The five-year change process at a secondary school: A case study

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THE FIVE-YEAR CHANGE PROCESS AT A
SECONDARY SCHOOL:
A CASE STUDY

by

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Southern Utah University
1989

Master of Science
Utah State University
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of the requirements for the

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ABSTRACT

The Five-Year Change Process at a Secondary School:
A Case Study

by

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This study explored the five-year change process as experienced by members of a secondary school community who intentionally sought out and pursued school improvement through the establishment of a continuous improvement process with the goal of increased student achievement. Three questions guided this exploration: (a) What contextual factors contributed to the change process at a secondary school pursuing continuous improvement processes; (b) How did these contextual factors interact and inter-relate to contribute to the implementation and sustainability of the continuous improvement process; and (c) How did these contextual factors interact and inter-relate to contribute to the change process itself. As such, this study involved a close examination of the phenomenon of change as it existed within the complex situational and contextual conditions of the school organization.

This was a longitudinal, exploratory single-case study with an historical analysis. Qualitative tools used to conduct this exploration included an extensive document review, an open-ended observation and twenty semi-structured interviews of teachers, teacher-leaders, administrators, parents and district leaders. Data were analyzed on three levels: chronologically, categorically and from the perspectives of multiple stakeholder groups. Within categories, data were analyzed for patterns and relationships using content and constant comparative analyses.
Findings showed the change process exhibited tenets of chaos theory, principles of complexity science and concepts of quantum physics. The organization engaged in two simultaneous sets of actions (establishment of a professional learning community and smaller learning communities) within two distinct phases to the change process. In Phase I, the school community went through a shift in culture from isolation to collaboration during which a high degree of disorder caused by dramatic changes in the organization’s subsystems, forced participants to rethink and regroup in such a way as to effect the educational agenda and program of the school as well as its leadership and community-building processes, ultimately leading to the establishment of a culture of continuous improvement. In Phase II the organization experienced the institutionalization of this continuous improvement process.

Findings showed the organization, over the course of both phases, went through a process of self-organization and self-similarity. Self-organization occurred primarily within a context of four conditions that proved conducive to organizational transformation: (a) an openness to data-including disconfirming data-with increasingly more transparent and sophisticated data collection, analysis and interpretation; (b) widely-shared information including research and theory from various means including the purposeful and challenging work of school community members in numerous, temporary, task-specific teams several times per week and whole group, job-embedded, collaborative professional development occurring at least six times per year; 3) freedom to act upon this information through teacher-driven and teacher-led decision-making and widespread invested leadership; and (d) frequent informal, annual, system-wide opportunities to self-reference.

Self-similarity occurred as congruent messages (core beliefs and principles) were communicated extensively throughout dense, interactive networks, creating a field wherein these messages exerted powerful influence. The condition of organizational disequilibrium allowed these messages to be fed back on themselves, greatly amplifying their effects, leading to their iteration throughout various subgroups—ultimately shaping the culture to one that was consistent
with the organization's strong sense of identity and intent. This continual shaping left the
organization more adaptable and flexible, better able to cope with fluctuation and more
intelligently respond to the changing needs of the environment: a professional learning
community.

The high-level of energy required for these significant changes and their sustainability came
from authentic ownership and invested leadership resulting from a continuous process of
meaning-making, collective inquiry, reflection among the school community, and the compelling
draw of the strange attractor: a fervent hope and desire to make a positive difference in a student's
life.

Further study into the role of the principal, the use of non-traditional teacher-leaders, invested
leadership and the degree of disorder needed to affect change in phase one of systemic change in
the secondary school organization was recommended.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The accountability movement, federal mandates and the public’s changing expectations ensure that most secondary schools will be involved in some type of formal school improvement effort in the near future. School improvement efforts of the past focused on surface-level changes and specific innovations. These have not resulted in significant and lasting improvement in student achievement nationwide (Packer & Kaufman, 2006). The current movement towards school-wide, continuous improvement involves a more comprehensive approach to change including change in the cultural aspects of the school, as well as to its structure (Boyd, 1992; Hord, 1997). In most cases this means a dramatic transformation in the organization member’s roles, relationships and patterns of interaction (Senge, 1990). It often challenges the personal belief system of individual members as well, causing anxiety and leading to resistance (Schein & Bennis, 1965; Siskin & Little, 1995).

Many school leaders have a naïve understanding of the change process and limited skills for leading this complex process (Fullan, 2001). A long-standing culture that supports the status quo compounds this problem (National Association for Secondary Principals, 2004). Incomplete implementation of initiatives is often the result (Hall & Hord, 2001). Efforts are abandoned long before any pay-off to the school is realized, leaving teachers and administrators with less and less confidence in the system (Daggett, 2004; Datnow & Stringfield, 2000).

The emphasis of the high school accreditation process, which had traditionally focused on student winners and features of the school that may have played a role in these winner’s successes, has also changed (National Study of School Evaluation, 1998). Today, the
accreditation process encourages and validates school communities which engage in ongoing, collective reflection and self-study; those which ask of themselves the more pertinent question, “Who’s not winning at our school?” and then, “What are we going to do about it?”

The federal government has tried to facilitate this paradigm shift by providing funding for schools to establish comprehensive school reform programs. Over a billion dollars has been spent on this effort already with the majority of secondary schools still functioning much the same as they always have with very little change in overall student achievement (WestEd, 2000). At the school level, administrators who have tried to lead planned change have learned that the process is lengthy and complex (Fullan, 2001; Hall & Hord, 2001). The structures, procedures and processes of the current public school system do not support a culture of collaboration and often work against it (Lortie, 1975; National Association of Secondary Principals, 2004). Leaders are finding that one-size-fits-all programs with promises of high student achievement most often do not fit the needs of their particular communities and/or do not reach deep enough into the day-to-day work of the school to positively affect overall student results (DuFour, Eaker & DuFour, 2005; McLaughlin, 1990).

Statement of the Problem

A relatively small but increasing number of schools have experienced the successful implementation and institutionalization of school-wide continuous improvement processes. Researchers have compiled similar lists of descriptors characterizing these professional learning organizations (Boyd, 1992; Fullan, 2001; Hord, 1997; Kruse, Louis & Bryk, 1995; Senge, 1990). The similarity of researchers’ descriptions, in spite of wide differences in the make-up of schools, has helped bring the vision of a professional learning community into greater focus for many school leaders.

Most research which has contributed to this sharper vision, however, has focused on identifying the contextual features of a professional learning organization. Few empirical studies
exist among this group due to the complexities of multiple, interrelated variables and the ethical issues which have always plagued education research. Instead, case studies and survey research have provided snapshots of these successes. In many cases, these studies have included the examination of multiple schools from which the researcher has then discovered characteristics cutting across participant schools. What has emerged from these studies are general descriptions of schools in which stakeholders engage in ongoing, collaborative self-study, set and work towards targeted student achievement goals and continuously increase their capacity to do their work effectively. However, regardless of the increasing number of studies that help to clarify this vision, education leaders are still left with the perplexing dilemma of how to get there. Relatively few studies focus on the actual process of change in secondary schools.

The literature base on organizational culture and change is extensive. Several change process theories provide perspectives on this complex social phenomenon (Chin & Benne, 1969; Fullan, 1993; Lewin, 1951; Havelock, 1973; Rogers, 1995). Educational theorists, however, have expressed a need for more studies, specifically case studies, which center on the change process in real school contexts. Fullan (2005) asserted, for example, that we need to know what these theories look like in real-life school settings. The variables which distinguish one school community from another need to be explored in as many different settings as possible representing different philosophical orientations and demographics, including: urban and rural, large and small, wealthy and poor. McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) maintained that, “Documentation and analysis of teacher learning communities in diverse settings and at different points in their evolution would provide a cornerstone for local learning systems” (p.129).

Hall and Hord (2001) reported that in addition to knowing more about the factors which play a role in the change process in schools, we need to know more about how these factors interrelate and how they interplay. Firestone and Reihl (2005) proposed that if more studies existed which examined, in a detailed way, the process each school took to establish and sustain a culture of continuous improvement, researchers could work to discover the similarities and establish
guidelines for change leaders. An even more direct result, they pointed out, is that school-level leaders could glean useful information, deciding for themselves which aspects of these studies have the best fit for their school circumstances, from across many different school types.

Currently, there exists a lack of research focused on the change process in high schools as opposed to the elementary school. In spite of heightened interest in improving high schools in the past decade, most success stories are from research involving elementary schools. The American high school system is especially complex and many of its structural, procedural and cultural characteristics work directly against the change process (Lortie, 1975; National Association for Secondary Principals, 2004). Of the studies focused on the change process in high schools, very few have taken a longitudinal approach to the research. This is in spite of a current understanding of change as a process, taking place over time (Hall & Hord, 2001). Leading the change process is challenging at best. Staying the course, over time, amidst restraining forces is one of the most difficult aspects of the challenge.

Purpose of the Study

This study sought to increase understanding of the change process in one high school intent on establishing and sustaining a culture of continuous improvement. Social systems theory, complexity science and various organizational change theories have provided a lens to explore the contextual factors which have influenced the five-year change process at this high school. These contextual factors included both situational and cultural features of the school's people, programs, processes and procedures, as well as the forces which bear on them. The interplay of these factors have been addressed in an exploratory manner as the author's purpose was not so much to explain these factors as to discover the role they play and how they interact over time in furthering the change process in a high school involved in intentional reculturation and restructuring.

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The school-wide processes, including the school’s leadership, educational agenda (mission, vision, values and goals), community-building processes, professional development efforts, educational/curriculum program and assessment processes have historically played a key role in the workings of American secondary schools and each of these processes is currently being re-conceptualized in some significant way on school campuses throughout the nation. These factors, their interaction, interrelatedness and significance have become apparent through this examination of school-wide processes.

Research Questions

This study explored the five-year change process as experienced by members of a secondary school community who intentionally sought out and pursued school improvement with the goal of increased student achievement. The central questions which have driven this exploration were:

1. What contextual factors contributed to the change process at a secondary school attempting to establish a culture of continuous improvement?

2. How do these contextual factors interact and interrelate to contribute to the implementation and sustainability of the continuous improvement process?

3. How do these contextual factors interact and interrelate to contribute to the change process itself?

Significance

A changing society and its resultant changing educational needs and expectations ensure that virtually every high school in the nation will face the challenge of deep organizational change in the near future. This study sought to increase our understanding of the change process which is necessary to make this happen. Change is a complex social phenomena and its process is poorly understood. Leading the change process in a secondary school is a daunting task and few have the knowledge, skills and experience to relish tackling it. School and district level administrators,
staff developers, leadership teams, outside change agents and others whose primary responsibility is leadership of school-level change and/or its support should benefit from the detailed account of another school's journey through the change process. By shedding light on this process, the findings from this exploratory case study will also help researchers better understand the factors influencing it.

Participants

While typical of many high schools in its district and state, the participant school has characteristics which are unique and played a definite role in its selection for this study. For instance, the participant school had a higher percentage of English language learners than other high schools in its large district. It also had the highest percentage of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch, a measure typically used to ascertain socio-economic status. When the school began its change effort, it was fairly new. Traditions and relationships with the community, which are typical of other high school communities in the area, had not yet been firmly established. In fact, when dividing the larger community to form this school, small student populations from several surrounding cities were carved out of their home areas causing significant social division among the new school community. Many families were holding on to past loyalties with their neighborhood schools. There was little parent involvement and interaction with the school.

Several dichotomies also existed in the participant school community. For example, in spite of having a majority of parents who did not graduate from college, and student achievement scores which were slightly lower than district and state norms, the student body at this school had an uncommon optimism and desire to go on to college with high expectations of doing well. The student population also had a much higher than usual percentage of students working substantial amounts of time at after-school jobs. In addition, although the school showed the typical high school characteristics of isolation and depersonalization, the school facility itself had been built in such a way as to encourage collegial collaboration.
The school had and continues to experience a high turnover in leadership with great diversity in leadership style. The change agency of this school was also unusual in that its leadership was bottom-up and its emergent change facilitators were athletic coaches along with being classroom teachers. The most intriguing aspect of this school's change initiative, however, is that the effort continues. Even though the school did not initially exhibit what previous studies describe as characteristics conducive to change, the school has continued changing and has sustained that effort for five years. The district's website today describes the participant school as a "model school" and as one having "the district's most progressive community approach to public education." This study will explore the process the school community experienced getting there.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher brings to this study the perspectives of dual roles—that of participant as well as observer. The researcher became aware of the participant school's change efforts in the second year of its school improvement efforts through communication with a close relation who had teacher-leader responsibilities at the school. Due to the researcher's prior experience with other school organizations working to re-culture their workplaces the researcher was asked to conduct school-wide training on collegial and collective reflective processes. As the school was approaching its school accreditation review and the process of accreditation had changed considerably, the researcher was also asked to provide technical assistance in this area. For a year and a half, the researcher's role as participant was clearly emphasized. The researcher had limited contact with the school in its fourth and fifth years of the change process.

