers; Accelerated Math K-12; Developing Power Point Presentations; Reading Renaissance; Looking Forward to Monday Morning; Physical Best (new district K-12 program); North Central Accreditation for High School Staff; Social Studies and Music Round Table Sharing; Kids Voting; Reading Recovery; Meth: Closer Than You Think; Robotics; Electronics Academy; and Crises Team Panel: Dealing with the Classroom in a Crisis.

In the spring of 2005, leaders in the Antelope School District decided to change the district's approach to professional development. They abandoned in-service days that featured numerous break-out sessions. Instead, district leaders and principals created building leadership teams whose purpose is to lead school-based professional learning communities. There are five building leadership teams in the Antelope School District: one at the high school, one at the middle school, one at the largest elementary school in town, one that serves two smaller elementary schools in neighboring communities, and

one that includes members from the remaining seven small rural schools and the smallest community-based elementary school.

Building leadership teams are responsible for facilitating building-based data analysis. They collaboratively set goals with their colleagues and plan and deliver professional development in their schools. In initiating professional learning communities, school leaders completely reformed the district's professional development program. The new professional development model is currently in its fifth year of implementation. The board of education and superintendent have contracted for continuation of consulting services through May of 2011.

<div align="center">IRB Approval</div>

I obtained study approval from the University of Nebraska Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A).

<div align="center">Data Collection Procedures</div>

<div align="center">*Questionnaire*</div>

Creswell (2005) states that surveys are useful to describe trends in the data rather than rigorous explanations. Though surveys collect quantitative data, they are generally directed more toward learning about a population and less on relating variables or predicting outcomes. They are often used to provide useful information to evaluate programs in schools (p. 354). Yin (2003) suggests that data collected from a survey can be used as one component of the overall assessment of a case.

In this case study, I administered a 17-item cross-sectional questionnaire to all building-based professional staff in the Antelope School District who volunteered to participate (see Appendix B). I posted a notice inviting all staff to respond to the

questionnaire in each school (see Appendix C). I distributed questionnaires with a cover

letter to professional staff who volunteered to participate (See Appendix D).   Completion

and return of the questionnaires implied consent. Professional staff members included

school principals, assistant principals and all other certificated professional personnel,

including teachers.   Estimated time for completion of the questionnaire was 15 minutes.

Principals gathered the completed questionnaires from their buildings and returned them

to me during an in-service session on October 10, 2008.

The questionnaire is titled *School Professional Staff as Learning Community*

(Hord, 1996). It was first developed as a rubric to assess the presence or absence of the

five dimensions of a professional learning community in a school or district as identified

in a review of the literature by Shirley Hord (1997a). Hord, Meehan and Orletsky (1999)

explain the five dimensions of a professional learning community and the design of the

instrument:

1. the collegial and facilitative participation of the principal, who shares leadership, power authority, and decision making with the staff --with two descriptors

2. a shared vision that is developed from the staff's unwavering commitment to students' learning and that is consistently articulated and referenced for the staff's work--with three descriptors

3. learning that is done collectively to create solutions that address students' needs-- with five descriptors

4. the visitation and review of each teacher's classroom practices by peers as a feedback and assistance activity to support individual and community improvement--with two descriptors

5. physical conditions and human capacities that support such an operation--with five descriptors.

The descriptors are stated as a series of three statements structured along a continuum that reflect most desirable/mature practice to least desirable/mature practice. For example, under the first dimension noted above, one of the descriptors is presented as a series of three statements along a continuum:

- Administrators involves the entire staff.
- Administrators involves a small committee, council, or team of staff.
- Administrators do not involve any staff.

The instrument was field tested for usability, validity and reliability with a small pilot group (n=28) and later with a large national sample for the purpose of drawing conclusions about its use in educational improvement efforts at the school level (Hord, Meehan & Orletsky, 1999). After testing was completed, developers concluded that the instrument was useful as a screening, diagnostic or measurement tool to assess the maturity of a professional learning community. Among other things, the instrument "could facilitate and support studies of how principals (or other campus and district leaders) work with staff and the effects of their efforts on teacher collaboration and efficacy" (p. 2). I received written permission from the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SDEL) to use this questionnaire in my study (see Appendix E).

The instrument differentiates the school faculties in terms of their development as professional learning communities. The purpose of administering the questionnaire in this study was to gather additional descriptive data to complement the qualitative data

gathered through interviews. Staff completed the questionnaire anonymously. A total of 156 questionnaires were returned from a total possible number of 199 including 192 certificated staff and seven principals. This was a return rate of 78.39%.

Interviews

Hatch (2002) suggests that informant interviews can be the primary data collection strategy in a qualitative project. Qualitative researchers use interview strategies that are different in nature from quantitative studies. In particular, data collected through interviews for quantitative studies usually consist of responses to yes-no questions, closed-ended questionnaires or Likert scales, the responses to which can easily be analyzed statistically. In contrast, qualitative interviewers ask open-ended questions, encourage respondents to elaborate and explain their unique perspectives, and listen intently to probe for further information. Interviewers enter the setting with questions in mind but ask additional questions based on participants' responses.

Miles and Huberman (1994) offer general principles for bounding the collection of data in qualitative studies through the use of "purposive" as opposed to random sampling" (p. 27). One sampling strategy they suggest is referred to as "stratified purposeful," used to illustrate the perceptions of subgroups and facilitate comparisons. In this study I invited the following individuals to participate in interviews: the superintendent, the curriculum director, the director of special services, the five building principals, and the two assistant principals. I invited members of building leadership teams to participate in focus group interviews. These individuals and building leadership teams were invited to be interviewed because they were likely to be the most articulate spokespersons for the innovation being studied. This stratified purposeful sample

allowed for the collection of perceptions data from six different job-role perspectives and allowed for comparative data analysis among them.

I developed a series of semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix F). As suggested by Merriam (1998), I conducted pilot interviews with one superintendent, one building principal and one teacher from a school district of similar size that had implemented a professional learning community model similar to the one being implemented in the Antelope School District. This pilot process provided me with the opportunity to identify questions that were ambiguous or confusing and needed rewording. Although I did not find a need to revise questions, I did revise the interview form to allow more room for note taking. In addition, I learned that interviews of individuals took longer than I had originally anticipated. I had originally planned to allow one hour for each interview; instead I informed individuals that interviews might take up to 90 minutes. The amount of time available for team interviews was restricted because three of them were conducted during the school day and teachers could be absent from class during only one period. The others were conducted over the lunch hour on an in-service day. Interviews were conducted between November of 2008 and February of 2009.

The superintendent had already given verbal consent to participate in an interview prior to IRB approval for this project (personal communication, June 5, 2006). I personally contacted the two central office administrators, the five building principals and the two assistant principals by telephone to invite them to participate. Building principals invited members of teacher teams to participate in the focus groups (see Appendix C). Volunteers were directed to contact me for further information.

Prior to each interview, I gathered signed consent forms from all administrators and teacher team members (see Appendix G). I conducted interviews of individuals in their offices. I conducted focus groups with the high school team, the middle school team and one elementary team within their schools. I conducted a focus group with one elementary team at a member's home during an in-service lunch break and with another elementary team at a restaurant during an in-service lunch break. I audiotaped the interviews. Duration of interviews ranged from about 40 minutes to nearly two hours.

Yin (2003) suggests that case study research is among the most difficult methods of research because there are no routine formulas to follow. He states that, once data collection has begun, "you should think of yourself as an independent investigator who cannot rely on a rigid formula to guide your inquiry" (p. 63). He suggests that interviews be regarded as guided conversations rather than high-structured queries. The interview protocols I created allowed me to ask clarifying questions and to probe for additional data based on participant responses. Interviews were also informed by data gathered and analyzed from the questionnaire.

<div align="center">Data Analysis Procedures</div>

Analysis means dissecting or taking apart data while keeping the relationships among the parts intact (Stake, 1995; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 1994)). Through analysis, the researcher looks for patterns or consistencies in order to identify categories and commonalities and identify themes to create meaning. Stake (1995) calls this pattern identification "correspondence" (p. 78). He suggests that a researcher can discover patterns both through direct interpretation—asking "What did that mean?"--and by coding records and aggregating frequencies.

Questionnaire

This is a qualitative study with embedded quantitative data designed to provide contextual information for the case. Therefore, no minimum number of questionnaire responses was required for statistical power. A description of the number of questionnaires completed and the aggregate responses are included as a table in the narrative of the case study report in Chapter 9. The table includes the mean and standard deviation for each school or group of schools served by a building leadership team. It also includes the mean and standard deviation for the total elementary, middle school and high school groups, as well as for the entire district.

Interviews

Creswell (1994) suggests that data analysis "be conducted as an activity simultaneously with data collection, data interpretation, and narrative report writing" (p. 153). He cites Tesch's eight-step process for creating coding procedures to be used to reduce the information to themes or categories. I followed these steps to conduct the data analysis on the interview transcriptions: 1) read through all of the transcriptions to get a sense of the whole; 2) read one document thoughtfully to ascertain its underlying meaning; 3) made a list of topics that emerged from reading several documents in this manner; 4) abbreviated the topics as codes and wrote the codes next to appropriate segments of the text; 5) turned the topics into categories; 6) made the final decisions on abbreviations for categories; 7) assembled data material belonging to each category and performed a preliminary analysis; and 8) re-coded existing data when necessary.

Because I conducted 15 interviews, the amount of raw data was substantial. In order to systematically match comments to the coding categories, I copied each of the 15

transcripts on different colored paper and assigned a number to each color. This made it easier to match the statements of individuals to the coded categories. I found the coding process to be non-linear and I changed the codes several times throughout the analysis. In some instances, coded topics overlapped and I combined them. In other instances, I discovered that an original code may have represented a single thought or idea that was not repeated elsewhere in the data. I analyzed the coded date to ascertain patterns and themes, and I drew conclusions from the patterns relative to my research questions.

<div align="center">Entry to the Setting and Permission to Study the Case</div>

In 2006, I had a telephone conversation with the superintendent of the Antelope School District to suggest the idea of doing a case study relative to the district's new professional development program (personal communication, June 5, 2006). His reaction to the idea was positive. He said he believed such a study would provide additional insight to teachers and school administrators relative to the evolution of the project and hoped that the research findings could be used to improve the work. In addition, he said he believed that findings from the study might provide practical insight for other school leaders attempting to implement similar programs elsewhere.

I had two subsequent conversations with the superintendent about the scope of the case study. The superintendent has provided written permission for me to conduct the study in the Antelope School District (Appendix H).

I chose the Antelope School district as the study site because the project had been in place for three full years and was entering its fourth year when I began to collect the data. In addition, I chose the district because the superintendent and Board of Education have committed to continuing the process at least through the 2010-11 school year.

Because the program was recently implemented, processes which led to selection and implementation of the building leadership team model were fresh in the minds of participants.

I kept all audiotapes, field notes from the interviews, and responses to questionnaires in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Only I and my dissertation advisor had access to the records. A disinterested third party transcriptionist transcribed audiotapes within one month of the completion of each interview. The transcriptionist signed a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix I). Audiotapes were destroyed immediately after transcription.

To maintain anonymity and protect participants, individuals are not identified in this report.

Methods for Verification

Internal validity, the extent to which the data provide an accurate picture of what actually occurred, is verified in three ways: a) I gathered both quantitative data and qualitative data to inform the descriptive reports, and b) I conducted member checks on all interviews, and c) an external auditor reviewed the data to assure that findings and conclusions were reported in a trustworthy and authentic manner. I hand-delivered interview transcripts to individuals and asked them to check the transcripts for accuracy. I gave them the opportunity to make changes. I e-mailed transcripts from the focus groups to all participating teachers asking them also to check them for accuracy and made any changes they wished to make. I received and have on file written affirmation from all individuals and all team members that they reviewed the transcripts. There were few

suggestions for changes; all suggestions were the result of typographical errors or transcription errors, and I hand-corrected them in the original transcripts.

Outcome of the Study and Its Relation to Theory and Literature

The outcome of this study is a description of the leadership actions which took place as the new professional development model in the Antelope School District was conceived and initiated. The study described leadership actions which support the development of professional learning communities in the Antelope School District. Findings inform theories of professional development and leadership.

CHAPTER 4

EXTERNAL FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHANGE

IN THE ANTELOPE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Participants described four factors external to Antelope School District that influenced the district's decision to change its professional development model. These factors are (a) the No Child Left Behind Act, (b) the launch of Educational Service Agencies (ESAs) in the state, (c) implementation of a successful professional development model in a neighboring school district, and (d) administrator awareness of external data and research. In this section, I explain ways that participants in this study talked about the impact of these factors on the district's decision to transform its professional development program.

No Child Left Behind

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of was passed by Congress on January 8, 2002. The intention of the Act is "to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind" (http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/beginning. html#sec1). NCLB calls for stronger accountability for states and schools, greater choice for parents and students, and a stronger emphasis on teaching basic subjects such as reading and math. Originally approved by the U. S. Department of Education in June of 2003, the state's Accountability Workbook serves as the framework for all NCLB efforts in the state. As required by law, each year the state produces and publishes on its website a report card listing the achievement status of schools, districts and the state as a whole.

Schools and districts must make adequately yearly progress or they are designated in need of improvement, corrective action or restructuring. Adequate yearly progress is determined by student performance in reading and mathematics on the annual state test of educational progress. All student subgroups within the schools must meet increasing levels of proficiency on this test. These subgroups include economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, limited English proficiency students, migrant students, and minority groups. In addition, elementary schools and middle schools must meet minimum attendance targets, and high schools must meet minimum graduation rates in order to avoid state and federal sanctions.

Alert status is the first level of school improvement and is assigned when a school or district has failed to make adequate yearly progress for one year. When schools and districts fail to make adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years, they are officially designated "in school improvement" at Level I. They must notify parents of their failing school status and create and implement detailed plans for improvement. If they make adequate yearly progress in the subsequent year they remain at the same improvement level, since two consecutive successful years are required to eliminate the school improvement designation. Consistent failure to make adequate yearly progress increases their designated levels of improvement. At levels four and five, the state must impose federally mandated corrective actions and require the school or district to be restructured.

According to the first state report card issued in 2003, the middle school in Antelope District was placed on alert for failing to make adequate yearly progress in reading, mathematics and attendance. The district's high school was placed on alert for

failing to make adequate yearly progress in reading and mathematics. As a result, the entire district was placed on alert in reading and mathematics.

Since 2003, the middle school and the high school have struggled to make adequate yearly progress. As shown in Table 2, they are sometimes successful. This success temporarily halts or reverses their progression up the levels of improvement. Because the bar on test scores continues to increase, however, both schools are currently moving toward the highest levels of improvement.

Table 2

Improvement Status in the Antelope School District

Year	District	Elementary Schools	Middle School	High School
2003	Alert reading Alert math	All schools OK	Alert reading Alert math Alert attendance	Alert reading Alert math
2004	OK	One school Alert attendance One school Alert reading	Level I reading Level I math	Level I reading Level I math Alternative school: Alert graduation
2005	OK	One school Alert reading	Level I reading Level I math	Level I reading Level I math
2006	OK	One school Alert reading Alert math One school Alert attendance	Level 2 reading Level 2 math	OK reading Level 2 math
2007	OK	All schools OK	Level 3 reading Level 3 math	Alert reading Level 2 math
2008	OK	All schools OK	Level 4 reading Level 4 math	Level 1 reading Level 3 math

Increased accountability under NCLB raised the level of concern in Antelope School District, according to some participants. It was not articulated as the most salient factor that influenced the district to change its professional development model, however. The superintendent said NCLB informed NCA goals in reading and mathematics and prompted the district to set up committees in reading and mathematics. These committees were the precursors to the Building leadership team and had carryover membership. He stated that "we were trying to . . . develop some coherent and systematic plan for school improvement." None of the five principals and only one of the two assistant principals mentioned NCLB specifically as an influential factor. NCLB was mentioned briefly as having influenced the change in two of the five focus groups with teachers.

The curriculum director, who had been a teacher when the new professional development model was first implemented, discussed the NCLB influence. His reference to AMOs refers to annual measurable objectives:

> Being a teacher at the time, I remember they put together a reading committee and a math committee, which may have been driven somewhat by No Child Left Behind. I can't say for sure, but those committees met to discuss what could be done to try to keep our test scores where they needed to be to reach AYP and AMOs to make sure we were meeting the No Child Left Behind requirements.

As the curriculum director states, the switch to a new professional development model in Antelope School District "may have been driven somewhat by No Child Left Behind." Evidence suggests that the launch of the educational service agency structure in the state more significantly impacted the decision for change.

Creation of the Educational Service Agencies

When *Leadership Teams in Schools* (Apaza, Heinert & Austin, 2005) was being drafted, the new ESA structure in the state was beginning to take shape. On March 15, 2004 during its 79th legislative assembly, the state legislature passed a law that authorized funding. (State of [name of state], 2004). The [name of state] Department of Education subsequently divided the state into seven regions. The department mandated that each ESA offer a menu of free professional development services to all school districts within their respective boundaries beginning in the fall of the 2004-05 school year. These services were funded by the legislative appropriation, federal school improvement flow-through dollars, and federally funded grants. Money was allocated to each ESA based on the number of districts to be served.