The researcher approached the school for this study from the unique perspective of an informed observer, one with first hand knowledge of the school's original goals and intents, previous culture and patterns of interaction, challenges and, more pertinent to this study, how the school faced those challenges in the early stages. All contact with the school and its purposes have been documented in the study.
The researcher is a district-level school administrator, and as such, is experiencing the same leadership challenges explored in this study. The researcher also serves as a facilitator on a state-level school accreditation review team and has had the opportunity to observe many school organizations involved in the change process.

Definitions

For the purposes of this study the following will serve as working definitions:

*Change process*—the process experienced by an organization undergoing planned change.

*Contextual factors*—human and situational features of the school community and the condition and forces which act upon it.

*Continuous improvement process*—the ongoing process by which an organization intentionally increases in its capacity to meet organizational goals.

*Professional learning community*—an organization which engages in an ongoing, continuous improvement process.

*Reculturation*—the intentional process by which an organization accomplishes a change in culture or the condition of experiencing a change in organizational culture.

*Restructuring*—the process by which an organization’s structures, programs, and/or processes are intentionally reshaped.

*School community*—all the stakeholders in the school organization including its faculty, school and district-level administration, support staff, students, parents, family and community members which have a personal and/or professional investment in the success of the school’s goals.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A Nation at Risk, a bold report published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) regarding the condition of American education, shook the nation’s confidence in public education and called for substantial school reform. The report underscored the need for more rigorous, measurable standards, and higher academic and behavioral expectations. The call for school reform has been answered with a number of school improvement initiatives such as outcome-based education, site-based education and the current standards-based education. There have been several federal interventions as well such as the current No Child Left Behind Act (2001). Several movements have marked large-scale shifts in thinking such as the Excellence Movement in the eighties which focused on curriculum and teacher practice and the Restructuring Movement in the nineties which focused on administration and school operations. Despite these and other attempts to reform the system to better meet changing expectations, results have been disappointing (Sarason, 1990). In spite of loftier goals, higher standards and more rigorous requirements, national test scores have changed very little and a great number of schools still have not made adequate yearly progress (Packer & Kaufman, 2006). Roemer (1991) observed that schools function much the same as they always have. He calls the situation a “change without a difference” (p. 447).

The public school system has always struggled with sustainable change. The public school system’s basic structure, for instance, established to address the needs of an industrial age and informed by classical organization theory (Weber, 1947) and Taylor’s (1911) scientific management, consisted of hierarchical bureaucracies which still exist today in spite of the
changing needs of students and the changing expectations of the public, both of which have changed radically since the industrial age (Argyris, 1982). Dramatic changes in the workforce, for example, make the two percent graduation rate of the industrial age totally inadequate (Dorn, 2003). The high student academic achievement expectations articulated in the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) are also indicative of this change.

The secondary school organization, in particular, has been especially inflexible (Siskin & Little, 1995). Findings from a study commissioned by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (2004) and published as Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform described the traditional secondary school as exhibiting high levels of teacher isolation, curriculum fragmentation, impersonal and factory-style mechanisms and communication patterns. These characteristics are highly entrenched in American educational culture and are tenaciously held onto by the general population, as well as education professionals. As such, relatively few secondary schools have been successful in making substantial change and of those who have, only a small number have been able to sustain their school improvements. Daggett (2004) reported, for instance, that none of the New York high schools recognized as high performing Smaller Learning Communities just ten years ago has maintained that status. Datnow and Stringfield (2000) reported similarly disappointing results from two of their own studies. In the first study only three schools out of eight that had implemented school reform models had been able to sustain their changes after just a few years. In the second study school reforms in only one of thirteen schools survived.

The current education movement encourages the implementation and sustainability of continuous improvement processes with the promise that such on-going processes, characterized by a professional learning community working collaboratively, reflectively and synergistically toward meeting targeted student learning goals, will result in not only increased academic achievement among students but will also result in the increased capacity of the professional learning community to work effectively together and sustain their efforts. The conceptual
framework for this study lies in the relationship between the continuous improvement process and the process of change which is required to implement and sustain it. A review of literature which supports this conceptual framework will be presented in two sections: (a) The first section will describe the structural and cultural changes expected of high schools today. These expectations involve changes in the school’s educational program including its curriculum, instructional practices and assessment methods, educational agenda, community-building processes, leadership, and its culture of continuous improvement. The high school accreditation process, which has undergone substantial change itself, will provide a lens by which to examine these changing expectations. (b) The second section of this review will focus on issues related to the change process itself, which is central to this transformation.

School Improvement: Changing Expectations

In 1994, a change in the Improving America’s Schools Education Act gave schools the opportunity to use federal funding for school-wide operations. This change was initiated following the examination of several promising alternatives to traditional Title I programs and revealed that the most effective approaches in regards to student achievement were school-wide approaches. To encourage this type of change, the federal government began subsidizing schools that implemented comprehensive school reform programs. The federal government appropriated $308 million dollars to support the Comprehensive School Reform Program which was authorized in 1998 as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (WestEd, 2000). A list of “best” and “most promising” comprehensive school programs was compiled as part of this initiative and included programs such as James Comer’s School Development Program, Success for All, and High Schools that Work (Education Commission of the States, 1998). Each program has a particular educational agenda and unique structural elements. All are expected to include specific characteristics identified as essential for high-performance schools.
However, results of these programs have not been consistent. Daggett (2004) asserts that not all of the schools which adopted even the two most successful programs on the list have experienced increased student achievement. The idiosyncratic nature of schools practically guarantees the unlikelihood that one program will be found as the panacea of school improvement initiatives (McLaughlin, 1990). For this reason, a growing number of education change thinkers maintain that off-the-shelf programs or specific innovations are not the answer to substantial and sustainable school reform. A demonstration of this unusual level of consensus is found in the book *On Common Ground* (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005) in which several high profile education researchers and practitioners joined efforts with the following express intention:

...clarifying the commonalities and integrated nature of their various approaches to school improvement and solidifying their collective belief that schools which have the best chance of implementing and sustaining substantial change are those functioning as learning communities engaged in a school-wide, continuous improvement process. (cover jacket)

The contributors which include Ronald Barth, Richard DuFour, Michael Fullan, Lawrence Lezotte, Douglas Reeves, Mike Schmoker, Dennis Sparks and Rick Stiggins, conceptualize a professional learning community as one that is continually building its capacity to meet its student learning goals amidst ever-changing circumstances and challenges.

Attention to school-wide effectiveness for school reform as opposed to the effectiveness of the individual teacher increased dramatically following the now famous Coleman Report, which was published in 1966 as part of *The Equal Education Opportunity Survey* (Coleman et al., 1966). In this report Coleman et al. concluded that the school as an entity had a less than ten percent effect on student achievement. Edmonds (1979) countered this claim with findings from his own subsequent study of schools which were effective despite having high at-risk populations. The results demonstrated that schools could indeed make a positive difference in the achievement of at-risk students. This idea represented a major paradigm shift in thinking about schools and the power of their influence. From his findings, Edmonds (1982) was able to isolate seven
characteristics common to these effective schools which he called The Seven Correlates. The
Seven Correlates include: a safe and orderly environment, instructional leadership, a climate of
high expectations for success, frequent monitoring of student progress, a clear and focused
mission, an opportunity for learning, student time on task and home-school relations.

Edmonds (1979, 1982) and his associates have since compiled a body of professional
literature to support the Seven Correlates and to be used by school leaders to assure research-
based school improvement efforts (Lezotte & Bancroft, 1985; Levine & Lezotte, 1990;
Brookover et al., 1978). This body of literature, referred to as the Effective Schools Research, has
been synthesized and updated several times (Bloom, Butler & Smith, 1984; Cotton, 1995).
However, the Effective Schools research has been criticized for including a weak representation
of empirical research among its sources (Ralph & Fennessey, 1983; Scheerens, 1992). It contains
several reviews of literature and represents a great deal of experiential knowledge, expert opinion
and theoretical ideas.

The quest for the effective school continues today. A large-scale study conducted by
Williams, Kirst and Haertal (2005) validated Edmond’s (1982) Seven Correlates and identified
several additional practices/conditions which reflect the changing needs and expectations for
today’s effective schools. In this study 5000 principals as well as teachers from 257 California
elementary schools, characterized by large numbers of low income students, were surveyed as to
the effectiveness of their school processes. This study differs from the original effective schools
research in scope, standards-based content and in the inclusion of an actual comparison of student
achievement results. The findings from this study added the following practices and conditions:
prioritizing student achievement; implementing a coherent, standards-based curriculum;
emphasizing quality of instruction; using assessment data to improve student achievement and
instruction; and ensuring the availability of instructional resources. In addition, Williams et al.
(2005) found that principal leadership which focused on the effective management of the school
improvement process had an influence on student achievement as did district leadership,
accountability and support. Although establishment of these practices and conditions require substantial change in the structure and the very culture of most schools, they are fast becoming the expectation for all schools. This is evident in the changes which have come about, in recent years, in high school accreditation processes.

Since 1871, the academic integrity of secondary schools in America has been determined by an accreditation process which provides program standards set by the professional academic community. Recent changes in this process make explicit the expectation that secondary schools undergo the substantial structural and cultural changes necessary to establish and sustain learning communities actively engaged in continuous improvement processes. A statement from the Council of Regional School Accreditation Commission (National Study of School Evaluation, 1998) explained the philosophical changes upon which the new accreditation processes are based:

The nation now acknowledges its utter dependence on schools as the agencies that will enable its people to deal with a future of greater complexity that any of its former times. A school not moving forward is considered to be failing. School improvement is, therefore, the imperative of modern accreditation. Modern accreditation demands that the school be continually improving...Accreditation today does not want a school to stand; it wants a school to move...It challenges a school to demonstrate how it is creating its future. For that reason, accreditation protocols today examine how a school looks ahead and how it plans for change. (p. 20)

The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) together with the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) organization has provided a framework with which a school community, through self-study, can assess its progress towards this vision. This framework, published as the NSSE Survey of Instructional and Organizational Effectiveness (National Study of School Evaluation, 1998) is made up of several rubrics which allow close examination of the following instructional and organizational processes: educational program (curriculum, instruction, assessment), educational agenda (mission, vision, values, goals),
leadership, community-building processes and culture of continuous improvement. The following overview of research supporting these instructional and organizational school processes outlines current expectations which represent significant changes from public school operations in the past and traditional classroom practice.

Educational Program: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Recent studies show that the school’s educational program is a significant factor in the effectiveness of the school (Newmann, King & Young, 2001). In its 2005 Action Agenda to Improve America’s High Schools, the National Governors Association acknowledged its importance by emphasizing a rigorous, relevant and aligned curriculum along with the improvement of instruction and increased principal and teacher quality. The quality of the school’s educational program, as described in the NSSE (1998) framework, is determined through an analysis of the school’s curriculum, instruction and assessment processes.

Specifically, the NSSE (1998) framework describes a quality curriculum as one that is well-articulated, well-implemented, well-evaluated and standards-based. Curriculum is also expected to be aligned with current student achievement goals and expectations (Reeves, 2002). This necessitates increased attention to curricular differentiation. Marzano’s (2003) findings support a guaranteed and viable curriculum. He found that there was often a difference between the intended curriculum, the implemented curriculum and the attained curriculum at a school. In addition, Newmann et al.’s (2001) work confirmed a need for more program coherency, as well as more tightly aligned curricula K-16, suggesting more collaboration between public and higher education than has been typical of the past.

The NSSE (1998) framework also encourages a deep and highly prioritized curriculum while discouraging the more traditional, wide-scoped curriculum. To this end, teachers are encouraged to determine and operate from essential learnings or power standards, to design learning activities sequenced to result in sophisticated levels of understanding and integrated to allow for more
connection and meaning (Reeves, 2000, 2002; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). Information processing skills and dispositions are also currently valued as highly as content knowledge and skills (Newmann & Wehlage, 1993).

Effective instructional practices, as described in the NSSE (1998) framework, are those which are data driven, closely aligned with student achievement goals and expectations, standards-based and include equitable and comprehensive assessment practices and interventions (McLaughlin & Shepard, 1995). The research findings of Marzano and Kendall (1997), Shepard (2001), Schmoker (1999) and that of Schmoker and Marzano (1999) support the student-centered vision of the ideal classroom as described in the NSSE framework. Teachers are encouraged to differentiate instruction much more intentionally and for a wider variety of student characteristics, learning styles, abilities, readiness levels, interests and personal circumstances than in the past (Tomlinson & Allan, 2000). Emphasis on the education of all students has increased expectations for teachers working with English language learners and other subgroups as well (Teachers of English to Speakers Other Languages, 1997).

Brophy and Good’s (1986) findings documented the effects of active teaching, characterized by interactive feedback. Marzano, Pickering and Pollock’s (2001) findings were more specific. He found nine critical classroom management and instructional practices having direct effects on student achievement. Among these practices were identifying similarities and differences, homework practice, setting objectives and providing feedback, summarizing, note taking, generating and testing hypotheses, reinforcing effort and providing recognition, cooperative learning, and using cues, questions, advanced organizers and other nonlinguistic representations.

There has been a clear shift away from transmission modes of instruction as teachers are encouraged to take on a more facilitative role in the learning process. Constructive methodology is also gaining favor due to its emphasis on personal connections and deeper understanding (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). Teachers are encouraged to provide opportunities for students to think critically, problem-solve, participate in inquiry and reflect on their learning (Tishman, Jay &
Perkins, 1993; Kurfiss, 1988). Opportunities for oral interaction along with collaborative, cooperative activities have been found to increase student engagement (Cohen, 1994; Johnson & Johnson, 1974; Johnson, Johnson, & Scott, 1978). Reading and writing opportunities in all content areas is being advocated as is technology integration in the classroom (Durkin, 1978; Lyons & Pinnell, 2001).

The NSSE (1998) framework determines the quality of school-wide assessment processes by ascertaining the extent to which those processes are comprehensive and equitable. Results-oriented approaches and data-driven decision-making is an expectation at all levels (Schmoker, 1999). All faculty members are expected to engage in school-wide, grade-level or departmental data analysis in addition to their own classroom-based assessment processes. Edmonds’ (1979) effective schools research findings encourage the frequent monitoring of student work. Marzano et al.’s (2001) findings showed that challenging goals and timely feedback have a positive effect on student achievement. Teachers are encouraged to use formative assessments in addition to summative assessments for frequent monitoring of progress toward goals (Stiggins, 1991).

Collaborative analysis of student work, design of common assessments, and collective action research have also become more common (Calhoun, Allen & Halliburton, 1996; Glickman, 1998; Sagar, 2000). Better and timelier access to accurate, disaggregated student achievement has allowed for school-wide intervention approaches as much attention is being placed on having the same academic expectations for all students (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001).

Educational Agenda: Vision, Mission, Goals

The educational agenda refers to the school’s mission, vision, beliefs and goals. The criteria by which the school’s educational agenda is assessed using the NSSE (1998) framework is through the quality of two elements: (a) the presence of a compelling, shared vision along with the collaborative processes used to build that shared vision; (b) goals which are clearly defined and which focus on student learning.
Senge (1990), a leading organizational theorist emphasized the idea of a shared vision to give purpose as well as direction to the work of the school community. Researchers have found that having a shared vision increases teacher’s collective feelings of responsibility towards students’ success, motivates and energizes group members, and helps set clear standards of professionalism (Louis, Marks & Kruse, 1996). A shared vision is developed from a shared understanding. It was Senge’s contention that individuals construct mental models from the assumptions and generalizations they make about what they see around them. Since mental models affect attitudes and behavior, similar mental models, and the shared understandings they create among all stakeholders can synergize improvement efforts at the school. A shared vision in an organizational setting is constructed during social encounters such as on-going reflection, inquiry, problem-solving and the ongoing exchange of ideas with others.

Senge (1990) also stressed the need for a compelling and well-articulated mission. A mission outlines the goals and objectives of the organization and specifies the action that will be taken to meet those goals and objectives. Schmoker (1999) asserted that an action plan that is results-oriented is necessary for school effectiveness. He stressed the importance of analyzing data from ongoing assessments, setting specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound goals as well as working toward small-term wins. Lecotte and McKee (2002) criticized strategic planning of the past as it often contained too much emphasis on planning and too little emphasis on working and assessing the plan. Today, there is a greater emphasis on continuous processes for goal-setting, problem-solving, collective action and evaluating progress.

Evans (1996) warned of the need to include all stakeholders in school improvement planning processes as each person attaches their own meanings to the change. Each member also needs to feel that he has been heard and that his opinions matter (Hersey, Blanchard & Johnson, 2001). Owens and Steinhoff (1978), maintain that the collective construction of the conceptual idea behind the school’s mission and the energy it creates is necessary to withstand the difficulties encountered in the process of change.
An organization that operates from a shared vision, with a clear and focused mission, centered on student achievement goals which have been determined by all members of the organization, represents a substantial change from the traditional high school setting wherein departments, classroom teachers and separate groups typically operate independently from each other (Lortie, 1975). The shared aspect of these processes requires cultivating relationships with those both inside and outside the school. This necessitates what the NSSE (1998) framework refers to as community-building.

**Community-building: Culture, Climate, Collaboration**

Community-building as described within the NSSE (1998) framework focuses on nurturing working relationships within the school and extending the support available to students through collaborative networks of parents and within the larger community. The NSSE framework stresses the value of collaboration both inside and outside the school and the expectation that stakeholders work effectively as a learning community.

Fullan (2001), noted educational researcher, encouraged school leaders to develop mechanisms within the school which support collaboration and collegiality. Drawing on evolution theory, he suggested that social interaction actually helps living organisms evolve faster than living organisms in isolation. Thus, Fullan considered collaborative interaction critical to the professional growth of the school organization and school-wide change. Fullan went so far as to suggest a possible improvement ceiling in professional growth, which may occur without opportunities for teachers to share and to offer support to each other. Collaborative interaction, however, is not a typical secondary school norm. Organizational norms in secondary schools, in the past, have supported isolated work environments and individual professional growth (Lortie, 1975). Education leaders today encourage a shift in these norms to include more interaction among all stakeholder groups (Little et al, 1987). A shift in norms means a shift in culture.
There is an extensive literature base on organizational culture from the mid-1960's when Coleman et al.'s (1966) findings established the importance of the student's background to his academic achievement. Sarason (1982) studied the relationship between school culture and change in the seventies. In the eighties, organizational theory and effective management became important concepts in the corporate world (Becker, 1964; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Prosser, 1999; Schein, 1985). Edmonds' (1979) and Brookover et al.'s (1978) studies re-establishing the importance of the school as a major influence on student achievement and a seminal study conducted by Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, and Ouston (1979), which linked secondary school culture with secondary school effectiveness, helped encourage further culture research.

There have been other studies linking cultural factors and school effectiveness since Rutter's time. However, most have been based on certain aspects of group interaction (Scheerens, 1992). Some analysts believe that the value of culture studies is limited by not only the abstract qualities of culture itself, but also by the large number of variables to account for in the school setting. Prosser (1999) suggested, for example, that the verbiage used to discuss culture in the research has been problematic from its beginning. Several different meanings have been attributed to the term culture. The same is true of the word climate, which is closely related. At various periods of time culture and climate have even been used interchangeably. They both have been referred to as ethos, atmosphere, tone, character, personality and other terms that are difficult to define and measure. Today, although criticized as simplifying a tremendously complex phenomenon, culture is sometimes conceived as the way we do things (Bower, 1996). Deal and Peterson (1990) suggest this can be evidenced through vision and values, ritual and ceremony, history and stories, architecture, artifacts, and other more visible features.

Climate, which is often thought as how we feel about things around here, can be best evidenced by examining the perceptions members have about the organization. Halpin and Croft's Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ), designed in 1963 and
adapted for school use in 1973 by Finlayson helped to shape a common perception of climate through quantitative means and measures (Prosser, 1999). Culturists, on the other hand, have long held a much broader view of climate, with elements so comprehensive and so interconnected that it makes quantitative measure difficult. Culturists have typically used ethnographic methods and tools to try to understand a culture's interacting influences (Dennison, 1996). These two views have separated culturists and climatists historically. However, in a recent review of studies regarding school context, Dennison (1996) observed that culture as it is referred to in recent culture studies bears a common resemblance to what was referred to as climate in early climate studies. He feels that although there has been a marked difference in the way climate and culture have been perceived and measured in the past, their meaning is becoming more aligned and measurement using mixed methods is becoming more common.

Schein's (1985) work is referenced in much professional literature on culture. Schein perceived culture as made up of an organization’s norms, values and the assumptions and beliefs upon which these norms and values are based. Schein cautioned researchers that while a group’s values and norms might be determined through ethnographic methods, the assumptions upon which they are based cannot be accurately ascertained this way as these assumptions are often not even within the participant’s own consciousness. Stern and Steinhoff (Owens & Valesky, 2007) also recognized the difficulty in interpreting culture through visible features of the school environment using the qualitative methods popular at the time. Adapting Stern’s earlier College Characteristics Index they developed the Organizational Climate Index (OCI), appropriate for schools and other organizations, to analyze two dimensions, developmental press and control press, in order to describe a school’s organizational climate. The OCI uses six environmental factors, combined in various ways, to determine this press: intellectual climate, achievement standards, personal dignity, organizational effectiveness, orderliness, and impulse control.

The prevalent perception of culture is as a product of organizational norms. As norms (collective behavior) are made up of the behavior of individual members of the group and
because an individual’s behavior is usually based upon his beliefs, changing the culture of an organization is contingent, in large part, on changing the individual group member’s beliefs (Owens & Steinhoff, 1989; Peterson & Deal, 1998; Schein, 1992;). Therefore, planned change of organizational culture requires purposefully setting up conditions and circumstances in which an individual’s mental models about teaching and learning can be challenged. Theoretically, with new perspectives comes new behavior. It follows that a new shared perspective, or shared understanding, can then lead to new collective behavior, or new norms, ultimately resulting in a change in culture.

Many education theorists today are adamant about the distinction between reculturation, a relatively new term referring to an intentional change of culture, and the restructuring typical of the Restructuring Movement of the 90s. They are quick to point out that these changes typically involved surface level features of the school such as size, organizational structure, and curriculum approaches. Fullan (2005) observed that this type of restructuring alone is rarely enough to bring about substantial increases in school achievement levels. Without changes in the culture along with changes in the structure, school improvement efforts will most likely not be sustained over time. The restructuring he and many others today advocate centers around the changes needed to accommodate collaboration which they see is central to a culture of continuous improvement.

Culture of Continuous Improvement

While teacher improvement generally refers to an increase in skills and knowledge of the principles of teaching and learning, organizational improvement is evidenced through an improved capacity to solve problems together in order to better meet organizational goals and objectives. Continuous organizational improvement refers to a continual increase in this capacity. Since improvement implies change, continuous improvement implies continuous change. A culture of continuous improvement as described in the NSSE (1998) framework, is one in which
the organizational context values and supports continual change leading to increasingly better results.

The implementation of continuous improvement processes to increase targeted results in organizations had its beginnings in World War II as a way to assure quality products needed for the war effort. Deming (1986) introduced his formal continuous improvement cycle, Total Quality Management, as a model for organizational effectiveness, to Japan following the war and then to corporations in the United States in the 1980s. The process, referred to as kaizen in Japan, focuses on small improvements over time, careful monitoring, participative decision-making and respect and empowerment for workers (Chance & Chance, 2002). Organizations engaged in this type of on-going reflection were referred to by Argyris in 1982 as professional learning organizations. Senge (1990) built upon this vision by articulating features of a professional learning organization which include systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared vision and team learning.

When the concept of a professional learning organization, engaged in the continuous improvement process, was eventually applied to school organizations, it differed greatly from previous school improvement efforts which had often focused on specific parts of the system or on certain group members. Even comprehensive school improvement programs up until this time were often subject-specific, had top-down features and still focused on individual or small group participation. In contrast, Fullan (1993) described a school professional learning organization as one that exhibits collective inquiry, group reflection and continuous construction of meaning in order to benefit its student population. Kruse, Louis and Byrk (1994, 1995) described a school-based professional community as one in which teachers engage in reflective dialogue, there is de-privatization of practice, collective focus on student learning, collaboration, and shared norms and values. Hord (1997), a researcher who has spent over thirty years studying school change described a school professional learning organization similarly with the following characteristics:

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• the collegial and facilitative participation of the principal who shares leadership, power, and authority through inviting staff input in decision making

• a shared vision that is developed from the staff’s unswerving commitment to students’ learning and that is consistently articulated and referenced for the staff’s work

• collective learning among staff and application of the learning to solutions that address students’ needs

• the visitation and review of each teacher’s classroom behavior by peers as a feedback and assistance activity to support teachers

• physical conditions and human capacities that support such an operation (Summary, para. 1)

Common to all of these descriptions of a professional learning organization is the idea that the school participates in a continuous improvement process characterized by faculty, administration and others meeting regularly to analyze its practices, identifying areas for improvement, working closely together on shared goals targeted on student achievement and monitoring results. Despite its growing popularity as a model for school improvement, there has as yet not been empirical research to document a causal relationship between a professional learning organization and student academic achievement. Certain elements of the approach, however, such as data-driven decision-making, have been directly linked to student achievement (Schmoker, 1999). The school-wide self-study upon which the continuous improvement cycle is based has been directly linked to student achievement as well (Lee & Smith, 1996). Teachers in environments engaged in the continuous improvement process have also been found to have increased feelings of collective responsibility toward their school’s students, increased feelings of teacher efficacy, increased staff cooperation and increased ability to solve problems in a group (Costa & Garmston, 2002; Louis et al., 1996). Findings from these studies and others demonstrate
the significance of the manner in which teachers interact in the school (McLaughlin, 1990; Rosenholtz, 1989a, 1989b; Schmuck & Runkel, 1985).