In the spring of 2004, the state's department of education issued a request for proposals to operate ESAs in each of the seven regions across the state. With a twenty-year track record of providing professional development services to schools across the state, an intermediate service agency that was a division of an educational cooperative was awarded the contract for Region 7. Region 7 includes the Antelope School District. The already-existing intermediate service agency and the ESA for region seven became indistinguishable as professional development providers for Region 7 school districts, including Antelope.

Five intermediate service agency staff members were assigned part-time to the project. I was appointed to be Region 7 Director. During the first two years of operation, the state department of education provided training to educational service agency personnel from all seven regions. Training focused on data analysis, curriculum

mapping, effective instructional strategies, and student assessment. As Region 7

Director, I assigned one education specialist to be the key contact person in each of the

17 school districts. Districts could request any of the state-funded services through their

assigned educational service agency staff member. Staff members working in pairs or

small groups generally provided services on site within districts. Antelope School

District had access to free professional development services provided through ESA

Region 7 beginning in the fall of 2004. Because ESA staff members also worked in other

capacities at the intermediate service agency, they encouraged their assigned districts to

purchase fee-based services in addition to those services on the ESA menu.

       As ESA staff members across the state learned more about effective professional

development, they recognized the shortcomings of workshop-based in-service

approaches. They began to advise client districts to reconsider the structure of their

professional development programs and to create long-range professional development

plans.

       In the spring of 2005, ESA staffers began informal discussions with the Antelope

School District superintendent relative to transforming the district's professional

development program (personal communication, February, 2005). Specifically, they

discussed the feasibility of replicating a building leadership team configuration similar to

that implemented successfully in the larger, neighboring district.

       Five of the ten administrators who were interviewed mentioned the ESA as a

factor that influenced the district to change its professional development program. The

director of special services clearly associated the "advent of the ESAs" with the launch of

the new professional development model in the Antelope School District: "We would

pay the ESAs extra dollars to provide this . . . service for us. It seemed like a nice fit."

One elementary principal also stated, "So from what I understand, the ESAs came in and

. . . said, 'You know, this is an option that we can do.'"

The curriculum director also acknowledged the intermediate service agency/ESA

role:

> . . . we met and talked as a group of teachers about what professional
>
> development should look like and again, I think it may have been heavily
>
> influenced by . . . [name of intermediate service agency]'s recommendations. . . .

One other elementary principal and the elementary assistant principal also mentioned the

influence of [name of intermediate service agency]/ESA7 on the district's decision to

make the change.

In contrast, no teachers in any of the five focus groups specifically mentioned

either the intermediate service agency or ESA 7 as a factor that influenced the decision to

change the district's professional development program. This suggests that teachers were

not, at that time, aware of the emerging ESA structure and the role that ESA 7 staff

assumed in advising districts to improve their professional development programs.

Successful Implementation of a New Model in a Neighboring District

Before ESAs were created, the intermediate service agency contracted with a

large school district within its service area to provide professional development in a new

way (personal communication with the project leader, February 12, 2005).   Working

with district leaders beginning in 2001, intermediate agency staff successfully developed

and implemented a building leadership team train-the-trainer professional development

program. This program was specifically designed to improve student achievement in

mathematics within the district. Anecdotal data provided by the project leader and principals from the school district suggested that the model was effective. This process provided intermediate service agency staff members working on the project with the experience and expertise to replicate the building leadership team model in other school districts and to write the book *Leadership Teams in Schools* (Apaza, Austin & Heinert, 2005). When the intermediate service agency became the fiscal agent for the new ESA, school districts in Region 7 gained easy and affordable access to this experience and expertise.

All superintendents in Region 7 districts were invited to become members of the ESA 7 Advisory Council. This group convened for half-day meetings three times each year. The superintendent in the Antelope School District became an active member of the Advisory Council, as did the director of instruction and staff development for the larger, neighboring district. The Council's quarterly meetings included ample time for members to share what they were doing in their districts relative to professional development. The large-district administrator regularly reported on the progress of her district's building leadership team model and enthusiastically encouraged other districts to adopt a similar model.

Four of the ten administrators interviewed suggested that adoption of the building leadership team model in the Antelope School District was in some way influenced by implementation of the model in the larger, neighboring district. The director of special services suggested that the "advent of the ESAs" may have been the catalyst for the change that the superintendent and administrative team ultimately supported. The curriculum director suggested a stronger influence:

. . . it may have been a suggestion from [intermediate service agency] that we look at the building level teams. I believe [the larger, neighboring district] may have been doing it prior to our starting it, and I think we may have chosen to use their model.

The elementary assistant principal likewise mentioned the other school district: "I think initially the brain child came from [the larger, neighboring district]. That is my understanding is that we decided to pilot a similar program . . . ." An elementary principal concurred:

. . . we had read about the building level teams in [the larger, neighboring district]. We had heard other administrators talking about their BLTs and so we asked if we could. . . kind of look into those programs and see if that is something that we could replicate within our district.

The rural schools building leadership team was the only team that suggested the success of the professional development model in the larger, neighboring district influenced Antelope to change its professional development program. Members of this team drew this conclusion after the first building leadership team training session in the summer of 2004. One team member said, "I remember the first meeting that summer; it was at the [name of intermediate service agency] office and we had. . . I mean I didn't know that is what we were doing, but they were mentioning BLT, which is [the larger, neighboring district]'s model."

Administrator Awareness of External Data and Research

The North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement accredits the Antelope School District. Requirements of this accreditation

process and requirements of the school improvement process mandated for schools "in improvement" by the state require a close examination of data to inform goal setting. In addition, they advocate for school improvement strategies that are grounded in educational research. The language of No Child Left Behind actually requires that strategies within a school improvement plan be grounded in "scientifically-based research."

Four of the ten administrators in the Antelope School District said they studied educational research as they considered changes to their professional development plan. The superintendent said that a major driver in choosing the new professional development program was studying "what the research on professional development was telling us." As he reflected on the previous professional development program, he explained this shift in emphasis:

> What does the research say? About less than 5% translates into change in the classroom when you address professional development in that manner, and part of it is because you are not really going into anything in depth. I think the [name of new program] process now gives us an opportunity to change that model and do things in a more in-depth fashion.

He went on to explain the importance of reviewing data to determine student needs and, in turn, shape the content of professional development for teachers. He said that, because of the technology currently available, the district was able to graphically display student achievement data and identify academic needs. Instead of relying on teacher interest to shape a professional development program, student needs informed the new program.

The special services director also articulated the district's attention to research in making professional development decisions. She explained what she learned about a train-the-trainer model during a professional conference and during the district's participation in an effective, state-sponsored professional development program for teachers of reading:

> And that was such a terrific model. Our teachers would go to monthly classes, they would have follow up, they would talk to each other, we would have coaches come in and observe their teaching, and that really is . . . how you cement good strategies into your learners, whether it would be business people, teachers, students, or whatever. And so after looking at these models and doing some research, I think we learned it is high time to start making our in-services very effective.

She said that research findings and alternative professional development models were discussed at monthly administrator meetings. The middle school principal also explained that fellow-administrators were attending conferences and workshops and bringing back "a lot of good information." They were sharing information with each other, he said, and trying to figure out how they could "give this to our staff." One elementary principal recalled planning an in-service program at an administrator meeting and discussing possibilities for improved alternative approaches. In particular, she said, administrators were asking for more information on the large, neighboring school district's model.

There is no evidence from the teacher focus groups that teachers were involved in a review of research on effective professional development prior to implementation of the new professional development program.

A Convergence of External Forces

Expectations from entities at the federal, state and regional levels all converged simultaneously to exert external pressure for change in Antelope School District.   The district's schools struggled to meet accountability requirements under NCLB. That same year, the state's new ESA structure began to provide free professional development services that sought to improve student achievement and relieve strained district budgets. In a district just down the road from Antelope, a professional development model created pre-ESA by ESA coworkers was deemed innovative and successful. And, administrators in the Antelope School District began to study data and research on effective professional development for educators.

Coupled with these external factors, two key internal conditions laid the foundation for change. With strong leadership from the superintendent's office, the district had just committed to a new district-wide accreditation process through the North Central Association. This process required greater alignment of vision, goals and school improvement strategies among all district schools. In addition, strong discontent over coherence and quality of existing in-service programs left teachers and administrators alike searching for alternatives. The conditions were right for a "perfect storm" that would upend the status quo and transform the delivery of professional development in the district to a totally different model.

CHAPTER 5

INTERNAL FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHANGE

IN THE ANTELOPE SCHOOL DISTRICT

According to participants, two key factors internal to Antelope School District influenced the district's decision to transform its professional development model. These factors were (a) the district's new NCA accreditation process, and (b) extreme dissatisfaction with the existing professional development program that led to readiness for change. This section explains these factors. It describes ways that informants in this study perceived the impact of these factors on the district's decision.

North Central Accreditation

According to the organization's home page on its website, the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI) was founded in 1895 (http://www.ncacasi.org). It accredits more than 8,500 public and private schools in 19 states, the Navajo Nation, and the Department of Defense. An article on the site titled "District Accreditation Overview" explains a recent shift in accreditation options (http://www.ncacasi.org/accreditation/district_accreditation/?). Individual schools have historically pursued accreditation. These schools set their own goals and determined what evidence they would use to determine success. The Association has recently perceived the district "as a key leverage point for school improvement." It has, therefore, developed an accreditation process specifically designed for districts. This process "invites school districts and their stakeholders to collaborate in reviewing the quality of the district's systems, the success of each individual school, and their collective contribution to student learning and overall district effectiveness."

NCA CASI cites benefits of district accreditation. They include (a) development of a common language of school improvement across content areas and grade levels, as well as across individual schools, feeder schools, and school system lines of responsibility, (b) continuity and collaboration in planning for improvement anchored in a common vision for education among all of the district's schools and ensures that each school's improvement goals complement those of the school district, (c) a system-wide approach to achieving results, and (d) alignment and coordination among all of the schools in the district.

According to the superintendent, the Antelope School District switched from a school-based accreditation model for its high school to a district accreditation process beginning in 2004 (personal communication August 14, 2009). This was one year before the new professional development model was implemented. Antelope was the first district in the state to pursue accreditation and the superintendent viewed this as a positive and progressive move. The district began to focus on system improvement, common vision and goals across the district, and alignment and coordination among all schools. As part of the requirements of the process, literacy and mathematics committees comprising teachers were created to address goals and NCLB targets. The superintendent indicated that part of the new accreditation process was to re-think the district's professional development delivery system. In the interview, he said the "NCA process and school improvement process that we were using at that time kind of helped point us a bit in that direction."

In addition to the superintendent, four of the nine other administrators interviewed for this study specifically cited NCA as a key factor in adopting the new professional

development model. Both the high school principal and the assistant high school

principal virtually quoted the superintendent. The high school principal said, ". . . I

believe Mr. [name of superintendent] . . . he says that we need to be a school system

opposed to a system of schools, and there needed to be unity, we needed to be going in a

particular direction. The high school assistant principal said, "Oh, I think they have a

little bit more of a vision. I know when Mr. [name of superintendent] came into our

school district he talked about making it a school system, not a system of schools. That

was the big focus, and he was absolutely correct."

   Teachers in all five focus groups also mentioned NCA district-wide K-12

accreditation as a key factor that eventually led to adoption of the new professional

develop model. Teachers on all teams discussed a district vision that included shared

goals for improvements in reading and math achievement and expectations that all

teachers in all grade levels and content areas would work toward the goals. An English

teacher on the high school team explained:

> I think once we were going for the accreditation, things started happening. . . we
>
> needed to know what was happening, not only in high school, but also in middle
>
> school. I mean so it was continuous K through 12. Everyone knew what was
>
> going on, what was being implemented. . . . I think before. . .I didn't even really
>
> know some of the math. I didn't ever really know who taught math in the middle
>
> school other than teachers that my own son had. And I think we have a lot better
>
> understanding of the whole program now.

   A high school team member said she understood that Antelope School District

was "the first to attempt district-wide accreditation through the NCA process" and an

elementary team member said that "I think that was one of Mr. [name of superintendent]'s goals . . . to become the first district in the state to be K-12 [NCA accredited]."

Dissatisfaction with the District's Professional Development

Program and Readiness for Change

The professional development program in the Antelope School District prior to the launch of the new program in the summer of 2005 can be described as traditional. According to the superintendent, it typically included two scheduled in-service days before school started in the fall and two to three days during the school year. These sessions generally featured keynote speakers and breakout sessions on a variety of topics that were determined by teacher interest through an annual survey. Teachers could choose the breakout sessions they preferred. The superintendent explained:

> I would say the best way to describe it would be the traditional smorgasbord
> model. . . that was generally driven by an annual needs assessment where the
> teachers would identify all of the things that they thought might interest them in
> terms of professional development. . .and then over the course of the day's
> professional development, the curriculum office and the administrative team
> would work diligently to find speakers to address all these myriad of topics that
> may have been identified by teachers. And then generally we would provide
> some process by which we . . .would have them evaluate and give us some
> feedback on how well they thought the presenters presented the materials, and
> whether they thought it was interesting and worthwhile. So, it was pretty much
> self-identified and then each. . . time a host of topics and interest sessions were

provided, and I think it is a model that has been used for many, many years in public schools. . . .

Among all individuals and groups interviewed, language used to describe the previous professional development program was similar to the superintendent's description. Teachers on the high school team also said that, at times, professional growth was specific to departments or to individual schools: ". . . every site. . . did their own thing. No one really knew what was . . . going on [elsewhere in the district]." They described days when teachers rotated through 20-minute sessions provided by other teachers and outside presenters. Members of one elementary team said that, when teachers left the district for training it was "highly suggested" that they bring the information back to share with others during these mini-sessions. The high school assistant principal said that "very rarely were our teachers the ones that would bring forth the information—once in a while." In addition, he said there was no long-range plan in place for delivery and that sometimes planning would be last minute: "Sometimes we would plan in-service just a few days before as far as, 'hey, we have a little clump of time. What are we going to do?'"

The middle school principal, who had been in the district for 25 years at the time of the interview, affirmed that past practice in professional development included a combination of district-sponsored professional development sessions and site-based sessions. A long-tenured member of the middle school teacher team also said that, in her early days with the district, staff would travel to other districts in nearby towns for in-service programs. A member of the rural elementary team recalled similar trips wherein

the entire district staff would join with the staff of several other school districts for a

regional event.

The assistant elementary principal described the previous program as "a little bit

scattered":

It was kind of a flavor of the month type of thing. When the leadership found

something that they thought would be interesting or beneficial, they would go

with it, they would bring in speakers to talk to the staff, but it didn't necessarily. .

. streamline everything into one direction.

In addition to sessions focused on academics, yoga, the operation of ham radios, and

massages were among the sessions that individuals remembered being able to choose

from over the years. Generally, there was no expectation that teachers would integrate

into the classroom whatever they had learned during these sessions. As one elementary

teacher said, "I felt like it was just 'Here is some information for you, and do with it what

you want.'"

Other descriptors that informants used to explain the district's professional

development program include "buffet style, relatively fragmented, a hit and miss process,

scattered, the round robin approach, spray and pray, the shotgun approach, a potpourri, a

hodgepodge, and helter-skelter." These terms give some indication of the professional

staff's frustration with the previous professional development model in the Antelope

School District. Teachers and administrators in the study described the existing program

as having limited effectiveness. Speaking about the in-service sessions she attended, one

elementary teacher summed up the feelings of the majority: "you got lucky every now

and again." The superintendent said, ". . .it was a model that we have determined is not very effective in terms of actually impacting upon the teaching and learning process."

Five reasons emerged from the data for this lack of effectiveness: (a) many sessions were irrelevant to the day-to-day work of individual teachers, (b) sessions were delivered in rapid-fire fashion with inadequate time allotted for in-depth teacher learning and no follow-up, (c) planning and practice time were not part of the process, (d) sessions were not linked to any overall district vision or focus, and (e) there was no accountability for classroom implementation of skills learned.

Interviews suggest that lack of impact was due, in large part, to lack of depth and follow-through. The curriculum director elaborated:

> A lot of that professional development may not have made it into the classroom because it was a case where the teachers went to the in-service training for that particular day, and the next in-service training may have looked completely different. And so the follow up and trying to make sure there was implementation of the material just did not happen.

Teachers on the middle school team and all three elementary teams viewed the lack of depth and follow-up as particularly problematic. One elementary teacher said not enough information was given for anyone to really do anything with it. "You are kind of just glazed over because it was such a short period to time," she said. One middle school teacher said,

> And a lot of speakers, they were good speakers, but . . .you were given information, but just all of a sudden we are talking about a topic that you didn't know about. You were given the information. "Okay. There you go. . . start."

And then you never had time to implement into the classroom or the time to think about it.

Besides having little perceived impact on instruction, most teachers felt sessions were either irrelevant to their day-to-day teaching responsibilities or lacked coherence with any long-range district plan or vision. One elementary team member said that most teachers would rather have spent the time in their classrooms. Another elementary teacher said, "there was no common language, there was no common goal." The middle school principal described the dilemma:

> . . .We would do a district wide in-service, and it would be developed by the curriculum department. It was good but. . .the downside of it was it is hard to find a topic that is applicable for all grade levels. . . so that was the downfall of that, and then we went to building in-service where each building would create the in-service that they needed for their building, and the idea was pretty good, but the problem was there wasn't any direction for the school. . . .There was no direction as to what topics we should discuss.

One elementary teacher said, "I think what we found when it was K-12 all in one area at one time that it was not grade level appropriate, and so you often times felt that you came out with things that just were not applicable for you to use back into your classroom, and so it was frustrating."