Since the culture of an organization is made up by the values, beliefs and behaviors of the individual members of the group, the success of the professional learning community is ultimately affected by the work of individual teachers. Therefore, establishing a culture of continuous improvement necessitates giving attention to the continuous improvement of individual teachers as well as to that of the whole organization. In addition, the current federal school improvement mandate, No Child Left Behind Act (2001) places great emphasis on teacher quality as studies show a link between teacher quality and student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1997). To assist in assuring the quality work of individual teachers, standards for excellence in teaching have been developed (Danielson, 1996). A National Board Certification process has also been established (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2002).

While professional development has played a significant role in many school change initiatives, it has undergone radical changes itself. National standards for professional development have been established which reflect a much broader conception of professional development than in the past and place it central to school reform (National Staff Development Council, 2001). The characteristics of quality professional development articulated in these new standards are similar to the conditions which support the continuous improvement process in a school. Quality professional development is described in these standards as involving professional learning experiences which are continuous and ongoing, job-embedded, results-oriented, and constructivist in nature. Similar characteristics are articulated in The Mission and Principles of Professional Development, a document created by the United States Department of Education Professional Development Team (1994) that defines high-quality professional development with the following markers:

- focuses on teachers as central to student learning
- focuses on individual, collegial, and organizational improvement
• respects and nurtures the intellectual and leadership capacity of individuals within the school community
• reflects best available research and practice in teaching, learning, and leadership
• enables teachers to develop further expertise in subject content, teaching strategies, and technology
• promotes continuous inquiry and improvement
• involves collaborative planning
• requires substantial time and other resources
• is driven by a coherent long-term plan
• is assessed by its impact on teacher effectiveness and student learning (para. 5)

Expert levels of implementation require deep understanding of new knowledge and high levels of skill attainment (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). Joyce and Showers (2002), researchers noted for their significant contribution to the study of professional development, maintained that traditional professional development structures such as in-services, trainings, conferences, and workshops have rarely in and of themselves resulted in the sophisticated levels of understanding required for actual change in classroom practice. Joyce and Showers observed that the result of these trainings is more often than not an awareness level of understanding among participants. They attribute this to the fact that teacher’s prior assumptions about teaching and learning are rarely challenged in these settings. This suggests that change in classroom practice, as with change at the organizational level, is not likely without teachers engaging in professional development activities that challenge their underlying beliefs and assumptions about teaching and learning which can then lead to the creation of new mental models (Senge, 1990).

Ongoing reflection and dialogue are central to these paradigm-shifting experiences (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Wood & McQuarrie, 1999). Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1990) identified the following five professional development formats, each optimal for different
purposes but all with reflection and dialogue at their core: curriculum design, problem-solving, analyzing student work, data analysis and evaluation, inquiry, case studies, and action research.

In addition to reflection and dialogue, these five formats also share a constructivist base. Sparks and Hirsh (1997) pointed to constructivist methodology as the best approach to quality professional development as it fosters the personal meaningfulness and relevance required for sophisticated levels of understanding. Constructivism is a theory which offers an explanation for how people learn by constructing meaning for themselves from their life experiences (Bruner, 1966). Its tenets suggest that learners are continually and actively searching for and constructing new meanings. Dewey (1938) suggested that context gives experience its meaning. Vygotsky (1978), noted Russian psychologist, came to a similar conclusion. However, his findings focused on the social context he believed influenced the meaning that people assign to experience (Wink & Putney, 2002). Each of the five formats listed above are job-embedded and so each provide a context for meaningful learning and application. Several researchers advocate job-embedded activities that involve a teacher’s real, day-to-day work centered on his current students’ learning (Costa & Garmston, 2002; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Stiggins, 1991; Wood & McQuarrie, 1999). This represents a definite shift in the content of what has traditionally been considered quality professional development—a shift from the subject of teaching to the subject of learning (Lieberman, 1995; Schmoker, 1999; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). The collective meaning-making which occurs as colleagues are involved in collaborative reflection on their work helps individual teachers clarify their own understanding of learning (Little et al., 1987).

In their early studies of professional development, Joyce and Showers (1984) found that presentation, demonstration, and opportunities for practice and feedback led to 10-15% of actual classroom application of new learning and skills. With the addition of implementation support features such as ongoing study teams and peer visits classroom application increased dramatically, to an average of 80-90%. A decade after their initial study, Joyce and Showers (2002) conducted research which added new insights regarding school-wide processes of
professional development. They found that when professional development involved school-wide implementation, classroom application levels rose to 100%, higher than that of well-supported individuals and even sub-groups. Newmann et al.'s (2001) findings verified the effects of school-wide supports. He found it ineffective to train individual teachers and then send them back to unsupportive environments. Goodlad (1984, 1992) observed, as well, that school level change had an effect on the improvement of individual teacher behaviors.

Lee, Smith and Croninger (1995) reported a connection between school level professional development and student achievement. Findings from an extensive study involving 11,000 students from 820 different schools showed greater student achievement gains in schools whose staff worked together to provide support for one another while making needed changes in classroom instruction. Hord (1997) summarized the results of several studies in which similar results were found. Students from these studies experienced the following:

- decreased dropout rate and fewer class cuts
- lower rates of absenteeism
- increased learning that is distributed more equitably in the smaller high schools
- larger academic gains in math, science, history and reading than in traditional schools
- smaller achievement gaps between students from different backgrounds (Summary, para. 2)

Rogers' (1995) findings provide a possible explanation for this phenomenon. Rogers reported that the rate of change is accelerated within collaborative workplaces due to the diffusion of information through formal and informal communication networks. We can conclude that while individual teacher quality is vital, a collaborative workplace within a culture of continuous improvement is necessary to capitalize on it (Lieberman, 1995; Lieberman & Grolnick, 1997).

The challenges of establishing school-wide mechanisms to provide the time, opportunity and means for frequent dialogue, peer coaching, study teams, peer visits and other features of
collaborative continuous improvement often require major changes in how time, money and other resources are used (Murphy, 1995; Showers, Murphy & Joyce, 1996; Wood & McQuarrie, 1999). With a desire to establish just such a collaborative workplace, DuFour implemented the professional learning organization concept by establishing a cycle of continuous improvement at his school (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). His school experienced notable results. Aldai Stevenson High School is the only school to have earned the United States Department of Education Blue Ribbon four times (DuFour et al., 2005). Although the establishment of professional learning organizations had been encouraged for many years, DuFour's success at Aldai Stevenson High School raised awareness of school leaders nation-wide and provided a concrete example for an otherwise theoretical and abstract idea. DuFour's intentional use of the term professional learning community as opposed to professional learning organization was to emphasize the inclusive and interdependent aspects of the school as a collaborative workplace. DuFour's vision of a professional learning community was very similar to that of Fullan (1993), Senge (1990), Hord (1997) and Kruse et al. (1994, 1995) before him. It includes a shared mission, shared vision and values, collaborative teams, collective inquiry, an action and results orientation, and a continuous improvement process as collaborative professional development (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). As demonstrated by the experiences at Aldai Stevenson High School, collaborative professional development of this nature requires a new type of leadership; leadership for collaboration and change.

Leadership

Leadership for school improvement, as defined within the NSSE (1998) framework, combines the concepts of an instructional leader with that of the visionary leader as illustrated by the following description:

Promotes quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning; develops school-wide plans for improvement focused on
student learning; employs effective decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative; monitors progress in improving student achievement and instructional effectiveness through a comprehensive assessment system and continuous reflection. (p. 11)

The effect of the principal on the success of the school organization has been examined and validated by several researchers (Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982; Little, 1982; Mortimore & Sammonds, 1987). Specifically, research findings by Calweti (1987b), Edmonds (1979) and Lezotte and Bancroft (1985), have shown that strong leaders have an effect on student performance. Brandt (1987) observed that teacher perceptions of principal leadership have an effect on student achievement as well.

A large research-base on organizational leadership reveals different perceptions of what constitutes effective organizational leadership over time. The following historical overview of significant contributions in this field has been generated from information presented in Hersey et al.'s (2001) Management of Organizational Behavior: Leading Human Resources. According to Hersey et al., traits and similarities of effective leaders were popular in the thirties when it was thought that a leader’s behaviors equated to a group’s success. Attitudinal approaches followed in approximately 1945, ushered in with Ohio State University’s leadership studies which considered a leader’s behavior style. Style was exhibited by degrees of control and how a leader viewed the needs and desires of his group members. Several leadership style theories were based on behavioral orientations which could be conceptualized on continuums such as that of the 1948 Michigan Leadership Studies, led by Blake and Moulton, which identified the leader’s concern for people or production; the 1948 Ohio State University Leadership Studies, led by Stogdill, which identified the initiation or consideration orientations; or Likert’s 1961 employee-centered or job-centered orientations. The 1970’s was an era of contingency theories in which the flexibility of the leader was the critical aspect to effective leadership. Hersey et al.’s own Situational Leadership called for a match between a leader’s behavior and the needs of his or her follower group.
In the 1980s, the effective principal was thought to be an instructional leader, or one who helps maintain a focus on learning throughout the school setting (McLaughlin & Marsh, 1979). However, the principal as an instructional leader has been more of an ideal than a reality. Shifting roles from an emphasis on managerial tasks to an emphasis on growth and development of a professional learning community has proven difficult. The role of manager versus that of a leader is debated throughout the literature (Burns, 1978). While the two terms are often used interchangeably, many believe there is a distinct difference in the nature of the tasks of each. Leithwood (1992), for example, described the manager as one who is more concerned about the day to day workings of the organization. Deal and Peterson (1990) contrasted this with a leader, who they characterized as one who brings energy to the system, keeping it moving forward. Block (1987) spoke of a leader as one who was able to turn “intentions into reality” (p. 98). The distinction between the two sets of skills and dispositions has had special significance in recent years as the concept of a visionary leader has been explored.

A visionary leader is one who functions as an instructional leader who can lead a shared vision and help an organization maintain a targeted focus. The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium leadership standards describe a visionary leader as an “educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community” (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996, p. 10). Due to the changing expectations of school reform such as those inherent in school improvement and accreditation processes, today’s visionary leader must be knowledgeable about the organizational change process in schools, as well, and skilled at change process facilitation (Louis & Miles, 1990; Tichy & DeVanna, 1990).
School Improvement: Organizational Change Process

In an effort to understand change and its effects on the public school organization, education leaders have drawn upon an extensive literature base examining organizational development and change in the corporate setting (March & Simon, 1958; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Senge, 1990). Further studies, focused on the complexities and unique applications in the field of education, have added much to the understanding of organizational change (Fullan, 1993; Garmston & Wellman, 1999; Goertz, Floden & O’Day, 1995; Hall & Hord, 1987; Sarason, 1982). Several change theorists have developed approaches to change which are similar to each other such as Chin and Bennis (Chin & Benne, 1969) who considered normative-re-educative, power-coercive and empirical-rational approaches and Havelock (1971) who also described three strategic orientations to change (problem-solving, social interaction, and research, development and diffusion).

The history of education policy regarding school improvement reveals change approaches which over time become increasingly wider in scope. Sashkin and Egermeier’s (1993) analysis of change initiatives identified four action tactics applied to school improvement, namely, (a) fix the parts, (b) fix the people, (c) fix the school, and then (d) fix the system. Hord (2002) maintained that Marshall Sashkin and John Egermeier’s ideas align conceptually with that of Warren Bennis and Robert Chin, and Ronald Havelock. Raywid (1990) also described a series of change initiatives which he characterized as waves. He reported a first wave of change, beginning in 1982, as focusing on quick fixes; a second wave as focusing on changing classroom practices; a third wave as focusing on fixing the school and its programs; a fourth wave as focusing on fundamental restructuring; and a fifth wave as focusing on systemic reform. Both Sashkin and Egermeier’s (1993) and Raywid’s (1990) analyses showed a clear movement from a focus on parts of the school system to a focus on the school system as a whole. The learning and growth of the organization as a whole, or system, is the current focus of school improvement.
Change in a System

Organization theorists have found systems theory, based on Bertanlaffy’s (1968) general systems theory, a useful analogy to explain the workings of the organization. According to the tenets of this theory, a system is made up of many interacting parts and the effectiveness of the whole is dependent on the effectiveness of the interactions of these parts. Change in one part of a system is likely to affect its other parts as well as the system as a whole. The reverse also applies: Change in the system as a whole is likely to affect its individual parts. Applying the basic ideas of systems theory to planned organizational change suggests that focusing all efforts at the individual level while hoping to make substantial change at the organization level is likely to be ineffective. Likewise, concentrating on the whole organization without considering the individual’s feelings, perceptions and ideas is also likely to result in very little substantial, sustainable change.

Throughout the professional literature on school change, the school organization is depicted as a social system: a system comprised of living organisms. Getzels and Guba (1957) developed the social system model during the social sciences period. Getzel and Guba’s social system model acknowledges two key dimensions: a) individuals and institutions (subgroups) within the organization and their relationship with each other, and b) the whole organization itself. As a social system, the school organization is made up of a number of interrelated subgroups such as faculty and administrators, and a number of subsystems, such as tasks, structures, technology and people (Owens & Valensky, 2007; Owens & Steinhoff, 1976). These subgroups and subsystems greatly affect each other.

An open social system is a type of social system which affects and is affected by interactions within the system and its interactions with the environment surrounding it (Hersey et al., 2001). The exchange of information provides opportunities for constant monitoring through feedback loops (Argyris & Schon, 1976). The vulnerability of an open social system to both internal and external influences greatly increases the system’s complexity but also increases its amenability to
change. As an open social system, the public school is both complex and open to change. The openness of the public school organization is evidenced by its interdependent relationship with various entities, conditions and forces external to it. The systems' survival depends on its successful interaction with these outside influences and the energy created by them. Garmston and Wellman (1999) used the term adaptive organization to refer to this amenability. Senge (1990) asserted, however, that being adaptive is not enough for school organizations. They must be generative, referring to the ability of the organization to renew itself, learn and grow, or in other words, increase its ability to meet its goals and objectives.

Schein (1985) maintained that an organization changes or grows in recognizable stages. He found that the organizations' stage of maturity affects the ease or difficulty with which the organization faces change. He found, for example, that it is difficult for an organization to change in its midlife. Groups within the larger organization have also been examined as to patterns of learning and growth. Tuckman (1965) for example, described a common sequence of interactions which are evidenced within groups as they become more effective at working together, namely, norming, storming, forming and performing. These and other such patterns have helped establish some predictable characteristics of the organizational change process in schools.

The most prevalent of these characteristics is the nature of change as a process. As a process, change takes place over time (Hall & Hord, 2001). Mort (1953) studied the process it takes for information to spread and take hold in an organization as he applied diffusion theory to the change process in the education system. He found that the rate of diffusion for the concept of kindergarten to be accepted, embraced and fully implemented on a large-scale, as a whole system, took about fifty years. Hall and Loucks (1977) later observed, through their own studies that the implementation of innovations at the school level took approximately three to five years. This timeline is largely ignored in school organizations as evidenced by a traditional expectancy of immediate and full implementation of new policies, programs, and instructional practices.
Cuban (1998) found that the size as well as the level of a change greatly affected its rate of diffusion throughout an organization. He articulated a distinction between first order change, which he described as change which is focused on renewal, improvement, effectiveness and efficiency, and second order change, or transformational change, which he described as more comprehensive. Transformational change, according to Burns (1978), involves change in the organization's very mission and structure. It involves change in the deeply held beliefs of its members. Thus transformational change is more difficult and is often resisted (Siskin & Little, 1995).

Due to the human element involved in an open social system, change is non-linear, thus has an element of unpredictability (Gleick, 1987). The nonlinear and unpredictable qualities of change have led education theorists to favor chaos theory over diffusion theory to help explain the process of organizational change (Fullan, 2001). The mathematical tenets of chaos theory mirror phenomena characteristic of the school system amidst change. The major disturbances in the school community which arise from seemingly insignificant and unrelated incidents are examples of the onset of turbulence, a tenet of chaos theory as explained by Chance and Chance (2002). Another reason for the conceptual shift from diffusion to chaos theory is its emphasis on interactions between whole systems. In the school system, this concept is evidenced by relationships and interactions between the education system and its surrounding political, social, religious, and cultural systems.

Fullan (2001) further pointed to complexity science as a framework for thinking about how living systems function. Although similar to chaos theory, complexity science, places a great emphasis on the order and stability which eventually emerges naturally out of otherwise chaotic conditions (Pascale, 1990). This tenet, self-organization, is particularly pertinent to school leadership and provides good reason to leaders to stay the course during chaotic and uncomfortable phases of a change initiative. Complexity science posits that unforeseen consequences are certain. Fullan (2001) suggested that facilitation of change rather than its
management is a more appropriate expectation in an environment of complexity due to this unpredictable and nonlinear characteristic. Complexity, as a construct, has been referred to as an area on the edge of chaos (Pascale, Millem & Gioja, 2000). Fullan (2001) suggested that working on the edge of chaos is beneficial to an organization as it is in this area that movement and growth is most likely. However, the tendency of systems to maintain equilibrium and resist change works against movement and growth.

Equilibrium and Resistance

Equilibrium is evidenced in a secondary school organization by its strong tendency to maintain its status quo (National Association for Secondary Principals, 2004). Fullan (2001) cautioned, however, that the tendency of a system to maintain equilibrium and resist change in response to changing surroundings actually increases risks to that system. Many education leaders today consider the growing momentum of the school choice movement to be an example of how the public school system has suffered due to its resistance to change and failure to respond to a changing society.

Because of the system’s tendency to maintain equilibrium and resist change, Lewin (1936, 1951), recognized as the father of modern social psychology, surmised that force is required for significant change to occur in organizations. Lewin identified the construct of driving and restraining forces both inside and outside the organization which continually act, either directly or indirectly, upon the organization. These forces, which can demonstrate themselves as trends, events or factors, are necessary to unfreeze the organization precedent to change. Lewin maintained that in a state of equilibrium driving and restraining forces are pushing back at each other with equal pressure. If driving forces are decreased, restraining forces increase their pressure and vice versa. Driving and restraining forces can be economic in nature, environmental, physical, political, social, ethical and even technological. Lewin also suggested that organizations needed refreezing once a change has been implemented in order for the change to become
institutionalized. Lewin developed the force-field analysis as a method to analyze the forces acting upon an organization.

Lewin’s (1951) theory has been challenged in recent years by theorists who contend that change rather than equilibrium is the natural state of organizations. Instead of looking at organizations as being in a state of equilibrium, experiencing episodic bursts of change activity, these theorists see the organization as in a state of constant change (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). As such, driving and restraining forces, at least when seen as instigators or barriers to change, are somewhat irrelevant. Burns (2004) defended Lewin’s original theory, however, stating that process theorists fail to acknowledge the forces acting upon the organization even in the state of equilibrium. Lewin’s theory acknowledges constant change but in a pragmatic sense differentiates it from the planned change which concerns organizational leaders.

Colville (2005) added a twist to both points of view. While acknowledging the constancy of change, Colville sees intermittent stopping as great opportunity for collective reflection, which he considered necessary for organizational improvement. Colville contended that change within organizations should not be confused with organizational change. The first rarely reaches deep enough to affect the culture of the organization. Colville offers, rather, that organizations, which he agrees are naturally in a state of constant change, need planned opportunities for stopping, or as this is theoretically impossible, at least stepping outside of the continuous stream of day to day happenings in order to engage in meaningful collective reflection. From this point of view, the important job of the educational leader interested in organizational improvement is to anticipate the need for freezing for meaningful change as well as unfreezing for meaningful change. Increased force may be needed for both. This is especially true when considering the psychological elements which often act as restraining forces or barriers to the improvement process.

Schein (1985) expanded Lewin’s theory to include the consideration of psychological elements. Schein maintained that unfreezing requires individuals to be confronted with data
which disconfirms their operating schema and creates feeling of guilt-anxiety. According to Schein, the individual, with feelings of guilt-anxiety, will then move towards needed change if, at that point, barriers to change are removed or there is a reduction of threat. Once unfrozen, the actual changing of individuals involves learning new responses or changing attitudes through a process of cognitive re-definition. Schein perceived Lewin’s re-freezing stage as a process similar to unfreezing in that the individual receives personal and relational feedback which then effects whether the new learning is eventually adopted and fully integrated into new schema and new habits or whether the new learning is abandoned. This process involves emotional, psychological, and social dimensions which makes the human aspects of change quite evident. Schneider’s (1990) work underscored the central and critical role of the individual in organizational change as well insisting that it isn’t the organization that does the changing. Change actually happens to individuals in the context of an organization.

The Individual and Organizational Change

Organizational change has its roots in anthropological and sociological theories. Ever since Mayo introduced the significance of the human element in the workplace, in the 1920s, researchers have studied various humanistic elements of organizational change such as the individual group member’s motivations, perceptions and concerns (Gillespie, 1991). It has been established that an individual’s personal investment in organizational change has much to do with his or her motivation to change. Several motivation theories have been developed over time, most based on the idea that people have needs which influence their behavior.

Maslow’s (1943) Hierarchy of Human Needs, one of the first of these theories, delineates five basic-needs levels: (a) physiological needs; (b) safety needs; (c) love (the need to belong to a group, to give and receive friendship, etc.); (d) esteem (includes the desire for self-esteem, self-respect, reputation, and the need for recognition and appreciation); (e) self-actualization or self-fulfillment (characterized by the desire for self-development, creativity and job satisfaction).
Herzberg (1968) offered his unidirectional twin factor theory. In it he recognized, as did Maslow, the worker's need to increase job satisfaction (self actualization). He added, however, the human need to avoid pain. Herzberg (1968) identified hygiene factors for work conditions (social, security and physiological elements) which have a tendency to reduce job satisfaction, whereas his motivators are connected to achievement, recognition, responsibility, personal growth, advancement and sometimes even the work itself.

Vroom & Yetton (1973) considered decision-making as an element which affects motivation. Vroom and Yetton's expectancy theory was based on three perceptions that can influence an individual's decision to participate in change initiatives, all having to do with a person's expectations of their own success. These expectations can add to or reduce a person's self-confidence as well as in the system in which he works. Attribution theory is related as well as it addresses the level of control a person feels over various aspects of his work (Weiner, 1974).

People approach and respond to change differently. Hersey et al. (2001) suggested that individuals differ in their readiness to change and identified a distinction between an individual's willingness and his ability to make changes. Rogers (1995) found that in addition to an individual's perceptions and attitudes about a particular proposed change, his attitude toward change itself plays a significant role in a person's response to change. Rogers considered five categories of individuals according to the order at which they typically adopt change: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. Schein and Bennis (1965) suggested that psychological safety accounts for some of this variation. Lack of psychological safety, which is necessary for a person to agree to and to persist through difficult changes, may cause considerable stress.

Several researchers have suggested that there are emotional stages a person experiences as he works through the stress of change. Scott and Jaffe (1995) identified four psychological adjustments the individual must make: denial, resistance, exploration, and commitment. Bridges (1980, 1991) recognized a similar phenomenon. He identified three transitional experiences...
which he labeled: endings, neutral zone, and new beginnings. Glickman, Gordon and Ross-Gordon (1998) found that teacher’s concerns change as they increase in levels of teaching experience. Krupp (1993) came to a similar awareness about a teacher’s changing worries and concerns from his studies of a teacher’s life cycles. Fuller (1969) found in her work with student teachers, for example, that the type of worries and concerns experienced by teachers change over time beginning with concerns focused on the self, then to concerns focusing on the task or innovation and finally to concerns about the impact of the task or innovation on students. Hall and Hord (1987) built upon Fuller’s three stages of concerns by further clarifying these stages of concerns and developing an instrument to measure them. The Concerns Based Assessment Model (Hall & Hord, 2001) is an assessment tool designed to guide a leader’s interventions in response to teacher’s concerns as the teacher moves through the change process. Hall and Hord (1987) maintained that ignoring teacher’s concerns or giving the wrong type of assistance can not only slow down the process of change but may add stress and lead to job dissatisfaction.