One member of the high school team said, "I think overall, from the comments I remembered, a lot of it was, 'this is a waste of time.'" Another said that "by and large, that might have been a perception, but there were still opportunities to implement programs. . . ." One of her teammates suggested that dissatisfaction with the existing

professional development program may have been more of a concern to administrators than to teachers. One member of the high school team said there was an opportunity "to implement some programs." She cited training in the 6 + 1 Writing Assessment training as one opportunity. One team member said, "There was certainly an opportunity for professional growth, but it was isolated probably more by departments, and certainly isolated more in terms of what were the expectations at each site." One middle school team concurred, saying,

> Well, sometimes you would go to something that was very useful, and you would get a lot of information out of it, but then you would go to one that was not so much so, and it was hard to know which ones to go to, and what not, and maybe someone in your team went to one, but not another person, so we didn't all get the same information.

Members of the middle school team estimated a 10% to 30% impact on instructional practice under the traditional model.

An elementary principal, who had been a teacher at the time, explained the lack of accountability for teachers to implement what they had learned:

> . . .It was kind of like, "Okay, we did that, now tomorrow we can go back to work." Because many times you just chose topics that. . . sounded like something I would like to know a little bit about. But there were no expectations on the district's part that anything we learned in any of those sessions might be implemented in our classroom, and I don't know that a lot of thought was given as to whether these were sound instructional practices, or if they were more just informational sessions so a person could go and relax and just absorb some

information, and whatever you did with it you did with it, so it didn't really impact or influence any changes in teaching and learning. It just didn't offer that opportunity because there was no follow up, no accountability for anything that a teacher might have learned in that day.

District leaders said they surveyed teachers after each in-service program and began to receive negative feedback from staff on the value of the sessions as structured. They said they began to ascertain that teachers were not happy with the existing program, providing another reason to make a change.

The superintendent suggested that conditions within the district set the stage for change:

I think the NCA process and school improvement process that we were using at the time kind of helped point us a bit in that. . .direction. . . . I think the stage was just right. . . . Everything kind of came together. I don't know if we really had. . . some big master plan overall, it just kind of fell into place.

CHAPTER 6

SELECTION AND IMPLEMENTATION

OF THE NEW PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MODEL

As the superintendent in the Antelope School District said, "the stage was just right" for change in the district's professional development program. This section examines the roles of the superintendent and central office administrators, principals and teachers in selecting and implementing the new professional development model.

Selection and Launch of the New Professional Development Model

Data suggest that the decision to adopt the building leadership team model was heavily influenced by the superintendent. Perceptions on the extent to which other administrators and teachers had input into the decision vary, according to the data. There is evidence that district-level leaders sought buy-in from teachers and principals primarily after the model was adopted. At that point, leaders allowed select teachers some choice in determining the content of the professional development to be provided.

Role of the superintendent

The superintendent described his role in influencing the district's new professional development direction:

> To plant a seed, the seeds of change, to help facilitate how we bring all of these
>
> processes to bear on achieving school improvement. . . . I found my
>
> administrative team and my teaching staff were eager to embrace change. They
>
> were eager to embrace ways to do our work better. . . . I think they really
>
> embraced the idea of engaging staff and teachers in the process, and having not
>
> just input, but. . . being very much a part of it, and serving in a leadership role,

having some control again over their own professional destiny, and ultimately

over the destiny of the teaching and learning process here in school.

He went on to say that he secured board approval for the new program and did

everything in his power to "remove the obstacles that stand in the way of progress." He

noted, however, that making the change was not as difficult an undertaking as he had

experienced in other districts. He said that, once the new model was launched, his role

was to provide the support and resources necessary and to be a "cheerleader. . . . to feed

back the good news to them as progress is being made, to encourage them to continue."

Role of Central Office Administrators

The curriculum director said he believed the role of the central office was to

"make sure that all teachers were on board and understood the [name of program] process

before we moved forward." Getting this buy-in from teachers and planning the

professional development program with [name of intermediate service agency]

consultants were the main tasks of central office administrators, he said.

The director of special services perceived the role of the central office was to

determine what teachers needed to move the process forward and to provide it. She said

providing this type of support is what she discerned principals were doing also.

Role of Principals

Of the seven principals on staff at the time the new model was implemented, two

had left the district and been replaced by the time this study was conducted. The two

principals replaced were the high school principal, who came from a different district in

the same state, and an elementary principal, who had previously been a principal in a

different state and had been most recently a member of the board of education in the

Antelope School District. The new elementary principal had some knowledge of the
changes being made because of her previous role as a board member. Four of the five
principals who had been in the district when the new model was selected said they
believed the change was initiated in the central office with the primary impetus coming
from the superintendent: One elementary principal summed it up:

> . . . [It] came from the curriculum department. . . or the curriculum director at the
> time, and also the superintendent kind of basically did the ground work and set it
> up, and then once the format was established that each . . . one of the five
> academic units . . . would have a team of leaders, and then it became a train the
> trainer approach. . . . Train teacher leaders with this common information, and
> then those teacher leaders would then go back and work with the rest of the staff.

Another elementary principal recalled an administrator meeting. She used the
abbreviation "BLT" for building leadership team:

> . . . we started discussing whether the in-service days as they were were really
> effective, and we had read about the building level teams in [name of neighboring
> district]. . . . We had heard other administrators talking about their BLTs, and so
> we asked if we could. . . replicate within our district. . . . We decided that we may
> need a contract with [name of intermediate service agency] to provide some
> overall leadership and organization for us to get us started, and so that was
> pursued. . . . Now whether there had been a lot of ground work prior to it, I guess,
> I can't remember that part, but I just remember that meeting and how that
> conversation went."

Both the assistant principal at the high school and the high school principal referred to the superintendent's strong vision for change, and teacher teams likewise attributed the change to the superintendent. As one high school teacher said, "I think a lot of it was our superintendent. . . . He. . . started district committees and then it went to [name of new professional development program]. "

Role of teachers

Teacher leaders on all five teams described weaknesses in their previous professional development program. Providing feedback to administrators on their concerns was the extent of their input into choosing the building leadership model, however. One elementary team member said that teachers did not choose the new model, that the decision was made by [name of intermediate service agency]. Three administrators interviewed and members on four of the five teacher teams said they were uncertain about how the decision was made to implement that particular model. No one on any of the five teacher teams was able to explain the process that was used to make the decision. None of the members on any of the five teams was able to explain the process used to select the new model.

There "were factors that influenced the decision" that they did not know about, one team member said. Another elementary team member said the superintendent may have "had a bigger plan," possibly influenced by the curriculum director, that teachers were not aware of. Members on two of the three elementary teams and the high school team said they knew nothing about the model until they attended the first training session at the [intermediate service agency] office during the summer of 2005. "There may have been something else that went on, I don't know," one elementary team member said, "but

as far as our involvement, it came after that [the first training]." One middle school team member said, "I don't know how the decision was made." One member of the high school team said administrators favored the new approach. "I don't think we as teachers were really even that familiar. . . never even really aware of anything other than what we were doing." There was no teacher input into selection of the building leadership team model as far as they knew.

Reflecting back on the launch of the new model, the superintendent acknowledged that staff may not have been aware of how it began: ". . . I am not sure if you were to survey people here, they would tell you how it started, or who started it, or I am not sure it is important to them, and I think that that is probably the way it should be."

Implementation of the New Professional Development Model

Implementation of the new professional development model was a marked change from the previous "smorgasbord" program. According to consultants who had developed and implemented the model in the neighboring district, it was intended to organize adults within the Antelope schools into learning communities (Apaza, Heinert & Austin, p. 3). The goals of these learning communities were to be aligned with those of the school and district. The first step in this process was to create building leadership teams that included teacher leaders and the building principal. With the assistance of outside consultants, these teams would analyze district and school-level student achievement data. As a part of this analysis, teams would identify areas of student weakness and set school improvement goals intended to strengthen achievement in these areas. Teams would then be trained by consultants in research-based instructional strategies designed to help students improve their academic performance relative to improvement goals.

Then teams would return to their schools and replicate the training with other members of the instructional staff. According to the model, all instructional staff would then integrate the new strategies into their instructional practice and engage in follow-up discussions about effectiveness of the new strategies in improving student performance.

When the new building leadership team model was being considered for the Antelope schools, the district had already set improvement goals in reading and mathematics as a part of its North Central Accreditation process. Target committees of teachers, one in reading and one in mathematics, had been convened to design improvement strategies. Thus, the NCA process and the new professional development model were aligned.

The new Antelope School District professional development plan included four full days of training for building leadership teams interspersed throughout the school year. One week after each BLT training day, teams would conduct building-based training for other members of the instructional staff. When the model was first implemented, a decision was made to use *Classroom Instruction that Works: Research-based strategies for increasing student achievement* (Marzano, Pickering & Pollock, 2001) as the content for the BLT training. This book features nine research-based instructional strategies that can be used across grade levels in all subject areas. On the building leadership team training days, consultants would present a number of strategies and tools based on the content of the book. During that last part of each training day, team members would select the strategies or tools they wished to share with their colleagues and plan their presentations for subsequent in-service days. They had the flexibility to customize their presentations based on perceived needs of the staff.

According to the superintendent, the reading and mathematics target committees made the decision to focus on the Marzano, Pickering and Pollock book.

The superintendent said that planning for the new professional development program was underway when he asked consultants to meet with the NCA target committees in reading and mathematics: "I had them share a lot of information relative to research and best practice. . . . I think the decision to focus on Marzano strategies really came from the target committees and was. . . in part also facilitated by the work that the [intermediate service] organization did in helping make . . . us aware of what was out there and what might work for us."

Selection of Building Leadership Team Members

The superintendent issued a directive that selection of the building leadership team members was a principal decision. A total of five teams were to be created with four teacher members on each team. Because of grade level configurations and previous committee structures, some teams had five teachers instead of four. For example, the largest in-town elementary school has five grade levels, K-4, and the principal wanted one teacher on the team from each grade level. Initially, teams were established as follows:

- one at the high school to include five teachers, the assistant principal and the principal
- one at the middle school to include four teachers and the principal
- one at the largest in-town elementary school to include five teachers and the principal

- one to include four teachers from two smaller elementary schools and the principal who had both schools and

- one team to include four teachers selected from among the district's smallest eight rural schools.

The district agreed to pay each building leadership team member an annual stipend of $1500. In addition, each team member could earn two hours of graduate credit each year for participation in professional development activities.

The rationale used initially to select BLT team members varied somewhat by school, although all participants indicated an understanding that it was the principal's prerogative to extend the invitation.

The director of special services said she believed that some principals had purposely not chosen the strongest people to be team members but instead those who exhibited leadership potential and would benefit from the experience. The curriculum director said he perceived principals chose team members based on leadership skills, their ability to relate to other teachers and their classroom expertise. Two of the three elementary principals said they chose team members with leadership skills; one of these principals said she also considered the workload and obligations of teachers to other committees and their ability to work together. In one instance she selected a teacher whom she wanted to be challenged more. In some instances, principals chose team members who were already on other school improvement committees within their schools on the district NCA target committees. One high school team member, for example, had been the chair of a High Schools That Work committee that had been initiated at the school two years prior to implementation of the new professional

development program. Another high school team member had been a member of the

district NCA target committee for reading. All four team members at the middle school

were on the NCA target committees, two in reading and two in mathematics. One

elementary team member had also been on the NCA committee. Some team members

joked that they were selected because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time:

One high school team member said "I think I was in the office at the time they were

looking for someone." One middle school team member said the principal had

approached her and said, "I have a deal for you." One elementary team member said she

had been put on the team by "default."

Extent of teacher buy-in and commitment

A majority of administrators said that teachers supported the new professional

development model, despite difficulties inherent in the change process. The potential for

higher-quality professional development, teacher leadership development, and

sustainability over the long term were factors that administrators cited.

The superintendent said that he "found it was not as difficult as I had experienced

in other settings. They were just more willing, more receptive. " The director of special

services said that teacher buy-in "was tough for the first probably year and a half"

because it was "a lot easier to sit and learn some broad-based concept about math or yoga

or whatever" than to be an active participant in professional development. She said she

thought that teachers "bought into" teacher leadership and the promise that instruction

could be more effective. In addition, she said teachers perceived the new model would

be in place for the long term, not "here this year and gone next year," as previous

professional development initiatives had been.

The middle school principal said he got greater teacher buy-in by inviting teachers other than BLT members to share effective strategies on in-service days and then giving them small gifts when they did.

The Special Case of the High School

The only evidence of discontent over initial implementation of the new professional development model came from the high school and primarily from the assistant principal.   The assistant principal used strong language to express the frustration and stress he experienced when the new professional development model was first implemented. The principal on staff at the time has since resigned and a new principal was hired three years into the process. The assistant said that, two to 2l/2 years prior to the new model, the high school had received a three-year grant to implement a High Schools That Work framework for school improvement.

According to its website, High Schools That Work was established by the Southern Regional Education Board " to help states transform their public high schools into places where all students learn at high levels" (http://www.sreb.org/page/1137/about_high_schools_that_work.html). The framework includes ten key practices for school improvement; the grant that Antelope High School received included on-site professional development from national trainers for implementation of these key practices. According to the assistant principal, the high school staff valued the training, had bought into the concept, and believed they had a common vision for school improvement. When the new professional development model was implemented he said teachers perceived it as yet another initiative that would set a different direction for the high school. In addition, he said teachers perceived that the

initial training offered was redundant—that they had had the same thing two years previously. Although the new model was intended to empower teachers, he said, high school staff perceived it as a top-down mandate that was reversing the progress they had made under the High Schools That Work model.

In an effort to merge the two initiatives, the high school principal appointed the teacher leader of the High Schools That Work project to the building leadership team. In Year four of the new professional development initiative, when the high school began to focus on project-based learning, both the assistant principal and the principal said the two initiatives seemed more in sync. The assistant principal said the first two years of building leadership team implementation were extremely difficult at the high school, especially for team members when they gave presentations.

Members of the high school team did not verbally criticize the superintendent or members of the administration when they responded to questions about the launch of the new professional development model. There was some evidence of frustration, however. The interviewer probed a question to see if they believed the direction for the new model had come from the central office. The response to this question was unusual laughter along with the affirmative response. One team member recalled a meeting conducted to choose the professional development focus for the coming year: "We really tried to base which direction—after we were told that this was the direction we were going---on [state test] results and where our district as a whole was not meeting those standards. . . . " She did say that a positive outcome of the new model was that "we have tried to get a little more site specific."

CHAPTER 7

CYCLE OF TRANSFORMATION IN THE ANTELOPE SCHOOL DISTRICT

The superintendent and other administrators in the Antelope School District selected and launched the new professional development model with little initial teacher input. According to members of all teacher teams interviewed, teachers were not directly involved in the decision to select the new model. Despite this lack of involvement, all administrators on staff at the time except for the high school assistant principal and all teacher teams except for the high school team described the change as generally positive.

This section is a presentation of how the new model was used to deliver professional development in a different way and how that delivery changed during the four-year period being described in this study. The section includes what administrators and teachers throughout the district did to transform the district's professional development program. Strategies included 1) professional development focus and delivery; 2) superintendent and central office support; 3) within-district coherence, system alignment and continuity; 4) teacher leadership; 5) principal involvement in professional development; 6) accountability; and 7) adaptability.

Professional Development Focus and Delivery

This description of the professional development focus and delivery is based on a synthesis of comments made during interviews of participants, personal knowledge, and personal communication with the lead consultant assigned to the project (ongoing, 2005-2009).

Once the new model had been selected, the superintendent in the Antelope School District negotiated a contract with external consultants. Terms of this contract spelled out

both the responsibilities of the district and the responsibilities of the consultants to provide professional development for the district's five building leadership teams.

During the first year of implementation the teams gathered at a central location four times during the school year for a daylong training session with the consultants. The professional development took take place in the morning with three or four consultants taking turns giving presentations on effective instructional strategies. Then teams broke for lunch and training resumed for part of the afternoon. Teams then had planning time in the afternoon toward the end of the day. Initially, teams were directed to replicate with fidelity the training that consultants had presented. One week after each training day, teams returned to the central location, met in separate facilities with the staff from the schools they served in, and delivered the training they had received the week before. The structure of in-service sessions was a half day of training in the morning, a break for lunch, and then departmental meetings and grade level meetings in the afternoon. Consultants followed up with principals and building leadership team members between in-service days to help assure that teachers were using strategies they had learned during the training sessions in their classrooms.

This plan was implemented as designed in the first year of project implementation. It was modified in years two, three and four based on feedback from teachers and district needs determined by administrators. Modifications in Years 2 and 3 were not significant; trainers still focused on instructional strategies but, according to participants, the amount of content presented was less than in Year 1. In Year four, content was differentiated for elementary, middle school and high school teachers. Elementary teachers focused on standards-based report cards, middle school teachers

focused on differentiated instruction, and high school teachers focused on project-based learning.   Contracts between the district and the intermediate service agency were re-negotiated annually.