Stress is a leading cause of job dissatisfaction in the general workforce and a factor in decreasing teacher retention which has been a major concern of education leaders throughout the past decade (Calweti, 1987a; Darling-Hammond, 1997). Indeed, Ingersoll (2001) found that fifty percent of teachers leave the profession within their first four years of teaching. One of the most common reasons teachers give for leaving the field of teaching is a lack of leader and collegial support (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Ingersoll, 2001; Lieberman, 1995; Little, 1982; Rosenholtz, 1989b; Tye & O’Brian, 2002). Emerick, Hirsch and Berry (2005) reported findings of several studies which demonstrated that support was even more important to teachers in schools where the majority of students were of low socioeconomic status. Studies in both North Carolina and South Carolina of about 50,000 teacher surveys showed that working in a collaborative environment led by an instructional leader that supported professional endeavors made the biggest difference in a teachers’ decision to stay in the profession. Hord’s (2002) asserted that
these same workplace factors not only increased teacher's abilities but increased the teacher's inclination to change as well.

Leader and collegial support are just two of many workplace factors which make up the context of the school environment. Contextual factors as defined by Hall and Hord (2001) are a combination of cultural (human) and situational (physical) elements in the organizational environment. Boyd (1992), whose review of literature on workplace culture is heavily referenced on the subject of educational context and its effects on the change process, identified seventeen indicators that describe an educational context conducive to change. Hall and Hord (2001, p. 197) organized Boyd’s indicators into the following paraphrased four groups of observable action: (a) reducing isolation with policies, schedules and structures that build a sense of community and support collegial relationships among teachers; (b) increasing staff capacity as evidenced by a norm of involvement in decision-making and policies that provide greater autonomy and staff development; (c) providing a caring, productive environment evidenced by parents and community members as partners and allies, with supportive attitudes, positive, caring student-teacher-administrator relationships, student heightened interest and engagement in learning, and positive attitudes of teachers toward schooling, students and change itself; (d) promoting increased quality, assuring a shared vision and sense of purpose by establishing norms of continuous critical inquiry and continuous improvement.

The context that Boyd (1992) described is similar to the descriptions of other researchers of professional learning communities engaged in a continuous improvement process. Hord (1997), concluded from her review of literature on professional learning communities that teachers working within this context (supportive and shared leadership, shared personal practice, collective learning) express more satisfaction, experience increased teacher efficacy, give more attention to student needs, and adapt new classroom behaviors more readily. Hord inferred that within this context teachers are more likely to make and sustain fundamental and sustainable change.
Sustainability

The professional literature on school improvement shows an increasing emphasis on the importance of the sustainability of school change efforts (Miles & Louis, 1986). Organizational leadership and particularly the role of the principal are central to this discussion. Researchers and theorists are adamant that while strong leadership is vital to school effectiveness, leadership within a culture of change can no longer be vested in one central, popular leader (Fullan, 2001; Lambert, 1995; Lieberman, 1995). There is an expectation that everyone in a learning organization must assume responsibility for the success of group-determined goals (Hargreaves, 1994; Lieberman, 1995). Within the context of shared leadership, Barth (2001) explained, everyone is willing to take a leadership role as needed.

Shared leadership is neither top-down nor bottom-up, but a combination of the two (Fullan, 1994, 2002). The principal in such a role, a leader of leaders, needs to be comfortable with less control and be more intentional about building capacity than in the past (Fullan, 1993). A leader of leaders intentionally fosters relationships and coordinates interaction which prompted Lambert et al. (1995) to refer to the role of the principal in this setting as a facilitator of conversation. Fullan (2002) addressed this diversification of principal roles when he stated, “The role of the principal as instructional leader is too narrow a concept to carry the weight of the kinds of reforms that will create the schools that we need for the future” (p. 16).

Others in the school setting, besides the principal, often act as change agents or change facilitators (Miles, Saxl & Lieberman, 1988). Fullan (2003) asserted that every person in a learning community must be a change agent, referring to the responsibilities implied in the concept of shared leadership. Hall and Hord (2001), who have done a considerable amount of study of change facilitator style and behaviors, defined change facilitators as those who assist the organization through the change process. These facilitators can come from inside or outside the organization. They suggested that there may be several levels of change facilitators in a school change effort. Mortimore and Sammonds (1987) found that school leadership teams often act as
change agents/facilitators as well and provide a level of leadership that in the past was reserved for administration. Havelock (1973) identified the following four roles of change agents: catalyst, solution giver, process helper, resource linker. Hord (2002) compiled a list of the functions of interventions which she suggested form a job description of a change facilitator. These include creating an atmosphere and culture for change, developing and communicating the vision, planning and providing resources, providing training and development, monitoring and checking progress, and continuing to give assistance.

While the trend toward shared leadership, collaboration and other elements of a professional learning community might suggest a lack for the need of outside expertise, researchers have found that external consultants and staff developers are still valuable to the school change process. However, the role of these consultants has changed considerably from providing professional development to providing guidance to school communities working through the change process (Lambert, 1995). Beaton (1985) witnessed a shift in job responsibilities for district staff development specialists as well, from providing training to assisting with organizational change.

More recently, district-level supports have been emphasized as vital to sustainability (Fullan, 1993, 2005; Lezotte & Jacoby, 1992). Fullan’s (1993) observations of the change process in many schools and districts have led him to conclude that significant and sustainable change requires supports at all levels of the educational system. Fullan (2005) offers eight district system-level conditions needed for sustainability:

1. a moral purpose
2. commitment to changing context at all levels
3. lateral capacity building through networks
4. intelligent accountability and vertical relationships
5. deep learning at all levels
6. dual commitment to short-term and long-term results
7. awareness of energy required for full engagement and the need for replenishment

8. leaders as system thinkers (p. X)

Change which is deep enough to result in reculturation typically affects many areas of the system, at all levels throughout the system. This is the type of complex change inherent in the establishment of a continuous improvement process in a school. This deep change can have a chaotic feel. For this reason, Fullan (2001) recommended deliberate efforts to bring coherency to the process. One way to do this is to help organization members understand the workings of the change process and to recognize the changes that are occurring while the culture is amidst change (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Hall & Hord, 1987; Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin & Hall, 1987). Principals can also assure more coherency if they work to embed the structures and mechanisms of the continuous improvement process into the every day practices and procedures of the school. The more embedded the change the better the chance of sustaining the process (Hord, 2002; Miles & Louis, 1986). In a system which is truly sustainable, the habits and methods of the ongoing continuous improvement process will remain constant in spite of the certain change in future leadership, programs, structures and innovations.

Summary

Twenty-five years of school reform efforts have not produced significant change in student achievement scores on standardized assessments nationwide. The structure and culture of the majority of high schools, across the nation, remains virtually unchanged as does classroom practice. Change has always been difficult for the public school system as it has a tendency to maintain status quo despite substantial changes in the needs and expectations of the society it serves. However, the school system has not lacked in effort. The system has experienced numerous education movements and a plethora of school improvement initiatives. Unfortunately, most of these efforts have involved surface-level changes and been based on naïve understandings of the complex machinations of the process of change itself.
Whereas past efforts have typically focused on changing individuals and programs, the current school improvement movement shifts attention to the organizational setting of the school itself. It encourages a much deeper transformation than required in the past in order to establish and sustain a culture of continuous improvement. Despite the challenges inherent in the change process, many feel that an organizational context which supports continuous improvement holds the most promise for school effectiveness. Education researchers, theorists and noted practitioners are hopeful that school organizations which function as professional learning communities conducting ongoing self-examination through a process of day to day continuous improvement will result in increased student achievement as well as increased creativity, motivation and efficacy of teachers.

Building and sustaining organizational habits of on-going, collective analysis and reflection requires a collaborative culture which differs considerably from the traditional culture of secondary schools. However, the vision remains largely abstract and there are relatively few models. Researchers have expressed a need for descriptions of the process experienced by school communities working to restructure and re-culture their schools.

The change process is complex, non-linear and unpredictable. It can be challenging, chaotic and messy. It involves changing long held beliefs about teaching and learning as well as the underlying assumptions upon which they are based. The process involves change throughout the entire system including changes to the school’s agenda, academic program, leadership, community-building processes, and its culture of continuous improvement. A variety of contextual factors affects this change process and can be conceptualized as forces exerting pressure and either driving the change forward or working to restrain it. The conceptual framework presented here is based on the relationship between the continuous improvement process and the change process which is central to it. This review of literature has described the expectations of change facing school organizations today. The change process itself was also described and analyzed in terms of its characteristics and challenges. The student achievement
increases sought after for twenty-four years of school reform may just depend on how school communities meet and work through these very challenges.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study explored the five-year change process as experienced by members of a secondary school community who intentionally sought out and pursued school improvement through the establishment of a continuous improvement process with the goal of increased student achievement. The research questions which framed this exploration were:

1. What contextual factors have contributed to the change process at a secondary school attempting to establish a culture of continuous improvement?
2. How do these contextual factors interact and interrelate to contribute to the implementation and sustainability of the continuous improvement processes?
3. How do these contextual factors interact and interrelate to contribute to the change process itself?

This study was based on the supposition that planned change in the secondary school setting is a complex process which takes place over a period of time. The change process involves many, varied and interrelated contextual factors. How these factors interrelate and interplay to contribute to the implementation and sustainability of a continuous improvement process, in a secondary school, over the course of five years was the focus of this study. Although the participant school undertook an intentional process of change with the ultimate goal of increased student achievement, the researcher was less interested with student achievement results and more concerned with a better understanding of how the school, as an organization, pursued and sustained what it considered to be the optimal means to that end. As such, this study involved a
close examination of the phenomenon of change as it existed within the complex situational and contextual conditions of the school organization.

Research Design

In order to provide better understanding of the change process at a secondary school involved in planned change over the past five years, this study utilized an exploratory case study model with an historical analysis. The study’s research design was based on Yin’s (1994) well-developed case study model. Yin (1994) maintained that a case study model is the preferred strategy when meaning is sought and the focus of the study is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context. According to Yin (1994), case studies, such as these, are typically process-oriented and focused on an issue. In this study, the process is change and the issue is one that many secondary schools leaders throughout the nation are currently facing: the challenge of implementing and sustaining continuous improvement processes.

Yin (1994) held that a study’s research questions dictate an appropriate research approach. The purposes of this study and its research questions justify an exploratory approach. While this study had descriptive elements, the research questions guiding this study were what and how questions, often indicative of exploratory investigations intended to shed light on little understood phenomenon such as the change process in a secondary school (Yin, 1994).

This case study followed a holistic single-case design which Yin (1994) maintained is appropriate when attempting to confirm, challenge or extend a theory, when the case represents an extreme or unique case or when the study is revelatory in nature. Although the case study was holistic in nature, as it explored the process of change at a secondary school, it also included embedded sub-units to help focus the study and allow for more complex analyses while maintaining the flexibility needed for an exploratory approach. These subunits included aspects of the school’s culture which are outlined in the secondary school accreditation process.
including: educational agenda, educational program, leadership, community-building and a culture of continuous improvement (National Study of School Evaluation, 1998).

While some criticism of single-case study research in the past due to its supposed ungeneralizability, Yin (1994) maintained that external validity could be achieved from theoretical relationships. From these theoretical relationships, generalizations can then be made. In spite of its seemingly limited application, the value of single-case study research, focused on school learning communities, has been pointed out by several researchers such as Fullan (2005), Firestone and Reihl (2005), as well as McLaughlin and Talbert (2006). Each has supported the in-depth investigation and high level of specificity and detail which single-case studies allow. It is this level of specificity and detail which make these studies particularly useful to school leaders who can decide for themselves which aspects of these studies have the best fit for their school communities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Data Collection**

Yin (1994) suggested three principles of data collection for case studies in order to enhance validity and reliability: (a) use multiple sources of data, (b) create a case study database and (c) maintain a chain of evidence. Yin (1994) suggested using multiple sources of evidence as a way to ensure construct validity. This study incorporated four of the six sources of evidence listed by Yin (1994) as appropriate for data collection in case study research. These include documentation and archival records, physical artifacts, interviews and direct observation. Data from these sources provided triangulation, thus ensuring a more accurate picture of the change process over time and increasing the validity of its interpretation.

Qualitative methods were employed to gather data for this study. Qualitative methodology has been found optimal for the exploration of real school processes in their natural setting (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Due to the complexity of the change process in secondary schools, it was critical for the researcher to approach the study without preconceived ideas about
what was meaningful and relevant. Qualitative methodology allowed for significant factors to emerge (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Merriam, 2001) and allowed the researcher to capitalize on the participant’s frame of reference, which proved critical to this study (Creswell, 2003).

**Document Review**

A document review, which, according to Yin (1994), has the advantage of being stable and unobtrusive, was conducted prior to semi-structured interviews and observations in order to reveal historical perspectives and to provide greater meaningfulness of subsequent interactions. Documents were also used to corroborate evidence gathered from other sources. Formal documents and informal artifacts chronicled organizational changes and paradigm shifts, and uncovered cultural features and technical operations. The review included three sets of documents: (a) researcher notes, correspondence and training materials collected in the researcher’s earlier association with the school as a staff developer/consultant, (b) an extensive collection of documents within the computer data files belonging to key teacher-leaders which included among other things school plans, district reports, grant proposals, memos, letters, PowerPoint presentations, meeting agendas, achievement data, survey questions and results, study group rosters, newsletter articles, school process analyses and program evaluations, and (c) artifacts including yearbooks, newsletters, manuals, student newspapers, school maps, and histories.