Although the structure for the new professional development model had been determined by the superintendent and the administrative team, the content for the training had not been determined during the contract negotiations process. According to the curriculum director, the district's Instructional Council had been responsible for "setting up professional development" prior to implementation of the new model but "did not play a very large role in professional development" once the new model was in place. In the spring of 2005, members of the NCA target committees for reading and math met with the external consultants to decide what content the consultants would focus on during the ensuing year of training. With direction from consultants, the target committees chose the Marzano, Pickering and Pollock instructional strategies book (2001). The nine instructional strategies featured in this book and covered during the course of the professional development program are as follows:

- identifying similarities and differences

- summarizing and note taking

- reinforcing effort and providing recognition

- homework and practice

- representing knowledge

- learning groups

- setting objectives and providing feedback

- generating and testing hypotheses

- cues, questions, and advance organizers

These strategies are not content-specific and can be used by all instructional staff across grade levels and across all content areas. They were selected to meet the needs of all teachers K-12 and to provide unity and coherence in the new district program. Above all, they were selected because the research indicates they will positively impact student learning. Thus, they were compatible with the district's goals to improve student achievement in reading and mathematics. Target committees also decided that, during the first year of the project, training would focus on cues, questions and advance organizers. There were members on all teacher teams who said they were not certain how the decision was made to use the instructional strategies book as the foundation for the district's professional development program. Former members of the NCA target committees who served on building leadership teams at the time of the interviews affirmed that that they had participated in this decision with guidance from consultants.

<div align="center">Superintendent and Central Office Support</div>

The superintendent said that, when the new model was first implemented, he tried to carefully outline expectations with the principals but, at the same time, not be too prescriptive in how they carried out his directives. He required that building principals be "very actively engaged" with their teams: "They are. . . involved in all of the . . . training that occurs in a district level, they are involved in the planning and carrying out of those objectives in each of their buildings." The director of special services referred to the district-level team training as "somewhat of a sacred cow. . . ."

In contrast to the traditional model, principals were expected to participate in professional development activities along with their teachers. The superintendent said,

"When it comes time for in-service day, they are actively engaged. The principals are not off someplace else meeting. . . while the teachers are having in-service." He also required that principals gather evidence that teachers were implementing the new strategies they were learning. Specifically, he asked them to consider it as part of the performance evaluation process.

The superintendent said that, for the first two years of implementation, he showed his support and indicated the program was a personal priority by attending the training sessions along with the principals and teams: ". . . I wanted the staff to know from my own presence that this was important to me, that I supported it, and I am willing to commit time to it as well." He described how he handled "considerable change in the leadership team" during the early years of implementation:

> I have always had to be careful each time I brought in a new principal, or a curriculum director, or whatever to make sure that I appropriately orient them. . . to the model, how it is working, what my expectations are. . . and in each case, I think they have been very very willing to work within that model, and I think they have adapted quite well. And they brought new knowledge, and in some cases, new energy to the process and I think overall, it has improved.

The director of special services and the curriculum director were also expected to attend and actively engage in the district-level training sessions. The director of special services is responsible for supervising 75 staff, mostly special education teachers, who serve in schools across the district. As a result, she rotates among buildings, co-presenting with a different team each time.

The curriculum director had been a high school teacher at the time the new model was implemented and was beginning his second year in the new position at the time of the interviews. He described himself as the primary liaison between the building leadership teams and the external consultants. He said his responsibilities included gathering feedback from building leadership teams, determining needs for further training and helping to support diversification at the building level. He met with each Building leadership team in the spring of Year 3 to better determine needs for Year four. He also worked with external consultants to gather feedback from teachers through a survey after each in-service session. This feedback, he said, influenced changes to the content of the professional development program beginning in Year four.

Content changed from a district wide focus on instructional strategies to a district wide focus on technology. In addition, each grade level group—k-4, middle school, and high school—focused on a different priority area. He said one of his main roles was "to make sure that the teachers are getting the help they need from [the consulting organization] so that when they go to do the in-service, they have what they need to share with their teachers and make sure that the in-service is productive."

Within-district Coherence, System Alignment and Continuity

Six administrators and members of four teacher teams discussed the value of having everyone in the district focus on the same content during professional development sessions. One elementary principal said it is a matter of everyone in the district understanding what is going on. The elementary assistant principal said that "trying to streamline things has been beneficial because. . . you would go to a

professional development opportunity and . . . if you go from one session to the next, they wouldn't have anything to do with each other."

The director of special services said, "I like that all teachers are learning the same thing. So the Special Education teachers or Title I teachers are not off doing something separate. I expect them to have the most recent research-based lesson plans using the latest ideas, so that when they are doing inclusion or a co-teaching model they have the same information, the same training." One high school team member summed it up: "Everybody. . . every site was doing the same thing. Your essential questions, everybody had to present that, and then graphic organizers, everybody had to do that."

The curriculum director said three times that the district was not "abandoning" the focus on research-based instructional strategies in Year four but, instead, trying to incorporate them into standards-based report cards, differentiated instruction, and project-based learning at the elementary, middle school and high school levels, respectively. He also said, however, that "quite honestly the Marzano's nine strategies have not been mentioned as much as they were in prior years." One elementary principal and the middle school principal did not know for sure what the high school content focus was in Year four when the interviews took place.

The middle school principal said he believed that, when the new model was first implemented, it was important for everyone in the district to focus on the same thing: "We started using some of the same language, but the high school adapted it to their needs, the middle school adapted to our needs, and the elementary too. So I think that is the only way it could have started." He stressed the importance of all staff members receiving the same training:

. . .The only group we have allowed to branch away from this has been the counselors, and at first the counselors were getting more specialized training for their area. This year we said, 'We want you guys to sit in on our. . . training because the principals, the teachers. . . we are using a certain terminology, and. . .they have a component of learning and our kids are using that terminology.

He said the district had resisted a push from physical education teachers and other groups to "break off" from the rest of the staff and do their own thing.

An important reason for implementing the new professional development model was to provide coherence in professional development throughout the school district. The model supported the NCA district wide accreditation process. As the superintendent noted, sustainability and continuity were also top priorities. The elementary assistant principal noted that many educational innovations are cyclical; they come and go in two or three years. He said his perception of the new professional development model was that it would be sustained over time. In fact, the model is still in place as of this writing for the 2010-11 school year and the superintendent indicates it will remain in place throughout his tenure in the district (personal communication August, 2010).

Going into Year four of the new model, members of two elementary teams stressed that teachers were finally used to the change after being skeptical at first. One team member summed it up: "When we started doing in-service that way, it was hard for people to accept it and to think that it was anything that they were ever going to use. . . . Well now we are on our fourth year, people are used to it, it is the way we do things, it is good." The high school assistant principal said, " . . It took us four years but now we feel like we. . . are there."

Implementation of the new model in the high school was not initially as well received by administrators or staff as it was in the elementary schools and the middle school. Although a goal of the new model was to bring coherence to district initiatives, the high school principal perceived that it did the opposite. He feared teachers perceived the new model as yet another short-lived initiative. He described his perceptions:

> . . .I think K through 8 jumped into [the new model] at the perfect time. . . . They needed a tool, they needed some direction, they found it, they found things that they can work together on. . . [At] our high school you could not have picked a worse time to start it. If it had been two years earlier, boy I think it would have been just the answer.

The assistant principal described a mismatch between training that consultants were offering and what high school teachers needed. He said the teachers perceived that instructional strategies being covered during the training were redundant and added little to their repertoire of skills. He described the two initiatives as trains going in opposite directions. He said teachers were reluctant to suggest to the consultant a different direction because "we thought we were stepping on toes. . . .We felt like we were reflecting on the people presenting and it had nothing to do with it. . . . We were trying to slow this train down and . . . to get this one to catch up."

Teacher Leadership

The new professional development model was designed both to take advantage of existing teacher leadership and to further develop teacher leadership. Teachers on all building leadership teams are responsible for leading professional development in their

buildings. At the time of the interviews, the extent to which the principals relinquished additional decision-making authority to the team was minimal in all schools.

The curriculum director said, "I think putting teachers in leadership roles makes them stronger teachers in their own classroom. And I also think that the other teachers gain far more from their peers then they would from someone they don't know." The director of special services took a somewhat different view:

> "We have seen leaders emerge among our teaching staff. . . .These leaders have
> great power in the buildings whether it is negative or positive. They are very
> powerful people. And so we decided that if we could build more academic
> leaders in our buildings, we would have a stronger staff.

The high school principal said he saw untapped leadership potential among teachers when the school restructured the ninth grade into a small learning community. He said teachers are "more likely to get on board" if other teachers are providing a direction for the school rather than following a directive of the principal. He added that one of the most effective things about the new professional development model is that teachers are the experts that have a better understanding of what is effective in the classroom. They are "intelligent, dynamic leaders," he said. The high school principal said that the development of teacher leadership was also a goal of the High Schools That Work program. Although teachers were not expected to provide professional development, a building-level leadership team comprising teachers had been convened when the HSTW program began. According to the high school principal, this group "typically met and talked about the initiatives in our school and kind of where we wanted to go."

At both the middle school and high school other teachers besides those on the Building leadership team were invited to share strategies during in-service sessions. Both principals noted the value of acknowledging this expertise. The middle school principal also allowed team members to choose new team members when vacancies occurred. Members of the middle school team were confident that they could recommend a new professional development direction for the school if it were research-based and aligned with school and district goals.

All teacher teams described their primary leadership roles as delivering professional development. No teams described involvement in other building-level decisions apart from professional development.

The curriculum director said Building leadership team members are not the only teachers providing leadership in the schools. There are a lot of working committees in each school, he said, and principals are careful not to overload individuals and to provide leadership opportunities for many teachers. He also said that teachers within the district have assumed leadership roles at the state and national level by serving on curriculum review committees and professional organizations.

Principal Involvement in Professional Development

The superintendent's directive was clear: principals were expected to attend district-level training and to be active participants with the building leadership teams in professional development at the building. All building principals with the exception of the assistant elementary principal beginning in Year 2 followed this directive and consistently attended the district-level training. The extent to which principals actually participated in professional development delivery varied. As a floater among all district

teams, the director of special services had insights into the extent of principal involvement in professional development delivery. She acknowledged that some principals were actively involved in doing the building-level training and others had chosen to let the teachers do it exclusively. She said, "but these same principals run their staff meetings the exact same way. Some are teacher driven, some are principal driven. It is just their unique personalities."

Here is a summary of the involvement of the five principals and two assistant principals based on their own interviews and those of their teams:

High School Principal

He is actively involved in professional development planning. He said he considers himself an equal member of the team with equal input into decisions. He tries not to dictate or mandate but also recognizes that sometimes team members defer to him because of his position power. He views his role as making sure no one in the building deviates from team decisions. He does not present much during in-service sessions; he says teachers do a better job.

High School Assistant Principal

According to high school team members, he is very actively involved in planning meetings and professional development presentations. He confirmed that "absolutely" he takes a strong role in presenting information to the staff. He said "you have to model what you expect." He said the program would not be effective if he and the principal were observers rather than active participants.

Middle School Principal

In "the first few years" he said he was a an active member of the planning team and an "equal trainer."   His participation underscored the accountability component, he said. Due to other commitments, he was not doing as much of the training and the presentations in Year four. He also said he needed to "back off and let them present it so that it is truly coming from the team" and the staff did not perceive that they were "just saying what he told them to say."

Elementary Principal #3

He said at each level the administrator "probably takes a role that they are comfortable with or whatever they want to do philosophically. . . ." He described his role as "advisory." "I feel like there is no sense in having teacher leaders if I am not going to let them be teacher leaders," he said.

Elementary Assistant Principal

Although he was no longer listed as a team member on the roster beginning in Year 2, the elementary assistant principal, who serves both the largest elementary school and the middle school, says he is a member of the elementary team. He said that on building leadership team training days, since school is in session, he does not attend because "I stay back and manage buildings." He said he does attend in-service sessions and participates with elementary staff.

Elementary Principal #2

She said that initially she was "pretty directive" in what she wanted to see happen. Later she was called to an emergency meeting during team planning time and the team "lined up everything." She described this as a "reality check" for her and a realization

that she trusted team members. She said she "tries to give them that feeling that they have control over what happens with our building because. . . they are going to go back and talk to the other teachers." She was very actively involved in presentations on in-service day.

Elementary Principal #1

She is described by her team members as the "central leader" and "foundation" of the team. She actively participates in presentations on in-service days and does not believe she should ask teachers to do anything she herself cannot do.

Accountability

Accountability for implementation of instructional strategies was a major component of the new professional development model. Principals were charged by the superintendent to assure that strategies were being used in the classroom as a part of the evaluation process. Seven of the ten administrators interviewed and three of the five teacher teams described this expectation. Because all instructional staff and principals in the district experienced the same professional development content, it was easier for principals to check for classroom implementation than it was within the traditional professional development model. A member of one elementary team explained the difference between the district's traditional professional development program and the new Building leadership team model:

> When we were in . . . the big groups, depending on your personality type,
> you may not get anything and you may get a little. . . . You could sit in the back
> and you could talk to your buddies and you could pretend you were listening
> because nobody could really see you. . . Here you can't do that.

Accountability occurred on several levels. Although teacher leaders were identified to lead professional development under a new and very different model, the superintendent was clear that principals were responsible for "what happens or does not happen in that building." The superintendent said, "I have instructed principals that there really are no resisters. I mean, over time. . . they will get with the program, because that is what the expectations are, or they will be gone." The superintendent also expected principals to be actively engaged in the professional development training and in planning for professional development delivery in their buildings. In addition, he expected principals to check for classroom implementation of strategies that were being delivered:

> We also talked extensively about. . . accountability, and actually holding teachers accountable for making sure that. . . new knowledge and skills that we were providing them through the training we were providing were in fact being utilized in the classroom, and so . . . I felt very strongly and was able to communicate effectively to principals that. . . our only method for holding teachers accountable [was] on those performance reviews.

The director of special services said attending all the team training sessions was a "sacred cow" and that strategies teachers were learning were wrapped back into the evaluation process:

> One of our whole trainings a year or two ago was good questioning techniques. Now that we are trained on it and all pretty savvy we can address that in our evaluations, we can talk about effective praise, effective feedback instructional strategies being used. . . .

The curriculum director said that, because the focus in year four was on technology, principals were looking for technology integration in classrooms during their evaluations of teachers. He said the district had done some informal surveys asking teachers to explain how they are using technology to ascertain additional training needs.

All principals said accountability for classroom implementation of skills learned was an expectation when the new professional development model was put into place. Specific ways in which expectations were operationalized in the buildings varied depending on the principals' directives. One elementary team member said expectations in each building were "just a little bit different." The high school assistant principal said, for example, that he did not note in teacher evaluations whether or not specific strategies were being used, such as graphic organizers, but instead whether or not students were engaged, reaching standards and "stretched" every day."

One former middle school team member, then on an elementary team, said the middle school principal collected products from teachers and kept them in a binder. The middle school principal said that, although he checked for strategies implementation when the new model was first launched, accountability in Year four was less formal:

 I think we have advanced beyond, 'I am going to require this to be done so that it

 is being implemented.' Now it is more of, 'I know you are using this.' Trust is

 not the right word, but I mean, we just know the buy-in is there. And I think the

 administration, we use that terminology.

Members of the middle school team said accountability is built into the process. Team members ask their colleagues to bring back examples of student products generated from tools the teachers have learned about on in-service day.   One team member said,

"And a lot of times we will ask them to share, and if you randomly get called on. . . you really don't want to be put on the spot if you didn't use it."

The elementary assistant principal said he pays close attention during the evaluation process on whether or not teachers are using strategies they are learning and whether or not they are working to achieve building and district goals. He said part of his job is to make sure that instructional strategies are not just being discussed but being followed through.

According to one elementary principal, consultants provided each teacher each trimester with a document called an "Instruction Focus Strategy Lesson Plan." She said the document lists all nine strategies with reflection questions. She said she requires all members of her teaching staff to fill out this document. Members of two different elementary teams said they kept notebooks in the buildings of samples of graphic organizers they were using. The director of special services was aware of binders and said they could be found in the teachers' lounge. Elementary teachers in three schools also had to state in lesson plans where graphic organizers were being used and turn the plans into building administrators. Principals did walk-throughs with checklists to make sure teachers were including strategies and appropriate content.

<center>Adaptability</center>

Although the new professional development model was very structured when it began in the fall of 2005, teacher feedback and administrative directives led to changes in the program throughout the four-year period of this study. Staff perceptions about the effectiveness of initial implementation and the adaptations varied. Staff reaction to the initial strategies training was generally positive in the elementary and middle schools and

generally negative at the high school.   One high school team member said the training on

graphic organizers "it was not anything new and exciting," that high school teachers had

been using them for years. One teacher said, ". . .It felt like we would sit there all day

long listening to our trainers. . . and we would kind of scratch our heads at the end of the

day and say, 'Okay, we have the first half hour of in-service covered, now what are we

going to do for the next three or four hours?' So it didn't feel like it was meeting our

needs."

The superintendent said his role in supporting the new professional development

program changed during the four-year period documented in this study. He said he was

doing more work behind the scenes or on the sidelines and being less visible:

I am still pretty much interested in it. Still very much interested in its success,

but I find that I am not necessarily having to be out there carrying the banner, or

cracking the whip from behind. I mean, it really has caught on, and I think that

the building principals have been very receptive to it."

The curriculum director summarized changes in the program over the four-year

period: He said the first two years focused intently on the nine instructional strategies.

Year 3 was a review, which he believed teachers interpreted as less focused "because we

were not working on one strategy." He said that, during Year 3, he gathered feedback to

determine which areas needed to be addressed more. Information he gathered resulted in

differentiating professional development for the three grade chunks in Year four.

Information also resulted in a district-wide focus on technology integration.

The high school assistant principal, the middle school principal and members of

two elementary teacher teams said that, when the new model was first launched,

consultants presented too much content. They said teams mistakenly thought they were expected to deliver all the content to staff. One elementary team member said it was "overwhelming" to try to condense a full day of training into three to three and a half hours . Another elementary team member said staff felt "overloaded" with inadequate time to practice strategies. Another team member said they "could easily have worked one year on one strategy. The high school assistant principal said that, initially, high school in-service sessions were "horrible." He said high school team members believed they had little latitude to change the program that was presented to them and had to replicate everything. He said team members felt ill equipped to deliver what consultants had delivered and were unable to answer questions.

Teams later realized they could adapt content to fit their schools, the assistant high school principal said. At both the high school and middle school team members asked other teachers to share strategies. The high school assistant principal said the consultant assigned to them finally understood the background they have at the high school; he said the last training was "awesome." The assistant principal said that, after four years, "we finally got to the point where I think I see them working pretty close together."

The curriculum director explained that the basic train-the-trainer model remained the same in Year four with minor adjustments: prior to Year four, three or four trainers would come in on the designated training day and would each present a specific strategy or tool to the gathering of building leadership teams. There would be time for discussion and planning at the end of the day. In Year four, the teams would meet together for a couple of hours to focus on technology, a K-12 priority, but then would split into the

three grade level chunks. One consultant would work with each of the three levels in an effort to address more specific needs at that level. The curriculum director described the change:

> . . .We still meet as we always have with the [consulting organization] representative so that our trainers get the information first. They still meet and discuss what is going to work best for their school. They still go back to the school on the in-service day and divide up the work among the . . . team to present the information to the staff. The principals still follow up in the following weeks to make sure that the teachers are using the strategies. . . .So I think the concept remains constant; I don't believe we have changed the way we do business. We are just trying to make sure we cover as many strategies and needs of the classroom branching out from the limited focus that the Marzano's nine strategies had in the first couple of years of the implementation. . . .

All administrators and all teacher teams described how the professional development program had changed over its first four years of implementation, the period of this study. With one exception, the basic structure of the model grounded in teachers teaching teachers remained the same. The curriculum director said he gathered feedback from teachers through surveys conducted after each in-service session. He said that, based on this feedback, the administrative team made recommendations to the consultants to alter content with the intent of better meeting the needs of teachers.

In year four of implementation the administrative team decided that technology would be a focus of team trainings and in-service sessions and external consultants adjusted their plans accordingly. ." The middle school principal said he had modeled

technology use by conducting paperless staff meetings with agendas and meeting notes posted electronically. Teachers were not allowed to print paper copies. Even so, it was not enough to get all teachers to use the technology. He and other administrators had teachers who did not know "how to turn the computer on or are struggling." Another principal said that teachers had never received training on the features of their new notebook computers. Even though some teachers are self-learners, others don't take the time, she said. Thus, the administrative team made the decision to use the Building leadership team structure to focus on technology integration strategies.

Also beginning in Year four each grade chunk—elementary, middle school, and high school—focused on a different area of professional development. Elementary teachers studied standards-based report cards, middle school teachers focused on differentiated instruction, and high school teachers learned about project-based learning.

Teachers were less likely than administrators to believe they influenced this decision. Although he said he was reluctant to take "credit" for it, the high school principal said it was his idea to focus on project-based learning because it was a natural outgrowth of the High Schools that Work initiative and an attempt to address the "relevance" tenet of that program. Prior to joining the staff at Antelope School District, he had worked in another district that embraced the High Schools That Work program and favored continuing it in his new role as high school principal in the Antelope School District.

Members of the high school team said they did not know who decided to focus on project-based learning in year four. One team member believed it was the assistant principal; another assumed it was the principal who was "pretty gung ho with that." One

team member said "probably both." The team did acknowledge their meeting with the curriculum director the previous spring wherein project-based learning and more technology were discussed but one team member said "I do not remember how we came to that conclusion." Members of the high school team said they believed the decision to customize training for the different sites was a positive move, and they believed the training was "better this year." They said that having only high school team members work with a consultant, instead of the whole group, made communication and idea sharing easier.

Members of the high school team described the training on graphic organizers during the first two years as ineffective and redundant for high school teachers. Despite year four being better, staff reaction to professional development in project-based learning might still be viewed by some teachers as "the same old song and dance," according to one team member. Two team members said they did not feel training from outside consultants was worth the cost, that they had the expertise to design the training themselves. Team members agreed that lack of common planning time made it difficult to develop cross-disciplinary projects and thus put their training to good use.

The middle school principal said his team brainstormed ideas for the building-level focus that he viewed as "superficial":

It could easily just have been. . . redos. And I said, 'You know? We lost Title services. We are in school improvement. We are doing a great job,' but I said, 'We need to pick a deeper subject.' And it may have been a stretch because. . . it has been difficult.

He went on to say that the new focus on differentiated instruction had not turned out as well as he expected because the consultant had focused mainly on "information" and not instructional strategies that could be used in the classroom.

Perceptions of members of the middle school team regarding the selection of differentiated instruction as a focus match their principal's. One team member said that, although teachers had identified a variety of building-level needs through a survey, they had not chosen differentiated instruction *per se.* One team member said they had never heard of differentiated instruction until the first Building leadership team training session that year. Another team member suggested they knew it as individualized instruction. Their understanding was that consultants had recommended that differentiated instruction would include several of the topics teachers had listed to help them improve instruction. Another team member, new to the group, said she perceived the new focus as narrower than in the first three years of the program. With only one consultant making one presentation to the team, there was not as much content to choose from as in previous years. This narrower focus made it more difficult to find the right material to pass along to colleagues on in-service day and required more planning time. Another team member elaborated:

> . . .We just do not have the flexibility where we used to just get to pick everything and say again, 'This will work, this will work, this will work.' And it has not worked very well this year at all. It has been a struggle, and we usually have to take a whole other time period that we never had to do to get together for planning an additional afternoon.

Team members said they were also more reluctant to reject the consultant's suggestions, since they were presented by one individual instead of three or four: "It isn't easy for us to say, 'We don't want to do this" or 'we don't. . . like this. That's not happening as much this time." They described the situation as "uncomfortable" and as less desirable than when a team of consultants presented six or eight strategies that could be adapted for their grade level.

One elementary principal said that, despite gathering teacher input, principals were primarily responsible for identifying their areas of focus. He said the district's elementary schools had been transitioning to standards-based report cards steadily over the previous five years and felt they needed more consistency. The elementary assistant principal said he did not know for sure why the content of the professional development program was changing from the Marzano strategies to more site-specific topics. Members of one elementary team also said they did not know why the change was being made or who had made the decision.

Members of another elementary team agreed that administration and consultants were responsible for changing the content focus of the training. They said the decision was made because the district had purchased technology and there was an expectation that teachers would use it. One teacher on this team said the strategies training was also beginning to get "too upper-level." She said diversifying the training into three different content areas was an attempt to make it more grade level appropriate. Members of this team said this decision was definitely influenced by feedback they had offered through the surveys and to the curriculum director. Their perception was that the training in Year four was "more focused" than it had been in previous years.

Another elementary principal said she believed the Year four focus was intended to link the research-based instructional strategies with technology. She said that she did not consistently see the connection, however. She affirmed that the decision for the change was made by administrators in conjunction with consultants. Members of her team said that feedback from teacher surveys and input they provided to the curriculum director were definitely considered in making changes to the program.

Because central office administrators and principals were responsible for making the decision to change the content focus in Year four, they all supported the move. There was considerable diversity in the way teacher teams viewed these changes.

All teacher teams agreed that one technology in-service session in Year four was ineffective. Administrators, along with external consultants, had decided to suspend the usual train-the-trainer model and gather all elementary staff K-5 in a gymnasium for training by an outside expert. According to one team member, this included about 110 individuals. Given the heavy load on the district's technology infrastructure, many teachers were not able to access the internet-based resources that were being demonstrated during the training. One elementary team member described it as a "disaster." Another elementary team member said "it was a real waste of a day." Another elementary teacher said, "We were going back to something that we had worked for many years to get away from." Yet another team member said teachers were just getting used to the new model being interesting, good and predictable and that the departure "left a really bad taste in everybody's mouth, I think." Negative teacher feedback from that session prompted a return to the original train-the-trainer model for the subsequent in-service session with much more positive results. Building leadership team members were

once again responsible for providing professional development to other teachers from that school in ways they believed would be well accepted.

<div align="center">Changes in Central Office Administration</div>

<div align="center">and Building Leadership Team Composition</div>

According to documents provided by the district, the composition of the central office administration and the building leadership teams changed significantly over the four-year period of this study. In year two of the program, the district hired a new high school principal and one new elementary principal. The assistant principal assigned to the district's largest elementary school was no longer listed as a team member in years two, three, and four because he did not attend training. In year three of the program, the district hired a new curriculum director.   Twenty-two teachers comprised the five teams in year one. There were 21 teachers in year four, the high school having eliminated one team member. Of the 22 teachers on the five teams created in Year 1, only 7 remained on a team in Year four.

Table 3

Change in Composition of Building Leadership Teams 2005-2009

Year	High School Team	Middle School Team	Elementary Team #1	Elementary Team #2	Elementary Team #3
1 2005-06	5 teachers Asst principal Principal	4 teachers Principal	5 teachers Asst principal Principal	4 teachers Principal	4 teachers Principal
2 2005-06	One different teacher from previous year New principal	No change	Asst principal no longer listed as team member	One different teacher from previous year	No change

				New principal	
3 2006-07	One different teacher from previous year One less teacher from previous year	3 different teachers from previous year	3 different teachers from previous year	One different teacher from previous year	One different teacher from previous year
4 2009-09	2 different teachers from previous year	No change	1 different teacher from previous year	One different teacher from previous year	One different teacher from previous year

There was no systematic plan at the district or level to change the team composition. Instead, vacancies occurred primarily when members no longer wanted to serve on the team or left the district for other positions or retirement. The superintendent explained the evolving nature of the teams:

> . . . Those groups have been dynamic. They have changed. . . over time because we wanted to be careful that. . . we didn't create the perception that this was some elite group that nobody could break into once they were. . . in, so we do have some turnover and just normal attrition has created opportunities for us to change those group and continue to invite new people to participate.

One elementary principal said he used an informal process to rotate one or two members of the team off each year. He reasoned this would reduce the possibility that all members would quit at the same time and assure continuity. He said he would prefer to have no more than two leave the team in any given year. On other teams, vacancies occurred when members either left the district or asked to be released from team responsibilities. In all instances but one, principals selected team member replacements.

The middle school principal said he had turned over the selection of new team members to existing team members.

One other elementary principal said that replacing team members was easy because teachers "perceived it as a fairly safe step." She said team members have discovered her teachers are fun to work with, "roll with the punches," give honest feedback and do their best. She said, "I have never had to beg, borrow, steal, slip money under the table to get somebody to pick up that role."

CHAPTER 8

OUTCOMES

At the time that interviews were conducted between November of 2008 and

February of 2009, Antelope School District was in the middle of its fourth year of

implementation of the new professional development model. Participants described ways

in which the program had impacted professional practice, student learning, and

organizational effectiveness within the district. In addition, they talked about lessons

learned and advice they would give to other schools considering implementation of the

Building leadership team the model.

Perceived Impact on Professional Practice

Teacher Leadership Development

The new professional development model was designed both to take advantage of

existing teacher leadership and to further develop teacher leadership. Evidence suggests

that teacher members of building leadership teams improved their skills relative to

planning and delivering professional development in their schools. Eight of the ten

administrators interviewed and four of the five teams described this impact. One

elementary principal summarized the statements of administrators: "They are growing in

their confidence to be leaders. . . . These people are now more willing to step forward as

leaders in other ways just because they have felt successful as being [name of

professional development program] trainers." At the time of the interviews, the extent to

which the principals relinquished additional decision-making authority to the team was

minimal in all schools, however. Teams rarely shared power and authority with principals

on issues other than professional development.

The superintendent perceived that some principals may have used teams in other ways to make decisions within buildings and some did not. He said opportunities had come up for building leadership teams to address issues other than professional development but that he had not specifically addressed these opportunities with administrators. He said that some of his younger administrators and specifically his female administrators were "more inclined to engage in activities that would move in that direction. . . ." In fact, only two principals, both in elementary schools and both women, said they used their building leadership teams in an advisory capacity for school issues related to school improvement other than professional development.

As a floater from among teams, the director of special services did not perceive that responsibilities for Building leadership team members extended beyond professional development delivery. She did say, however, that "there is probably some leadership beyond that that is naturally evolving and that is what we want to occur in our buildings." By this she said she envisioned that team members become a resource for other teachers in terms of "instructional ideas" and effective instructional delivery. The curriculum director echoed this idea: "It is about teachers showing each other and sharing with each other what they are doing and everyone benefitting from that."

One elementary principal concurred, saying that, although he does "not use them as a sounding board or anything like that at this point," they are taking and expanding their leadership roles by frequently serving as a resource to other teachers. The elementary assistant principal agreed: "Their job is pretty basic in the fact that they facilitate, that they set up professional development opportunity. So no, it does not necessarily branch into other areas." Serving also part time in the middle school, he said

he perceives that at the middle school, "it is a bit more driven from the building level leader" than the elementary schools he works in. He did acknowledge, however, that teachers' opinions are valued in both schools.

The director of special services said teachers were perceived as leaders by virtue of the extensive training they had received. These teachers included both those on building leadership teams and others who had been involved in extensive training in other areas, such as reading instruction.

Improvement of Instruction

An expressed goal of the new professional development was increased competence among teachers to implement research-based instructional strategies in the classroom. Eight administrators and three teacher teams, including the high school team, expressed this as a positive outcome of the new model.

One member of the high school team said that technology skills among teachers had improved to a large extent. Another high school teacher said that, even though instructional strategies introduced were not new, they were reinforced through the training.

Members of the middle school team said that teachers were learning to blend technology skills with instructional strategies. They used the example of projecting a Venn diagram and filling it in as students observe. One team member said that classroom use of technology was "huge" as a result of the training. When teachers in their building use common strategies and tools, students benefit, middle school team members said. As an example, they said that initially students didn't "get" graphic organizers. When everyone in the building began using them and students caught on, instructional time was

saved across the curriculum. One team member said, ". . .So it is like we as teachers are

doing things consistently and these kids are seeing that things go throughout. . . .

Another member said, "We are consistent. We are a lot more consistent."

One elementary principal listed "capacity building" as a major outcome of the

professional development initiative.

A members of one elementary team said that, despite built-in accountability

measures, some teachers may still choose not to implement strategies they are learning.

For some teachers "it is . . . very much more on the surface than it is truly making that a

part of your teaching, which is then impacting the learning," she said. All team members

concurred, however, that the majority of teachers are viewing the new model as an

opportunity for professional growth and have embraced it: "I mean, it is part of our job

to get better and grow and so I really do look at it that way."

Members of another elementary team stressed the importance of the focus on data

analysis. One member explained:

> I think this whole program that we worked on has really forced all teachers
>
> to be a lot more familiar with what the content standards even are at their
>
> grade level. . . . They used to look at the teacher's manual and this is what they
>
> taught. Well now they know what needs to be hit harder on in that book.

Perceived Impact on Student Learning

Without conducting rigorous scientifically based research with control groups and

treatment groups, it is difficult to link specific improvement programs and strategies with

improved student learning outcomes. Only the superintendent, the elementary assistant

principal, and members of one elementary team specifically addressed this issue. The

superintendent said evaluations of the new professional development model did not

include formally measuring impacts on student achievement:

> Our main source of data right now on student achievement is Dakota STEP.
> I think right now we are still probably focusing more on the input side of that
> process, looking for a good solid evidence that teachers are making effective
> use of those practices, trusting. . . that the research is right. . . that over time
> we will in fact improve and enhance student achievement, but I can't say we
> have any data to support that yet.

The elementary assistant principal said skills teachers were learning through the

new professional development program had "absolutely" impacted teaching and learning.

He said that impacts appear minimal because some schools are still struggling to meet

AYP:

> But I think also too, there is a flawed system there. But I think if you get past
> that and you just look at data. . . you are going to see students are learning
> more and they are learning better than they have in the past. So I think we are
> definitely doing things the right way.

The largest of the rural elementary schools in Antelope School District was

named a Blue Ribbon School in 2008 based on results of the state test. At the time of this

designation, the new professional development model had been in place for three years.

Only two schools in the state received this designation for 2008 and only 320 schools

across the nation were recognized. The Blue Ribbon Schools award honors schools for

helping students achieve at very high levels and for making significant progress in

closing the achievement gap.

One member of the recognized school said, "I think obviously something must be working right since our school has made such improvement over the past five years." Another member of the team pointed out that none of the elementary schools within the district had been designated in need of improvement.

Perceived Impact on Organizational Effectiveness

Focus

Clarity of focus was both a goal and an outcome of the new professional development model. It was cited by nine of ten administrators and four of five teacher teams as integral to the change process. The previous program had been viewed across the district as fragmented and incoherent. In contrast, the new model created a systematic process wherein all schools could work toward common district goals and all teachers could learn common instructional strategies. With input from staff, principals wrote and submitted to the superintendent annual action plans that included scheduled professional development activities. One elementary principal summed it up: "We are a lot more focused on the 'Where are we going' . . . and we are all hearing the same message." Another elementary principals said, ". . . Even the grade level meetings. . . are more focused and the department level meetings are more focused. . . ." A member of one elementary team said she believed there was more "unity" in the district as a result of the new professional development model.