An organized and comprehensive database was developed for all three types of relevant documents over the course of this study. The database was marked and referenced during analysis and descriptions of significant pieces are contained in the study’s findings according to Yin’s (1994) recommendations. See Appendix A for a list of documents used in this document database. The bulk of documents reviewed for this study came from the computer files of the two teacher-leaders who were key players in the change process at the school. A separate database was set up to organize these computer data files. These documents were numbered, coded as to their types and then ordered chronologically. Each document was examined and notes were taken.
as to its content in preparation for a content analysis. The documents and their notes were then
categorized as to general content categories using the NSSE indicators: educational agenda,
educational program, leadership, community-building, and culture of continuous improvement

**Interviews**

Interviews, which Yin (1994) considered one of the most important sources of case study
information were conducted to expand the depth of data gathering, to increase the number of
sources of information and to help shed light on perspectives and causal inferences of
organization members. Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty
interviewees including seven teachers, one counselor, three teacher-leaders, three administrators,
three parents, and three district personnel.

The selection of interview participants was made from a pool of possible teacher interviewees
put together by the principal. This list included teachers who had been at the school for longer
than one year and who represented a variety of teaching assignments. All personnel in this pool
were offered the opportunity to participate in the study by the researcher through email. Those
who were interested in participating contacted the researcher directly for more information. The
list of those who participated in the interviews was never shared with any other person at the
school including the principal. The principal also provided the names and contact information of
current and past PTSA and School Community Council leaders. The researcher contacted these
people initially by phone. District personnel who had been directly involved in the change effort
were contacted by the researcher through email once appropriate district approvals were received.
Two former school community members who were key players in school improvement efforts
were also contacted directly by the researcher. The former principal of Hunter Hills who played a
key role in the change process at the school was unavailable for interview. An informed consent
form was signed by all interviewees prior to interviewing.
While set questions, appropriate for each subgroup, guided these interviews, participants were given the opportunity to elaborate on their responses, adding information they felt was pertinent to the discussion. The questions used to guide this study are listed in Appendix B. These interviews were taped, transcribed and coded. Perceptions were coded as to content categories based on the NSSE rubrics (National Study of School Evaluation, 1998). Within these general categories, perceptions were divided into increasingly more detailed sub-categories in preparation for analysis.

Observations

Open-ended, direct observations were conducted on each of ten visits to the school between January and March of 2007. Field notes from these observations were utilized to capture a snapshot view of the school's culture and climate. These observations consisted of a general walkthrough of the school building on each day of participant interviews.

Data Analysis

Yin (1994) suggested that every investigation should have a general strategy so as to guide decisions regarding what will be analyzed and to gain meaning from the actions, events, beliefs, attitudes and processes occurring in this phenomenon. Yin (1994) asserted, “Data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, or otherwise recombining the evidence to address the initial propositions of a study” (p. 102). A data array was constructed, as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1984), to organize the data for coding and analysis, and reduce a bias in the results. This data array was first set up chronologically, and then by categories representing school-wide processes previously identified as having played a key role in similar complex social transformations. Additional elements within these categories were identified as having significance to this study as well. These elements, uncovered during the study, directed further data collection (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Thus, data analysis and data collection occurred simultaneously as Yin (1994) suggested.
Several methods of analysis were utilized to uncover patterns, relationships and emerging themes within the data. Data were analyzed on three levels: chronologically, categorically, and from the perspectives of multiple stakeholder groups which included teachers, teacher-leaders, administrators, parents/community, and district personnel. As this study covered a process which had been in place for the past five years, an historical understanding of the context was necessary. Thus documents were initially organized chronologically and analyzed in order to uncover historical patterns and themes.

A content analysis was then used to identify conceptual ideas which signified changes in the school, as well as contextual factors which played a role in these changes. Within categories, the documents were analyzed for patterns through a constant comparative analysis to ascertain how these contextual factors interrelated and interplayed. Individual perspectives were compared within and across interviews to discover new insights and to validate interpretations. To increase the reliability of this case study, a chain of evidence was maintained through the cross-referencing of methodological procedures to the resulting evidence.

Report

The report is organized around a descriptive, chronological framework. Findings include a description of the change process, by year, beginning half-way through the 2001-2002 school year and ending half-way through the 2006-2007 school year. Names of participants in this study along with the names of the school and district have been changed in this report to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Brackets have been used in direct quotations in which information has been added to clarify meaning. The conclusions section of this report includes a full analysis of this five-year change process as well as recommendations for education leaders and areas of further study.
Limitations and Delimitations

Certain limitations applied to this study. The idiosyncratic characteristics of the participant school and the unplanned events and circumstances naturally occurring even in planned change limit the generalizability of the findings. The detail and level of specificity possible through the qualitative approach of this study, however, should allow school leaders to glean from the findings insights which can be applied most appropriately to their own unique settings.

The researcher’s prior relationship with the school could be considered a limitation for two reasons: (a) The researcher’s initial professional investment in the school’s success may have affected the researcher’s perceptions; (b) Prior experiences between the researcher and the school community may have affected participant interview responses. However, the researcher’s prior relationship and participant/observer role with the school also allowed for a unique perspective ultimately leading to a greater understanding of the phenomenon of change at the school over time and it ensured a level of trust and accessibility not otherwise possible. Consequently, the researcher experienced few barriers to the access of historical information and other pertinent data, as well as to the opportunity to meet formally and informally with members of the faculty, administration, support staff, and parent community. Periodic participant reviews were conducted to strengthen the study’s internal validity and a draft of the report was available to key informants for review.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Barbara served as the Secondary Language Arts Consultant for Jackson School District. As part of her job to oversee the curriculum, instruction and assessment of secondary literacy for the district, she also conducted training for teachers and administrators. She had served as a high school assistant principal, but was looking forward to becoming a high school principal. Her appointment as principal came earlier than she had expected. She was just finishing up a training session in January 2006 when she got a telephone call from the district office asking her to attend a school board meeting within the hour where it would be announced to the public that she had been appointed as a principal to Hunter Hills effective immediately.

Barbara knew that Hunter Hills was a large high school with a student population of about 1900 students. The city in which it was located was a fast growing suburb of the largest city in the state. The suburb extended clear to the mountains on the west side of the valley. Its earlier residents had mined copper in these mountains and the city continued to have a lower socioeconomic status than most of the other communities in the district. Many of the families came to the area when their children were young; their oldest children were now high school age. Barbara knew that the school had a growing English language learner population and was aware that the school was generally lower performing than other high schools in the area.

The boundaries of Hunter Hills had been formed out of three other well-established school communities and the school had weathered the commotion of community rivalries and confusing loyalties in its earlier years. The facility, which was only about nine years old, and two others built since Hunter Hills’s construction, had been designed to accommodate a Smaller Learning
Community (SLC) philosophy in which various structures and strategies are put in place in large secondary schools to help personalize the school experience for students (Wood, 1998); however, all three functioned at that time as traditional public high schools.

Although the school had been built far out of town in the middle of acres of empty farm land, it was now nearly surrounded by homes. The entire west side of the valley was experiencing tremendous residential growth but very few commercial enterprises. This had become a critical issue recently as there was talk of splitting the district. In case of a split, residents feared the west side schools would suffer because of the city’s low commercial base.

Barbara also knew that the first principal of Hunter Hills had only been at the school a short time when he had become ill. After a couple of difficult years he had retired. The most current principal, Dean, was near retirement when he came to Hunter Hills in 1999. Many believed Hunter Hills would be his last principal assignment. Dean had a strong managerial style of leadership and there were those who thought he was assigned to Hunter Hills to tighten up things that needed attention after the past principal’s long illness. Barbara regarded Dean as a smart and knowledgeable school leader, based on her previous work with him in his administration of a progressive school in the district: the only school in the district that followed a trimester schedule.

Barbara was aware that Hunter Hills itself had gone through some interesting school improvement changes in the past few years—just what those changes were she wasn’t sure. She didn’t hear much about Hunter Hills at the district level, unlike other low performing schools. The Secondary Literacy Specialist who worked directly under Barbara and who had been working with Hunter Hills for the past couple of years, had shared with her some of the school’s unique approaches, but it seemed as if the district, in general, didn’t know much about the work at Hunter Hills. It is likely, as Barbara reflected upon it later, that the district underestimated the seriousness and comprehensiveness of the school improvement efforts at Hunter Hills. It took Barbara several months to understand and fully commit to the school’s unique approach herself.

To better understand the efforts of the Hunter Hills school community to establish a continuous
improvement process, Barbara would have to reach back into the school’s history at least to the spring of 2002.

School Year 2001-2002

Don’t follow the path.
Go where there is not a path and begin the trail. –Ruby Bridges
(used in school-based professional development at Hunter Hills, October 2003)

During the 2001-2002 school year the Jackson School District administration was interested in the research supporting Smaller Learning Communities (United States Department of Education, 2001). They were considering the submission of a federal Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) grant proposal. The Deputy Superintendent had asked Nadine, a new district Executive Director, who had previously been a middle school principal, to lead this investigation. She had worked extensively with the middle school philosophy and understood that Smaller Learning Communities fit within that context. Its philosophical similarities made her a good choice for this assignment. More importantly, she explained, “The Deputy Superintendent at that time was looking for someone that had...the ability to move large groups of people to do things.”

The politics which accompanied this assignment filled Nadine “with trepidation.” She was aware of the potential pitfalls facing a newly appointed district-level administrator with a middle school background trying to lead a high school change initiative. “Even though they were...professional colleagues, there’s that hierarchy that’s involved.” She was also aware that the high school principals had been presented information about Smaller Learning Communities a year earlier and had basically dismissed the idea. “I approached it from the standpoint that I better learn as much as I possibly can and that I can’t be the only one that knows about this.”

Nadine decided to bring together a representative from each high school to form a year-long study group to study the research about Smaller Learning Communities and the best practices associated with it. Each high school was provided with enough money to pay for one period per day of a teacher’s salary to free them up for this work. With the Deputy Superintendent’s blessing.
and $100,000 says Nadine, "I was able to go to the principals and say, 'This is what I need you to give me.' Mostly, the principals were cooperative as they like that kind of resource." As Nadine saw it, the money was leverage to assure participation and bring schools into the discussion. Six of the schools cooperated. Two principals declined participation, noting that they felt their schools did not need additional support at that time.

Nadine had asked that the schedule of these teachers, whom she called Local Site Facilitators, be arranged so that their preparation period and their extra paid period would be back-to-back. This would free teachers up for a solid four-hour block of time. Nadine says, "I made them meet with me twice a month, sometimes once a week, depending on the reading." Nadine was pleased, for the most part, with the participants who principals sent her to be a part of this study group. "They were good workers. They cared about kids. I had wanted them to give me somebody that likes reform, change, and hard work." She had wanted them to select someone who could see the big picture. The Local Site Facilitators were not, necessarily, the movers and shakers in their schools, however. One was a brand new teacher. One never did have any access to the principal. In a couple of cases it appeared as if the funds had been used by principals to solve staffing challenges. Nadine described her experience with the group:

I wanted them to...just talk about what the research is saying. What are we doing out there that can be better? What are the needs of our kids? What do we see as where we're going? They didn't even have in their minds what that change would look like. We were learning together and the vision was being formed...I had an agenda every time, [and a] time log of what time they were putting into their building. They had to be accountable to me. I made them report...and gave them lots of work to do. Every meeting I'd have them go around and talk and share. I made them constantly do the networking and sharing.

Scott was the Local Site Facilitator from Hunter Hills. He was an athletic coach for the school as well as a classroom teacher. Nadine recalls that Scott immediately had the vision. He was eager to start. Scott and a colleague had attended the district's first presentation about Smaller
Learning Communities a year before. He had been asked to attend that presentation because of his previous teaching experience at a school with an Academy model, a smaller learning community structure designed to integrate curriculum and better prepare students for careers and continuing education. “He was impatient with how slow I was moving,” says Nadine. “I had to tell him, ‘I’m doing this very methodically. I’m doing this with the time that I think they need to move at.’”

Nadine’s doctoral dissertation had been focused on the socialization of the change process. Her experience had taught her that it wasn’t wise to go in and make demands. “The job of the committee members was to learn as much as they could about the concept of Smaller Learning Communities,” Nadine explained. The whole year they studied the research, visited several sites, including Scott’s previous high school, and looked at their own school’s data. Nadine explained:

I didn’t furnish stuff for them. They’re smart people. They got it right away and they would work with each other and develop their own surveys and develop their own assessment materials and then go to other workshops like the DuFour workshop… If things came, they went to them.