Culture of High Expectations

The superintendent specifically stated that the new professional development and the accountability measures inherent in the model were intended to create a "culture of. . . and a certain level of professional expectation." It was clear from the interviews that a

higher level of strategies implementation occurred under the new professional

development model than under the old traditional model. One principal explained:

> . . .teachers realized the district was serious about those things being implemented
>
> in teaching and learning. We wanted to see that the investment we were making
>
> in people and resources was paying off. She said the message was that passive
>
> participation in professional development was no longer an option. . . .

The assistant high school principal also suggested that the new model encourages

"working with your colleagues and trying to build professionalism."

Members of both the middle school team and one elementary team said that peers

training peers eases the stress of learning new things and leads to a level of comfort that

the traditional model does not: Elementary team members engaged in this exchange:

> I think we go into areas that a lot of people are uncomfortable in and it is always
>
> easier to stay inside your box than get out of your box. So it has been scary. A
>
> lot of people have been used to just coming in and here is my curriculum manual
>
> and I am opening it up to page one and I am going to go page by page until I get
>
> to May and then I am done teaching. And with the [name of professional
>
> development program] training it has opened up so many more avenues and so
>
> many more ways of teaching and ideas of teaching and now technology is being
>
> thrown in, which is the big scary piece. . . . And so I think the [name of
>
> professional development program] team is really good at making our colleagues
>
> feel comfortable and that it is okay to try and it is okay to fail and it is okay to get
>
> frustrated and mad. Whatever other thing you want to say about it. . . and it is
>
> okay because you grow from that.

One elementary principal said expectations crossed job roles:

I just feel it was a really good step forward in building relationships between administrators and teachers. The teachers now know that administrators are participating in in-service too and we are not just there. We are actually accountable for our level of participation there too. So I think that has lessened the thinking that 'Well, yeah. They plan in-service but they don't even know. . . . They're not even there, they're not even checking them, they're not even participating. So why do we care'? Now we are there and we are participating and we are accountable too. We are accountable to the superintendent to ensure that our staff are implementing the things that we are spending the time and the resources on.

Culture of Collaboration

Three administrators and two teacher teams described a culture of collaboration in the district and in the schools as an important outcome of the new professional development model. The high school principal stressed that for his school to successfully implement project-based learning, teacher collaboration was critical. He said the keys to success were "finding the leaders in your school and getting people to talk. Hopefully creating an atmosphere with teachers that encourages open dialogue, nonthreatening environment." He said that despite scheduling challenges which make collaboration difficult, the ninth grade Small Learning Community had "set the groundwork" for collaboration and that there was "some" collaboration happening at other grade levels as well.

The high school assistant principal said, "We want to actually build Professional Learning Communities at each grade if we could, and that is kind of our goal with project based learning. He said the ninth grade teachers in the small learning community are already seeing the advantages to collaboration. He acknowledged that, for more collaboration to happen in the other grades, teachers needed more common planning time.

Members of the middle school team and two elementary teams said that teacher sharing is an important outcome of the new professional development structure. They said they always build in collaboration and work time during in-service sessions. One team member said they would like to observe each other's classrooms but the schedule makes that difficult. Team members said the new model was "definitely" an improvement over the previous professional development program wherein outside experts did all of the content delivery. They said teachers in their building appreciate having other teachers do the training: "They are comfortable; it is a comfortable day," one team member said. Another added, "You are more apt to ask questions and interact."

One elementary principal said teachers are talking a lot more about student achievement as a result of the new model: "This year is a hot button issue for us with the standards-based report cards, but it has got the staff all talking about it, talking about assessments, talking about rubrics for defining proficiencies and things. If they are talking about it I think then they are cognizant of it when they go back into the classroom. So I think there is a direct correlation. . . to the training that we are doing, getting the teachers on board with and. . . performing it in the classroom."

He and one other elementary principal said that structuring professional development so that grade level teams can work together resulted in more collaboration. One principal said,

> . . . We were able to do our. . . training within our own building site before we joined up with the other groups. So you had grade level building, you had cross-curricular, cross grade level team building, you have pairs involved in discussions, you had specials teachers involved in the discussions. So I think it really built some of the collegiality within our own building.

The elementary assistant principal said , "without question, the dialogue has improved."

Institutionalization and Sustainability

The superintendent talked about the importance of any change effort becoming institutionalized within an organization. Relative to the Building leadership team model, he discussed giving up power and control in the interest of shared leadership:

> . . . Over time you have to be willing to move away from a leadership role and work more as a superintendent and be more of a support and encouragement and resource provider. And a person who sustains. And sometimes you have to let it take turns that you maybe might not have taken if you were still calling all the shots. You have to be willing to accept that. It may turn out a little different than you had anticipated. . . but it really is going to be institutionalized. . . and it does not leave when you leave. If I was to leave the . . . teams would be around for a while. I think they would probably continue with that. I am not saying that it would never change, but I think it would stay around for a while because I think

they are having some success with it and I think they see real value in it and that

is why it should stay around. . . . So you have to suppress your ego, I suppose, a

little bit.

He also discussed the importance of continued support of the program to ensure

its continuation. He said that, despite the need for budget cuts and reductions in staffing,

funding for the professional development would not be cut: "We invest considerable

dollars in this, but I will tell you. . . that is not something that I am considering at this

point reducing. It remains a very high priority."

Other administrators affirmed the superintendent's position. The director of

special services said, "For the time being we do not have other in-service priorities or

ideas on how to change it completely nor do we really want to." The curriculum director

said that allocating professional development money to support the new model was a

higher priority than allocating money for teachers to attend professional conferences."

The curriculum director said also that sustainability of the model is also more

likely because No Child Left Behind includes a sustainability component that it is not

based on the "latest greatest idea":

> . . . That is probably why teachers in the past have been so disillusioned by in-
> service because a lot of what was promoted did fade away in a short amount of
> time, and teachers were reluctant to invest time and effort into the latest greatest
> strategy knowing that it probably wouldn't even be around in two or three years. .
> . . Having the chance to share good teaching practices—that is not going to
> change over time. That will be a constant that remains.

High school principal said he does "not really see the intent of [name of professional development program] changing."

<div align="center">Reported Lessons Learned</div>

During the interviews, participants were asked to offer advice to other schools and districts that might be considering a similar professional development transformation. This advice constitutes lessons learned after nearly four years of program implementation. Sixteen separate suggestions were offered by individuals and members of teams interviewed. In some instances, the suggestion was made by only one individual or team. In other cases, the suggestion was offered multiple times:

Table 4

Advice on How to Replicate the Building Leadership Team Model Elsewhere

Suggestion	Individual or Team making the suggestion
Be philosophically aligned with the idea of teacher leadership and building capacity for teacher leadership	Superintendent, curriculum director
Understand the change process and do not fear it; change takes time	Elementary assistant principal, two elementary teams
Understand that focus and coherence are important; do not overload teachers with too much information at one time	High school assistant principal, elementary principal, four teacher teams
Expect all professional staff to participate; avoid splinter groups who wish to study different content	Director of special services
Expect administrators to participate actively in the training and in the professional development planning in their buildings	Two elementary principals, high school team
Take advantage of existing teacher expertise; shared personal practice is an important component of professional learning	Curriculum director, high school team, middle school team, one elementary team

Remember that collaboration is difficult without deliberately scheduling time into busy schedules	One elementary principal
Select team members purposefully; consider the advantages and disadvantages of using strong, experienced teacher leaders or a combination of strong leaders and novice teachers, teachers with leadership potential, or even resisters	High school principal, high school assistant principal, two elementary principals, middle school team
View team members as co-learners with their colleagues, not experts	Middle school team
Expect administrators to share power with teachers	Superintendent, curriculum director, high school principal, high school assistant principal, one elementary principal
Seek external facilitation and support when launching the new model	Elementary assistant principal
Assure that training is relevant to the needs of adult learners	High school assistant principal, high school team, middle school team
Gather regular feedback from colleagues; expect not all of it to be positive	Middle school team, one elementary team
Remain flexible	Middle school team
Build camaraderie within the team	High school assistant principal
Realize that the needs of elementary, middle school and high school teachers may differ	High school team

Four suggestions made most frequently were 1) understand that focus and coherence are important; don't overload teachers with too much information; 2) take advantage of existing teacher expertise; shared personal practice is an important component of professional learning; 3) select team members purposefully; consider the advantages and disadvantages of using strong, experienced teacher leaders or a combination of strong leaders and novice teachers, teachers with leadership potential, or

even resisters; and 4) Expect administrators to share power with teachers. The first two of these suggestions were made most frequently by teacher teams. The third suggestion was made most frequently by administrators. The fourth suggestion was made exclusively by administrators, including the superintendent.

CHAPTER 9

PROFESSIONAL STAFF AS LEARNING COMMUNITY QUESTIONNAIRE

The *School Professional Staff as Learning Community Questionnaire* (Hord,

1996) was administered in October of 2008 to all professional staff in the Antelope

School District (See Appendix B). Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Paper

copies of the survey with attached instructions and an Informed Consent cover letter were

distributed to principals in the buildings one week prior to a scheduled in-service day.

Completed surveys were collected from the principals on the in-service day. Surveys

were collected from the high school group, the middle school group, and the three

elementary school groups served by different building leadership teams. At the time the

survey was administered, the district was beginning its fourth school year of model

implementation.

This questionnaire is a three-page instrument assessing the implementation of a

professional learning community among school staff. The survey consists of five main

categories: shared leadership, shared visions, collective creativity, peer review and

supportive conditions/capacities. Each category contains descriptors and sub-items with

an individual Likert response scale of 5 (high) to 1 (low).

According to researchers who field-tested this instrument, it has several uses. It

can be used as a screening, filtering or assessment tool to ascertain the maturity of staffs

as learning communities (Hord, Meehan, Orletsky & Sattes, 1999, p.2). This information

can help researchers conduct studies of schools that are clear examples of communities of

learners and provide insights on how professional learning communities are created in

schools. An inquiry into a mature professional learning community would produce a

great deal of information about the transformation of a staff. In addition, the instrument

can be used to collect baseline data and determine whether successful progress is being

made toward developing a professional learning community in a school. It can be used to

explore the pacing and amount of time required by different schools in different contexts.

It can be used as a diagnostic tool to collect formative data for the purpose of identifying

support and assistance needed by a school staff as it makes the transition. The instrument

can facilitate and support studies of how principals or other district leaders work with

staff to promote staff collaboration and efficacy. Finally, it can be used during the

sustainability period after a professional learning community has been established to

ascertain whether the process is continuing to produce maturity or waning.

The field test of this instrument determined that it actually measured one overall

construct, rather than five distinct constructs (Meehan, Orletsky & Sattes, 1997).

Therefore, the individual items were combined into one total scale, which is how the data

are presented in this report   The total scale score indicates the extent to which the

teachers believe their school is a positive learning environment and is supportive as a

learning community. The higher the total scale score, the more positively the school is

viewed as a professional learning community.

When the schools are subgrouped into three levels—elementary, middle/junior

high, and high school—the instrument differentiates the school faculties in terms of their

development as professional learning communities. The purpose of administering the

questionnaire in this study was to gather additional descriptive data to complement the

qualitative data gathered through interviews.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics for the Hord Scale by Elementary,

Middle and High School Groups and the Full Group

Number of Surveys	Minimum Score (17)	Maximum Score (85)	Mean Scale Score	Standard Deviation
Elementary Group #1: Rural Schools				
20	43	73	60.10	9.66
Elementary Group #2: Two small community schools				
15	45	82	62.73	9.79
Elementary Group #3: District's largest elementary school				
39	35	74	58.87	9.11
Full Elementary Group				
74	35	82	59.99	9.39
Middle School Group				
35	43	75	59.51	6.21
High School Group				
47	50	84	64.02	8.08
Full Group				
156	35	84	61.10	8.55

Surveys were collected in groups that aligned with the district's five building

leadership teams. 156 of a possible 199 surveys were returned district-wide for a total

return rate of 78.39%. The range of possible scores was 17-85 on the 17 items clustered

into the five categories.   A total mean score of 51 would represent an average response

of three on the five-point Likert scale. Elementary Group #1 consisted of the eight

smallest rural schools in the district. A total of 20 surveys were returned. Among the

returned surveys the minimum score for this group was 43 and the maximum score was

73. The mean was 60.10. Elementary Group #2 consisted of two schools in small towns

near district headquarters that are served by one principal. A total of 15 surveys were

returned from this group. The minimum score in this group was 45 and the maximum

score was 82. The mean score was 62.73. Elementary School #3 is the largest

elementary school in the district and the one located in the town with district

headquarters. A total of 39 surveys were returned from this group. The minimum score

was 35 and the maximum score was 82. The mean score for this group was 59.99.

All elementary school scores were combined to net the full elementary group

score. A total of 74 surveys produced a minimum score of 35 and a maximum score of

82. The mean for all elementary surveys was 59.99. The middle school group included

35 surveys with a minimum score of 43 and a maximum score of 75. The mean score for

middle school staff was 59.51. The high school group returned 47 surveys with a

minimum score of 50 and a maximum score of 84. The mean score for the high school

group was 64.02.

A rank ordering of schools or groups of schools from lowest to highest is as

follows:

Elementary Group #3 (largest elementary school)	58.87
Middle School	59.51
Elementary Group #1 (rural schools)	60.10
Elementary Group #2 (two small community schools)	62.73

High School   64.02

All 156 scores were combined to create an aggregate district score. The minimum score for the full group was 35 and the maximum score was 84. The mean score was 61.10. Elementary groups #1 and #3 and the middle school scored below the district average. Elementary group #2 and the high school scored above the district average.

CHAPTER 10

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this case study was to describe the transformation of one school district's professional development program. The grand tour question guided this study: How do school leaders initiate, support and sustain a professional learning community within a school district accustomed to more traditional models of professional development? I reported school leaders' actions in implementing a model to replace the district's existing professional development program. I described actions that school leaders took to support and sustain the new model.

In this section I provide responses to the first five subquestions that were derived from the grand tour question for this study. Responses include a summary of the findings outlined in chapters eight and nine and conclusions that I drew based on a thèse findings. My response to the sixth subquestion constitutes recommendations.

Summary and Conclusions

1. What factors influence school leaders to select and apply a professional learning community model?

Both external and internal factors influenced school leaders to consider changing their existing, traditional professional development program. External factors were (a) the No Child Left Behind Act, (b) the launch of Educational Service Agencies (ESAs) in South Dakota, (c) implementation of a successful professional development model in a neighboring school district, and (d) administrator awareness of external data and research. The No Child Left Behind Act raised the level of accountability for student achievement within the district. Educational Service Agencies were created within the

state to assist districts in meeting new accountability requirements. These agencies encouraged districts to improve student achievement through improved instructional practice. They suggested that improved instructional practice would occur with intensive, targeted professional development for teachers that was research-based and aligned with building and district goals. A professional development innovation in a neighboring school district offered a model for this new approach. This model sought to create professional learning communities within the district and its schools. Based on research that administrators in the Antelope School District had been reading and discussing, this new model seemed viable. It seemed to hold promise as a more effective alternative to their traditional professional development program.

Two important internal factors also influenced school leaders to select and apply a professional learning community model. The district had just begun a new accreditation process through the North Central Association that called for a common vision, goals and improvement strategies across the district. In addition, there was widespread discontent among both administrators and teachers with the district's existing professional development program. This program, a series of unrelated, short-term workshops delivered mostly by outside experts, lacked coherence and continuity. It was viewed by a wide majority of participants in this study as extremely ineffective.

External pressures, internal discontent with the status quo, and North Central accreditation requirements all converged to influence the superintendent and other school administrators to initiate the change. The factor most often mentioned by teachers was discontent with the district's existing professional development program. The combination of factors created opportunities for the superintendent and other

administrators to initiate the change with little resistance among teachers, especially at the elementary and middle school levels. Discontent with the new model surfaced at the high school after the new model was implemented.

2. Which individuals' commitments are essential to initiating change in the school district?

Commitments from leaders at the district and building levels were essential to initiate change in the school district. These commitments were necessary but not sufficient to ensure broad-based support among teachers for the change.

The superintendent provided strong leadership in the selection and implementation of the new professional development model. He advocated the change and discussed it with other administrators at their regular monthly meetings during the spring of 2005. Evidence indicates that administrators supported the change. The superintendent negotiated the contract for training with the regional service provider. Teachers were not involved in the selection and implementation process until members of the NCA target committees in reading and mathematics met with consultants that spring to determine the content focus of the program. The superintendent directed principals to choose members of their building leadership teams, and these teams met for their first training session in June of 2005. Unless they were also members of target committees, Building leadership team members had little information about the new model, their leadership responsibilities or the first year's content focus until they attended this training.

The superintendent secured the support and commitment of central office administrators and principals prior to implementation of the new model. In this case, the

commitments of teachers selected to serve on building leadership teams were not secured

prior to implementation of the new model. This lack of information and orientation to the

new model did not adversely affect implementation at the elementary and middle school

levels. At the high school level, however, implementation met with resistance among the

building's assistant principal, Building leadership team members and staff.   Study

participants reported frustration and discontent with the content that was being delivered.

The current principal did not comment on the launch of the new model because he joined

the staff one year after implementation began. The former principal was not interviewed.

The assistant principal said high school teachers were unhappy because they

perceived that an initiative begun two years earlier and well supported by staff was being

abandoned for yet another new program. The initiative was High Schools That Work,

and the assistant principal said he held that program in high regard. Members of the high

school teacher team did not specifically refer to the High Schools That Work program

during the interview. They said that content delivered via the new model had little

relevance to high school teachers and duplicated training they had received earlier. Both

the assistant principal and members of the teacher team said they did not think they had

the latitude to change or customize the training when the new model was first launched.

One team member said a "one size fits all" approach to professional development was not

practical, since the needs of elementary, middle school and high school teachers were

different. One team member said she did not think it was necessary to bring in outside

trainers; there was enough expertise on the staff so that they could learn from each other.

Administrators and members of the teacher team at the high school struggled for

three years to make connections between the two initiatives. In Year four, the

professional development content was differentiated among elementary, middle school and high school levels. The high school began to focus on project-based learning. The building principal and assistant principal said this change was a positive step toward bringing coherence to professional development efforts in the school. Members of the high school team said they did not know who made the decision to focus on project-based learned but assumed it was the building principal and assistant principal. At least one member of the team remained skeptical that the change would be well-received by staff, stating that it may be viewed as "the same old song and dance."

To ensure acceptance of the model at all levels, commitments from principals and teacher leaders were essential before the launch of the initiative. Prior commitments from teachers were critical, since, within the model, formal leadership roles are assigned to teachers. As leaders, principals and teachers influenced the attitudes and behavior of other teachers within their buildings. Principals and teacher leaders at the high school did not share a common vision of effective professional development with district leaders and consultants. Initially, they were not committed to the change effort, rendering it less than optimally effective in their school. Only in the 4th year of implementation did building principals and a majority of team members feel the new professional development model was addressing the needs of high school teachers.

3. *What are the sources of leadership that enable transformation of a professional development program?*

In the Antelope School District sources of leadership that enabled transformation of the district's professional development program came from all levels. These levels included the superintendent and central office administrators, building principals and

assistant principals, and teacher leaders. In contrast to the district's previous professional

development program, teacher leadership was built into the new model. The

superintendent provided strong leadership to launch the new initiative. He informed and

involved members of the administrative team in making the final decision. Members of

the team included central office administrators—the curriculum director and the director

of special services—as well as building principals and assistant principals. The

superintendent and his team agreed to contract with an external service provider to assist

with the transformation. There is no evidence that principals sought input from teachers

or even communicated the imminent change to teachers in their buildings before the first

Building leadership team training took place in the summer of 2005. Although leadership

from teachers was not evident when the model was selected, it was integral to model

implementation.

Implementation of the new model proceeded with little resistance in the

elementary schools and in the middle school.   Members of building leadership teams in

these schools assumed responsibility for leading professional development as directed by

consultants.   Principals participated as team members in professional development

planning. A majority of principals also participated in professional development

delivery. During the first year of model implementation, consultants were more directive

than in subsequent years about content that had to be delivered by team members to their

colleagues. Team members from all the schools acknowledged that the professional

development they provided to colleagues was more effective when they were able to

customize it based on perceived needs of the staff.

The new professional model was designed to take advantage of existing teacher leadership and to further develop teacher leadership. Despite the central role of teachers as leaders in this initiative, their involvement in decision making relative to program content was minimal at first.

4. What actions among school leaders are necessary to support and sustain the change?

A wide array of actions among all school leaders including the superintendent, central office administrators, building principals, and teachers were necessary to support and sustain the change.

The superintendent secured fiscal resources and board approval to support and sustain the change. He stressed with his administrative team the importance of coherence in professional development and school improvement efforts across the district. This move toward focus and unity of effort across the district was viewed as an important and positive step by a majority of participants in the study. The superintendent directed principals to align building efforts with district goals. He clearly lined out expectations for central office administrators and building principals relative to active participation in the new program and accountability for implementing change. He said that, initially, he was physically present at professional development training sessions with Building leadership team members to indicate that it was a high priority for him. Later, he became more of a "cheerleader." When administrator vacancies occurred, he selected candidates who believed in the power of teacher leadership. He oriented new administrators to expectations for participation and accountability in the new professional development program.

Central office administrators including the curriculum director and the director of special services were actively involved with the new professional development program. A new curriculum director joined the district in Year 3 of model implementation. He gathered feedback from teachers via an on-line survey after every in-service session and met with each Building leadership team at the end of the year to collect input for program changes in Year four. The curriculum director communicated feedback received from teachers and building leadership teams with members of the administrative team and consultants. Adaptability in the structure and content of the program were critical for continued teacher buy-in, participation and support. The director of special services floated among all district teams as a member and presenter.

In the elementary schools and middle school, building principals and the elementary assistant principals supported the new professional development initiative in a number of ways. They participated actively in the Building leadership team training. A majority of them also participated actively in professional development delivery. One elementary principal who did not participate in delivery left the position after Year 1 of the new program. He was replaced by a principal who was a very active participant. All elementary and middle school principals supported Building leadership team members by demanding accountability for strategies implementation. When vacancies occurred on building leadership teams they carefully selected new members in an effort to augment existing teacher leadership. The middle school principal allowed members of his team to select teachers for team vacancies.

Members of building leadership teams, selected by their principals, attended quarterly training sessions with external consultants. They replicated the training during

subsequent in-service sessions. At first, the training program was highly structured and team members perceived they had little flexibility in adapting content to the needs of their colleagues. As the program became institutionalized, teacher teams perceived they had more flexibility to customize building-level training.

At the high school, support for the new professional development initiative was weaker than it was in the elementary schools and the middle school. The principal and assistant principal also participated actively in the Building leadership team training. The principal left the position after Year 1, however. He was replaced by a principal from a high school that had adopted a High Schools That Work (HSTW) school improvement model. Shortly afterward, Antelope High School received a grant to implement the same HSTW model. Grant dollars paid for nationally known consultants to provide professional development to high school teachers for a period of two years prior to implementation of the district's new professional development model. The assistant principal said that he and high school teachers perceived a mismatch between the HSTW model and the district's new professional development model. Although accountability was an expectation under the new professional development model, he did not check for specific strategies implementation but rather for student engagement when doing teacher observations. Members of the high school Building leadership team said that strategies training under the new model did not meet the needs of high school teachers.

High school participants expressed greater frustration and more discontent with the new professional development model than elementary and middle school participants. As leaders, they found it challenging to deliver the content as directed. They perceived that professional development within the new model had been more effective at the

elementary and middle school than at the high school. Content was differentiated in Year four for elementary, middle school and high school teams. This willingness among district leaders to adapt the program to better fit teacher needs was viewed as positive among high school administrators and members of the Building leadership team.

5. What effects does leadership have on the maturity level of a learning community within a district?

Although implementation of the new professional development model in the Antelope School District was not flawless, a majority of participants in the study said it was a positive step for the district. Transforming the professional development program from a traditional, workshop-based approached to a model designed to empower teachers as school leaders and create professional learning communities was a significant change. Survey data indicate that teachers perceived they were making progress toward this goal.

One hundred fifty-six professional staff in the Antelope School District completed the *Professional Staff as Learning Community Questionnaire* . This questionnaire was administered in October of the third year of model implementation to gather additional descriptive data to complement the interview data for this study. Specifically, the instrument is used here to ascertain the extent to which educators at the building and district levels perceived their maturity levels as professional learning communities.

Data indicate that teachers and professional staff within all schools or groups of schools rated themselves above average as professional learning communities. On the 17-item questionnaire, the range of possible scores was 17 to 85. The median score is 51. School scores ranged from a low of 58.87 in the district's largest elementary school to a high of 64.02 at the high school.

Questionnaire results indicate that, among all of the district's schools, the high school had advanced the farthest along the professional learning community continuum. Having been involved in the High Schools That Work initiative two years before the new professional development model was implemented, this is not surprising. One of the 10 key practices of the HSTW model is teachers working together. Specifically, high schools are asked to "provide cross-disciplinary teams of teachers time and support to work together to help students succeed in challenging academic and career/technical studies." A Small Learning Community structure had been implemented at the ninth grade level during Year 3 of the new professional development program and principals continued to emphasize the importance of cross-disciplinary collaboration and project-based learning to staff.

Within a high school incubating a culture of collaboration, the rigid structure and fixed content of the new professional development model in its first three years of implementation was viewed by the assistant principal as a step backward. In a school where one team member said principals "consider and value everyone's opinion in reference to how the school operates," the new model, selected at the district level and implemented with little teacher input, turned out not to be perceived as a good fit.

Recommendations

6. What preparation experiences are necessary to develop leaders to replicate this change effort in another school district?

This study described the actions that school leaders in a small school district took to dismantle its ineffective, traditional professional development program and replace it with a model designed to empower teacher leaders and create professional learning

communities. Data from both the interviews and the survey indicate that this process is underway within Antelope School District but, by its very nature, is ongoing.   District leaders are encouraged to administer the *Professional Staff as Learning Community Questionnaire* again and to compare results with the data originally gathered in November of 2008. This comparison will yield data about the extent to which learning communities within the district's schools have matured over time. These data may be useful to district leaders in continuing to improve their professional development program.

In addition to the overall snapshot of professional learning community maturity that the survey provides, participants in the study reported increased instructional capacity and leadership skills among teachers, higher expectations for professionalism and accountability, increased collaboration, and greater focus and coherence among district goals, programs and improvement efforts.

To successfully replicate this transformation in another school district and realize a similar result or a better result, leaders at all levels need specific, differentiated skill sets to assure success. These needs have implications for in-service training programs for principals and teachers who wish to assume stronger leadership roles within their schools. Given the ubiquitous professional literature relative to professional learning communities and the emerging body of research linking their success with increased student achievement, these needs also have implications for teacher and administrator preparation programs.

Recommendation 1: Offer pre-service and in-service leadership training to all teachers

Given the increasingly complex job responsibilities of principals, opportunities for teachers to assume stronger leadership roles within schools will likely continue to grow. Teachers in the Antelope School District were assigned specific leadership roles without leadership training. Training focused solely on learning instructional strategies or other content and processes for sharing those strategies and content with other teachers.

Members of three different teams talked about the challenges inherent in their leadership roles. Members of one elementary team discussed dealing with negative feedback and teachers who resisted change. "Not everybody is going to jump on board with the change," one team member said. A member of the high school team said, "adult learners treat you a lot differently than students, younger or adolescent learners." Another added, "And just know you are going to get frustrated when you are standing in front of 50 adult learners and they are not doing what you want them to do. . . .and it is probably more frustrating because the teachers don't allow it in their classroom, yet they bring it to the training." Another elementary team member described counseling a colleague who was "literally sick" during technology training because she believed she was unable to learn what was required.

These teachers would have benefitted from training on standards-based professional development and adult learning theory, theories and characteristics of change, managing conflict, and creating collaborative cultures.

Recommendation #2: Strengthen training for pre-service and in-service school administrators in facilitating democratic leadership to include sharing power, authority and decision making

It was clear from the data that taking advantage of existing teacher leadership and further developing teacher leadership were expressed goals of the new professional development model in the Antelope School District. Despite this intent, teachers said they were not involved in the decision to adopt the building leadership team model for professional development delivery. Only a small number of teachers, with guidance and direction from outside consultants, were involved in choosing the content focus of the training program as it began. Feedback gathered from Building leadership team members and other teachers during the four-year period of this study was used to inform and improve the program as it became institutionalized.

Strong leadership from the superintendent and support from the administrative team expedited selection and implementation of the model in the school district; however, evidence indicates that administrators did not share information with the staff as decisions were being made. More involvement of teacher teams in the beginning may have resulted in stronger initial support for the new model, especially in the high school.

The skill set needed to facilitate democratic leadership is grounded in group processes and effective communication. During pre-service or in-service training, school leaders should have more opportunities to practice using structured protocols for collaborative planning, organizing and conducting effective meetings, solving problems and making consensus decisions, and engaging with colleagues in productive inquiry.
Recommendation #3: *Structure mentor-protégé relationships between leaders in school districts at different stages of maturity in developing professional learning communities.*

The Building leadership team model implemented in the Antelope School District had been successfully implemented years before in a larger, neighboring school district.

Although Intermediate Service Agency consultants from the same organization provided the training in both districts, no systematic and ongoing processes were established for collegial dialogue among leaders in the two school districts.

Central office administrators, principals and team members from Antelope could have learned a great deal from the experiences of their counterparts. Although finding the time in busy schedules is always an issue, electronic communication via listservs, threaded discussions or even e-mail is always an option.

As professional learning communities mature, they should become more skilled at mining and sharing their own expertise internally and less reliant on outside consultants to structure professional learning experiences and deliver content. Consultants may continue to perform an important function by instead facilitating inter-organizational sharing.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval

UNIVERSITY OF
Nebraska
Lincoln

April 21, 2008

Sandra Gaspar
Department of Educational Administration
PO Box 1391 Spearfish, SD 57783-7391

Marilyn Grady
Department of Educational Administration
128 TEAC UNL 68588-0360

IRB Number: 2008048786 EX
Project ID: 8786
Project Title: Leadership and the Professional Learning Community

Dear Sandra:

This letter is to officially notify you of the approval of your project by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. It is the Board's opinion that you have provided adequate safeguards for the rights and welfare of the participants in this study. Your proposal seems to be in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46) and has been classified as exempt.

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Final Approval: 04/21/2008. This approval is Valid Until: 04/20/2009.

1. Uploaded on NUgrant are the IRB approved Informed Consent forms for this project. Please use this form when making copies to distribute to your participants. If it is necessary to create a new informed consent form, please send us your original so that we may approve and stamp it before it is distributed to participants.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:
• Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
• Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
• Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
• Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
• Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.
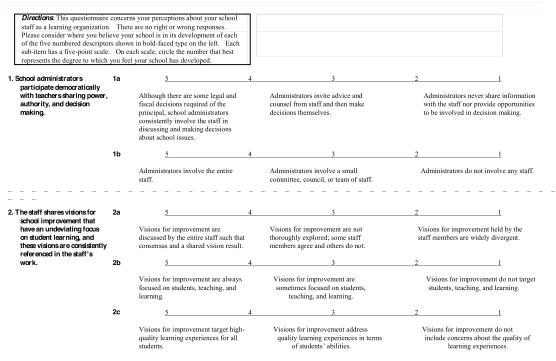
This project should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines and you should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project. You should report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the participants or others to the Board. For projects which continue beyond one year from the starting date, the IRB will request continuing review and update of the research project. Your study will be due for continuing review as indicated above. The investigator must also advise the Board when this study is finished or discontinued by completing the enclosed Protocol Final Report form and returning it to the Institutional Review Board.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 472-6965.

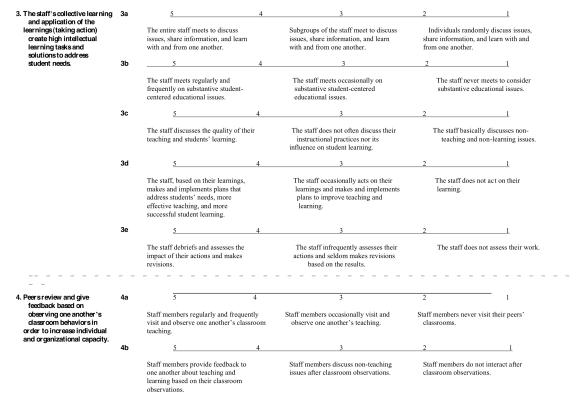Sincerely,
Dan Hoyt, Chair
for the IRB

Appendix B

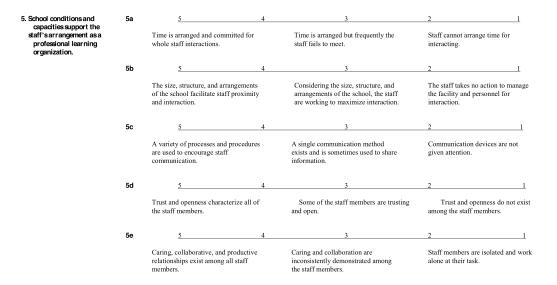## School Professional Staff as Learning Community Questionnaire

Directions: This questionnaire concerns your perceptions about your school staff as a learning organization. There are no right or wrong responses. Please consider where you believe your school is in its development of each of the five numbered descriptors shown in bold-faced type on the left. Each sub-item has a five-point scale. On each scale, circle the number that best represents the degree to which you feel your school has developed.

1. School administrators participate democratically with teachers sharing power, authority, and decision making.

1a

5	4	3	2	1
Although there are some legal and fiscal decisions required of the principal, school administrators consistently involve the staff in discussing and making decisions about school issues.		Administrators invite advice and counsel from staff and then make decisions themselves.		Administrators never share information with the staff nor provide opportunities to be involved in decision making.

1b

5	4	3	2	1
Administrators involve the entire staff.		Administrators involve a small committee, council, or team of staff.		Administrators do not involve any staff.

2. The staff shares visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning, and these visions are consistently referenced in the staff's work.

2a

5	4	3	2	1
Visions for improvement are discussed by the entire staff such that consensus and a shared vision result.		Visions for improvement are not thoroughly explored; some staff members agree and others do not.		Visions for improvement held by the staff members are widely divergent.

2b

5	4	3	2	1
Visions for improvement are always focused on students, teaching, and learning.		Visions for improvement are sometimes focused on students, teaching, and learning.		Visions for improvement do not target students, teaching, and learning.

2c

5	4	3	2	1
Visions for improvement target high-quality learning experiences for all students.		Visions for improvement address quality learning experiences in terms of students' abilities.		Visions for improvement do not include concerns about the quality of learning experiences.

3. The staff's collective learning and application of the learnings (taking action) create high intellectual learning tasks and solutions to address student needs.		5	4	3	2	1
	3a	The entire staff meets to discuss issues, share information, and learn with and from one another.		Subgroups of the staff meet to discuss issues, share information, and learn with and from one another.		Individuals randomly discuss issues, share information, and learn with and from one another.
	3b	5	4	3	2	1
		The staff meets regularly and frequently on substantive student-centered educational issues.		The staff meets occasionally on substantive student-centered educational issues.		The staff never meets to consider substantive educational issues.
	3c	5	4	3	2	1
		The staff discusses the quality of their teaching and students' learning.		The staff does not often discuss their instructional practices nor its influence on student learning.		The staff basically discusses non-teaching and non-learning issues.
	3d	5	4	3	2	1
		The staff, based on their learnings, makes and implements plans that address students' needs, more effective teaching, and more successful student learning.		The staff occasionally acts on their learnings and makes and implements plans to improve teaching and learning.		The staff does not act on their learning.
	3e	5	4	3	2	1
		The staff debriefs and assesses the impact of their actions and makes revisions.		The staff infrequently assesses their actions and seldom makes revisions based on the results.		The staff does not assess their work.

- -- -

4. Peers review and give feedback based on observing one another's classroom behaviors in order to increase individual and organizational capacity.		5	4	3	2	1
	4a	Staff members regularly and frequently visit and observe one another's classroom teaching.		Staff members occasionally visit and observe one another's teaching.		Staff members never visit their peers' classrooms.
	4b	5	4	3	2	1
		Staff members provide feedback to one another about teaching and learning based on their classroom observations.		Staff members discuss non-teaching issues after classroom observations.		Staff members do not interact after classroom observations.

5. School conditions and capacities support the staff's arrangement as a professional learning organization.	5a	5	4	3	2	1
		Time is arranged and committed for whole staff interactions.		Time is arranged but frequently the staff fails to meet.	Staff cannot arrange time for interacting.	
	5b	5	4	3	2	1
		The size, structure, and arrangements of the school facilitate staff proximity and interaction.		Considering the size, structure, and arrangements of the school, the staff are working to maximize interaction.	The staff takes no action to manage the facility and personnel for interaction.	
	5c	5	4	3	2	1
		A variety of processes and procedures are used to encourage staff communication.		A single communication method exists and is sometimes used to share information.	Communication devices are not given attention.	
	5d	5	4	3	2	1
		Trust and openness characterize all of the staff members.		Some of the staff members are trusting and open.	Trust and openness do not exist among the staff members.	
	5e	5	4	3	2	1
		Caring, collaborative, and productive relationships exist among all staff members.		Caring and collaboration are inconsistently demonstrated among the staff members.	Staff members are isolated and work alone at their task.	

Appendix C

Request for volunteers
to participate
in a research study
in the _____ School District

Purpose: The purpose of this case study is to describe the transformation of your school district's professional development program. The study will describe school leaders' actions in implementing a professional learning community model—the _____ program—to replace the district's former professional development program.

Benefits: Findings from this study will be reported in a doctoral dissertation. Findings may be used by _____ School District leaders to improve the _____ program or to assist other districts in implementing a similar program.

All professional staff members are invited to complete a brief, anonymous questionnaire. All data will be analyzed and reported in aggregate form.

All building principals and teachers are invited to participate in a 60-minute, face-to-face interview. All building principals who volunteer will be interviewed; up to three teachers from each building who volunteer will be selected to be interviewed.

Interviews will be audio-taped. All individually identifiable data will remain confidential. Data will be analyzed and reported in aggregate form.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact:

Sandra Gaspar, Researcher
 e-mail: sgaspar@tie.net
 phone: 605-394-1876 (office); 605-381-8754 (cell)

Appendix D

INFORMED CONSENT—QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear _____ School District Administrator or Faculty Member:

You are being asked to complete the attached questionnaire as part of a case study being conducted on the _____School _____ Project. Your responses are anonymous.

Information regarding the study and your rights as a participant follow:

Identification of Project:
        Leadership and the Professional Learning Community

Purpose of the Research*:*
        This research project is being conducted by Sandra Gaspar in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) from the Graduate College at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Results of this research study will be reported in a dissertation and may later be published in one or more professional publications. The purpose of this case study is to describe the transformation of your school district's professional development program. The study will describe school leaders' actions in implementing a professional learning community model—the _____ program—to replace the district's former professional development program. The study will also describe actions that school leaders, including teacher leaders, take to support and sustain _____. Descriptions of these leadership behaviors are intended to inform the continued maturation of the _____ School District professional learning community and to inform the practice of other school leaders who may consider developing professional learning communities within their schools and districts. _____School District was selected for this study because it has been engaged in this process for three years and because of its accessibility to the researcher. Data collection for this case study will be gathered in the spring semester of the 2007-08 school year.

Procedures:
        This study will collect interview and anonymous questionnaire data.   You are being asked to complete the attached anonymous questionnaire titled ***School Professional Staff as Learning Community.*** This questionnaire is a reliable and valid instrument designed to measure the maturity of the _____ School District as a professional learning community. It should take you no longer than 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Risks and/or Discomforts:
        There are no known risks or discomforts that may result from your being a participant in this research.

Benefits:
        Your district may benefit from reviewing this case study of the development of the _____ program and the leadership practices which support it. The information gained from

this study may also help the larger education community better understand leadership behaviors that support the development and maturation of a professional learning community.

Confidentiality:

The researcher (Sandra Gaspar), will keep all records in a locked filing cabinet in her home office. Only the researcher and her advisor, Dr. Marilyn Grady, will have access to the records. Records will be kept for a maximum period of one year after all data are collected.

Compensation:

Participants in this study will receive no monetary compensation. . In the event of problems resulting from participation in this study, psychological treatment is available through your local mental health provider at participant expense.

Right to Ask Questions:

You have a right to ask questions about this study and to have your questions answered. In the event you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you should call the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review board at 402-472-69-65. You may also contact the researcher, Sandra Gaspar, as follows: sgaspar@tie.net; Ph. 605-394-1876 or 605-381-8754.

Freedom to Withdraw:

Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decide not to complete the attached questionnaire.

Name and contact information of researcher(s)

Sandra Gaspar, Researcher
    e-mail: sgaspar@tie.net
    phone: 605-394—1876 (office); 605-381-8754 (cell)
Marilyn Grady, Supervisor
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Appendix E

SEDL License Agreement

TO: Sandy Gaspar (Licensee)
           Technology and Innovations in Education
           1925 Plaza Blvd.
           Rapid City, SD 57702

FROM: Nancy Reynolds
           Information Associate, Information Resource Center
           SEDL
           4700 Mueller Blvd.
           Austin, TX 78723

SUBJECT: Permission to reprint and distribute SEDL materials

DATE: January 4, 2007; revised March 14, 2008

Thank you for your interest in using SEDL's **School Professional Staff as Learning Community Questionnaire** (SPSLCQ) developed by Shirley Hord in 1996. This questionnaire will be referred to as the "work" in this License Agreement.

SEDL is pleased to grant permission for use of the material cited above in the Licensee's doctoral research at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. She proposes using the SPSLCQ to study leadership in launching and sustaining a learning community model in a small school district. The following are the terms, conditions, and limitations governing this limited permission to reproduce the work:

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Thank you, again, for your interest in using SEDL's SPSLCQ. If you have questions, please contact me at 512-391-6548 or by e-mail at nancy.reynolds@sedl.org.

Sincerely,

Nancy Reynolds   *April 4, 2008*

Nancy Reynolds for SEDL   Date signed

Agreed and accepted:

Signature: *Sandra L. Gaspar*   *4/1/08*

Printed Name: *Sandra L Gaspar*   Date signed

Appendix F

Research Questions

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this case study will be to describe the transformation of one school district's professional development program. School leaders' actions in implementing a professional learning community model to replace the district's existing professional development program will be reported. Actions that school leaders take to support and sustain the new model will be reported.

Grand tour question:

How do school leaders initiate, support and sustain a professional learning community within a district accustomed to more traditional models of professional development?

Subquestions:

1. What factors influence school leaders to select and apply a professional learning community model?

2. Which individuals' commitments are essential to initiating change in the school district?

3. What are the sources of leadership that enable transformation of a professional development program?

4. What actions among school leaders are necessary to support and sustain the change?

5. What effects does leadership have on the maturity level of a learning community within a district?

6. What preparation experiences are necessary to develop leaders to replicate this change effort in another school district?

Interview Protocol: Superintendent

Date: _____

Introduction:

I'd like to thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. I will be recording and transcribing our conversation so that I can make sure I reflect exactly what you mean. I will be asking you to review the transcriptions at a later date so that I can make sure I accurately record your thoughts and words as you intended them.

As you know, I am interested in learning more about your perceptions regarding implementation of the _____ project and how educators are developing a professional learning community as a part of that project. Specifically, I am interested in your thoughts regarding the role of leadership—yours, building principals' and teachers leaders'—in initiating, supporting and sustaining this change in your professional development program.

I really want to know your views, so please feel free to share anything you think is important in helping me understand this topic.

What questions do you have for me regarding this study or the research process I am using? Are you ready to start?

Question	Observer Notes
Describe the professional develop- ment program in your district prior to the implementation of the _____ program. (Subquestion 1)	
From your perspective, what factors influenced the district to change its approach to professional development? (Subquestion 1)	
Describe the process that was used to create and launch the _____ program. (Subquestions 1, 2, 3)	
How did you and others within the district provide leadership to initiate the change? (Subquestions 2, 3)	
Describe the _____ program. From your perspective, what are its most important attributes? (Subquestions 1, 5)	

What is your role and the role of other school leaders in supporting and sustaining the _____ program? PROBE: principals, teacher leaders? (Subquestions 4, 5)	
How has the _____ program evolved since its inception three years ago? (Subquestion 5)	
How is the _____ program impacting teaching and learning in the school district? (Subquestion 5)	
If other superintendents wished to begin a program similar to _____ in their districts, what advice would you give them? (Subquestion 6)	
How would you describe your leadership style? (Subquestion 6)	

Interview Protocol: Principals

Date: _____

Introduction:

I'd like to thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. I will be recording and transcribing our conversation so that I can make sure I reflect exactly what you mean. I will be asking you to review the transcriptions at a later date so that I can make sure I accurately record your thoughts and words as you intended them.

As you know, I am interested in learning more about your perceptions regarding implementation of the _____ project and how educators are developing a professional learning community as a part of that project. Specifically, I am interested in your thoughts regarding the role of leadership—yours, the superintendent's and teachers leaders'—in initiating, supporting and sustaining this change in your professional development program.

I really want to know your views, so please feel free to share anything you think is important in helping me understand this topic.

What questions do you have for me regarding this study or the research process I am using? Are you ready to start?

Question	Observer Notes
Describe the professional development program in your school district prior to the implementation of the _____ program. (Subquestion 1)	
From your perspective, what factors influenced the district to change its approach to professional development? (Subquestion 1)	
Describe your understanding of the process that was used to create and launch the _____ program in your school district (Subquestions 1, 2, 3)	
How did you and others within the district provide leadership to initiate the change? PROBE: Superintendent's role? Role of teachers? (Subquestions 2, 3)	
Describe the _____ program. From your	

perspective, what are its most important attributes? (Subquestions 1, 5)	
What is your role and the role of other school leaders in supporting and sustaining the _____ program? PROBE: superintendent, teacher leaders? (Subquestions 4, 5)	
How has the _____ program evolved since its inception three years ago? (Subquestion 5)	
How is the _____ program impacting teaching and learning in the your school district? (Subquestion 5)	
If other principals wished to begin a program similar to _____ in their buildings, what advice would you give them? (Subquestion 6)	
How would you describe your leadership style? (Subquestion 6)	

Interview Protocol: Teachers

Date: _____

Introduction:

I'd like to thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. I will be recording and transcribing our conversation so that I can make sure I reflect exactly what you mean. I will be asking you to review the transcriptions at a later date so that I can make sure I accurately record your thoughts and words as you intended them.

As you know, I am interested in learning more about your perceptions regarding implementation of the _____ project in your school district and how educators are developing a professional learning community as a part of that project. Specifically, I am interested in your thoughts regarding the role of leadership—teachers', the superintendent's and principals'—in initiating, supporting and sustaining this change in your professional development program.

I really want to know your views, so please feel free to share anything you think is important in helping me understand this topic.

What questions do you have for me regarding this study or the research process I am using? Are you ready to start?

Question	Observer Notes
Describe the professional development program in your school district prior to the implementation of the _____ program. (Subquestion 1)	
From your perspective, what factors influenced the district to change its approach to professional development? (Subquestion 1)	
Describe your understanding of the process that was used to create and launch the _____ program in your school district. (Subquestions 1, 2, 3)	
Who provided leadership to initiate the change and what specifically did they do? PROBE: Superintendent's role? Role of principals? (Subquestions 2, 3)	
Describe the _____ program. From your perspective, what are its	

most important attributes? (Subquestions 1, 5)	
What is the role of teacher leaders and other school leaders in supporting and sustaining the _____ program? PROBE: superintendent, principals? (Subquestions 4, 5)	
How has the _____ program evolved since its inception three years ago? (Subquestion 5)	
How is the _____ program impacting teaching and learning in the your school district? (Subquestion 5)	
If other teachers wished to begin a program similar to _____ in their buildings, what advice would you give them? (Subquestion 6)	
What leadership qualities do you feel are most important for successful implementation of a program like _____? (Subquestion 6)	

Appendix G

INFORMED CONSENT FORM--INTERVIEW

Identification of Project:
       Leadership and the Professional Learning Community.

Purpose of the Research:
       This research is being conducted by Sandra Gaspar in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) from the Graduate College at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Results of this research study will be reported in a dissertation and may later be published in one or more professional publications. The purpose of this case study is to describe the transformation of your school district's professional development program. The study will describe school leaders' actions in implementing a professional learning community model—the _____ program—to replace the district's former professional development program. The study will also describe actions that school leaders, including teacher leaders, take to support and sustain _____. Descriptions of these leadership behaviors are intended to inform the continued development of the _____ School District professional learning community and to inform the practice of other school leaders who may consider developing professional learning communities within their schools and districts. _____School District was selected for this study because it has been engaged in this process for three years and because of its accessibility to the researcher. Data collection for this case study will be gathered in the spring semester of the 2007-08 school year.

Procedures:
       This study will involve interviews and questionnaire completion.   In signing this form, you are consenting to be interviewed. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes of your time and will be conducted within the school district at a mutually acceptable location. This interview will be audio-taped with your permission.

Risks and/or Discomforts:
       There are no known risks or discomforts that may result from your being a participant in this research.

Benefits:
       Your district may benefit from reviewing this case study of the development of the ____ program and the leadership practices which support it. The information gained from this study may also help the larger education community better understand leadership behaviors that support the development and maturation of a professional learning community.

Confidentiality:
       The researcher (Sandra Gaspar), will keep all records in a locked filing cabinet in her home office. Only the researcher and her advisor, Dr. Marilyn Grady, will have access to the records. Records will be kept for a maximum period of one year after all data are collected.

Transcriptions of tape-recorded interviews will be made by a privately contracted individual who is not employed by the _____ School District. This transcriptionist will sign a confidentiality agreement. Data from interviews will be coded for patterns, and all data will be reported in aggregate form in such a manner that you will not be identified as an individual.

Compensation:

Participants in this study will receive no monetary compensation. In the event of problems resulting from participation in this study, psychological treatment is available through your local mental health provider at participant expense.

Right to Ask Questions:

You have a right to ask questions about this study and to have your questions answered. In the event you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you should call the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at 402-472-6965. You may also contact the researcher, Sandra Gaspar, as follows: sgaspar@tie.net; Ph. 605-394-1876 or 605-381-8754.

Freedom to Withdraw:

Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate. You can also withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researcher or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate, having read and understood the information presented in this document. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

_____ Check if you agree to be audio taped during the interview.

Signature of Participant:

_____   _____
(Signature of Research Participant)   (Date)

Name and contact information of researcher(s)

Sandra Gaspar, Researcher
    e-mail: sgaspar@tie.net
    phone: 605-394—1876 (office); 605-381-8754 (cell)
Marilyn Grady, Supervisor
    e-mail: mgrady1@unl.edu
    phone: 402-472-0974

Appendix H

Appendix removed to protect the anonymity of the school district.

Appendix I

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT—TRANSCRIPTIONIST

I _____, hereby agree that I will maintain
        (name of transcriptionist)

confidentiality of all tape-recorded interviews that I have been contracted to transcribe for

the following research project: ***Leadership and the Professional Learning Community.***

This means that I will not discuss nor share any tape-recorded nor transcribed data

with any individuals other than the researcher, Sandra Gaspar, or her supervisor, Dr.

Marilyn Grady. When the transcriptions are complete, I will return all audio tapes to the

researcher and will transfer all electronic files to the researcher. Upon confirmation of

receipt of these files by the researcher, I will destroy the originals.

_____   _____

      (Signature of transcriptionist)   (Date)