Although she hoped that they would go back and share the information with their schools, there was no pressure from the district to implement SLC at the school sites.

To keep principals abreast of what the Local Site Facilitators were doing and learning, Nadine asked the two Executive Directors over the two area high school sites for time in their principal’s meetings. “They were pretty intimidating,” Nadine remembers. She was trying to build a “triangulation of accountability,” she explained. In the spring, using the possibility of a large federal SLC grant as a carrot, Nadine was able to interest principals into attending a retreat for the purpose of discussing their involvement in the grant. “We purposefully wanted to take them away from their offices.” She wanted to take them to a place where they could look at the research and the data that the Local Site Facilitators had been collecting. Six high schools each sent a full team; two came without their principals. “The Local Site Facilitators all had a role on the agenda so they were given face-time and they were given leadership responsibility and the
principals had to watch them doing this,” explained Nadine. “We were careful in how we
discussed SLC.” In an effort to relax principals a little, to open them a little to the concept, they
talked about how a SLC was just “a different way of looking at what they already do.” Nadine
explains that her goal was institutionalizing the term Smaller Learning Community. “We talked
about how Smaller Learning Communities isn’t going to change their lives. It’s not going to
change everything they do.” She says, “They left that meeting raising their hands that they would
support the concept.”

While Nadine felt satisfied that she “had accomplished one huge hurdle,” she realized that,
more than likely, “They were going to continue to run their large comprehensive schools. They
were glad to come on board for the money.” She also recognized that despite the show of hands
in support of the initiative, she would probably continue to be the target of backstage negativity.
She explains, “Whatever they said behind my back I just let it sit.”

The district subsequently wrote a grant proposal for a federal SLC grant, but it was
unsuccessful. Never the less the district-level study group continued with their learning:

What I hoped would happen was that the Board would continue to fund this program so that I
could continue to work it a little bit at a time...My vision was to change all the high schools
in Jackson School District from large comprehensive high schools to small learning
communities in some way, shape or form based on their own individual needs.

Some Local Site Facilitators were more successful at sharing the information back at their
schools. Scott, the facilitator from Hunter Hills, was one of these. He was not only interested in
the research about Smaller Learning Communities; he was very concerned about the data he was
collecting about Hunter Hills. Scott shared his concerns and the information he was learning with
his principal and interested teachers. As a result, a committee was formed at Hunter Hills to look
at the research behind SLC and investigate its possible benefits to their school.

The Hunter Hills Smaller Learning Community Committee, which was basically a group of
interested teachers, did a lot of talking about their school and the implications of the research
supporting SLC. Madelyn, a science teacher recalled the beginnings of change at Hunter Hills, “I think just a lot of us talked to each other and said that’s kind of a cool idea. Scott came up with some ideas and he was really an inspiration and had the energy to get things going.”

Madelyn recalled the day when, as a group, they came to a realization that change was possible and they could make it happen:

The ‘aha’ moment for most of the people that have stayed here this long was when we all got into the Tech Atrium [large meeting room]. We all had sticky notes and we could all brainstorm all at once, and all of us were heard. We put [the sticky notes] all over the board. We organized them into, ‘What’s the main theme?’ The main focus [became] our mission and all of us felt good about this. All of us had a choice in, ‘Did we think it was good? Did we not think it was good? Did we want to change?’

The committee articulated four areas of weakness at Hunter Hills: they were not data-driven; the mission, constructed when the school opened, didn’t reflect current thinking; they had no current goals to lead school improvement; and there was little alignment of their mission with existing goals. To Madelyn, the teacher-generated nature of the work of this group is the thing that set it apart from previous initiatives. “So it was finally not so much the district telling you, ‘You have to do this.’” She remembers, instead, the group feeling, “‘We know what these kids need. Can we say it? Can we actually do it?’ From then on there was a good feeling. We all had the energy to do more.”

School Year 2002-2003

Know thyself. –Socrates
(used in school-based professional development at Hunter Hills, August 2005)

Nadine continued her work with the district-level Smaller Learning Communities study group throughout the 2002-2003 school year. This study group allowed Scott to continue researching
school improvement in general, and more specifically Smaller Learning Communities, and Nadine to keep abreast of changes at Hunter Hills.

No Child Left Behind

Interestingly, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the federal legislation which frustrated most education leaders, helped both Nadine and Scott leverage change in their respective realms. Due to the federal mandates associated with NCLB, the district began requiring its schools to submit annual Comprehensive School Improvement Plans (CSIP). The passage of NCLB was serendipitous; Nadine said, “Leadership is really about taking advantage of things that come along at the right time.” As she and her district-level colleagues developed CSIP procedures for school principals, she made sure the process was inclusive of school reform initiatives such as Smaller Learning Communities. “I had a really great opportunity to link this [Smaller Learning Communities] to the success of all students.” She used a symbol of an umbrella to help emphasize the concept of school improvement as all-inclusive of other structures and processes. She explained:

Everything we do in this large high school fits under one umbrella called CSIP—school improvement. And everything we do has to be under that: accreditation, small learning communities, literacy, the CTEs [Career and Technology Education], internships. Every single thing had to be related in that whole concept.

She wanted people to understand that programs, even Smaller Learning Communities, were not an end goal. Rather, they were a means to the end, which was student achievement. Adamantly she explained, “SLC or CTE or accreditation or literacy isn’t what it’s about: student achievement is what it’s about.”

Comprehensive School Improvement Plan—Leadership

The first 2002-2003 CSIP was submitted to the district in the spring of 2003. One of the school’s assistant principals, Steve, was given the assignment of preparing their first CSIP. Steve asked Scott to chair a team to develop the plan—the task being to “create a school improvement
plan which would lead to increased student achievement, create opportunities of growth for teachers at the school, and direct the application of funding for the school.” Scott, who had been working the previous year with a few teachers interested in researching the potential benefits of Smaller Learning Communities to their school, now had a formal charge to formally revisit the school’s purpose and to seriously analyze the school’s operations. The accountability of NCLB, in this case, had formalized the school’s emerging inquiry.

For its success, Steve and Scott both felt that the composition of a CSIP team was crucial. They decided to expand the existing teacher-leadership structure of content area departments led by Department Chairs. While the Department Chairs would continue to attend to curriculum issues in their subject areas under the direction of the principal, the CSIP team would represent a second body of teacher-leadership within the school. The CSIP team would oversee school improvement and work under the direction of the assistant principal. Participants of the CSIP team were selected based not only on their competence in the classroom, but also their openness to new ideas and a willingness to work hard. Because of conversations the previous year, Scott knew that there were teachers who were interested in new ways of looking at things and who had fresh energy to contribute to the movement. The science department, as part of a statewide effort, for example, had been considering its curriculum for ways to make it more relevant to students. A couple of other teachers had developed an Integrated Career Focus within their curriculum areas in an effort to increase relevancy for students. Many of these teachers were asked to be on this new committee. As communication between the CSIP committee and the remaining faculty was going to be very important, Scott also made sure that each department was represented on the CSIP team. Madelyn, a teacher who was asked to be on the CSIP committee in the very beginning and who was also a Department Chair described the difference between the roles of the two committees, “The Department Head [meetings were] more procedural, the rules. The CSIP was more brainstorming, thinking ahead. It was looking at a bigger picture.”
Scott had never facilitated this type of work before among his peers. Scott taught Marketing and Japanese, but he loved being an athletic coach. He had been a head football coach for five years leading his previous school to a state championship. Scott was new to Hunter Hills when he was asked to be the school’s Local Site Facilitator for school improvement. Scott had the characteristics one might expect to find in a coach: passion, drive, persistence. As a coach he was committed to continuous improvement processes. He regularly assessed his team’s strengths and weaknesses and made changes on a day to day basis. With this background, he could clearly see value in continuous improvement at the school-level. As a coach, Scott was a program builder. He could spot talent, was good at recruiting. His coaching decisions were considered long-term investment in human capital. Marilyn, a Hunter Hills assistant principal, remembered, “Scott could get people to do things. People wanted to help him. Scott could rally the troops.” These skills served him well with his students on the field and in his work with school improvement.

Sandy, one of the teachers Scott asked to join him in this work with school improvement, was a coach as well. She was also a classroom psychology teacher who was well-respected by the staff and community. Sandy had won the Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) Teacher of the Year award just the year before. She had also led athletic teams to state championships. Sandy exhibited deeply held beliefs and was strongly focused on her family. When Scott first asked her to come join the CSIP team, she flatly refused. While student-centered, her experiences in the district had led to skepticism about system change. She didn’t have much faith in the system to give more than lip service to change and as such, it wasn’t worth her limited time and energy. Scott said:

The first conversation Sandy and I ever had about school improvement was coming home from a basketball game that we had just lost—on the bus. Steve had asked me to head up this committee. I turned to Sandy and I said, ‘I need you on this committee for school improvement,’ and...her exact words to me were, ‘There is no way...I’m being on a committee, because...we can’t do anything in this district.’ And I said, ‘Well I think it’s
different this time. I think we're going to get a chance.' And she said, 'There is no way we'll be able to do anything different than we've ever done, and I'm not doing it!'

She explained that her family was more important to her than any stipend she might receive for attending. Scott continued, "We talked for about half an hour. It was a long bus ride, coming home from the game, and I worked on her the next couple of weeks and then she finally came to my first meeting."

Scott was convinced that this committee could do something right for students:

This was different. I knew that we were at least moving somewhere. We [district-level study group] had met, and we had studied, and we were moving and the School Board was letting us study it, and paying for it! So I thought, 'Maybe this is different.'

Scott was certain that since the district was considering Smaller Learning Communities—and the changes that it might represent—that the district would genuinely be open to any possible change Hunter Hills believed would be best for their students.

Persuaded that there was a good chance to make a real difference for adolescent students, Sandy became Scott's co-leader on the CSIP committee. Scott's assurance and tenacity together with Sandy's boldness and integrity would play a significant role in the change effort at Hunter Hills over the next few years. Many of those interviewed for this study spoke of the effectiveness of the Scott and Sandy partnership. While Scott and Sandy shared the same passion and seriousness for their work, they had very different teaching and leadership styles, communication patterns and different perspectives on many things. Marilyn, an assistant principal, said of them:

I feel like Scott had a nice grasp [of education] probably because of his family background in education, and he could consume the literature and understand it. He's just a quick study! Sandy was an absolute master classroom teacher in curriculum and instruction...Scott was the bulldozer that pushed through the barriers, that didn't care about the protocol so much and Sandy was the finesser that knew how to follow through and put the detail into things. Scott
didn’t...worry about the politics of things; at least that was my sense at the time. He was just about the right stuff.

Together, Scott’s and Sandy’s undeviating focus on what was best for their students was what led many teachers to trust them. Several interviewees alluded to the fact that neither Scott nor Sandy had egos to feed. In spite of his position and his direct manner at times, Scott displayed humility that never made it seem like he thought he might be above the rest of the group. He made mistakes, but acknowledged them. In fact, when asked what he had learned over the years working with Hunter Hills through these changes, he responded with, “Relationships are everything.” He regretted having burned some bridges in the beginning. Sandy had an easier time with relationships. Her psychology background undoubtedly gave her a helpful perspective for working with people. Regardless, the teachers trusted Sandy’s way of “telling it like it is,” being true to her convictions and her obvious loathing of hoop-jumping. They came to know that Scott and Sandy would fight for them. Even at times when stress was taking its toll among the faculty, when tensions were running high, and mutiny seemed imminent the teachers continued to follow. Together, Scott and Sandy provided trusted leadership of the change process at Hunter Hills.

A School Community Council (SCC) also had to be formed as required by the district’s CSIP process. This council included administrators, teachers and self-selected representatives from the community. Working with the principal, the SCC was intended to be a decision-making body. According to the Hunter Hills 2004-2005 Accreditation Manual, the SCC was charged with the responsibility to oversee “everything that is done at the school.”

Comprehensive School Improvement Plan—Mission

The first formal action to develop the school’s CSIP involved a group of twenty-five faculty members comprising of the CSIP committee, Department Chairs and administrators. This group spent two days revisiting the school’s mission, which had been determined by the previous principal when the school opened in 1995. The discussion began with the question, “What do we want our students to know, to be able to do and to be like when they leave this school?” This
question was the first of many used by the CSIP committee over the next few years to facilitate conversation among faculty about teaching and learning. In fact, self and collective reflection through questioning became the primary method whereby change ensued at Hunter Hills.

This discussion led to the determination of Hunter Hills’ Desired Results for Student Learning (DRSL). DRSL was a new term and concept for most people at Hunter Hills as it was a part of the new state accreditation process. In the old accreditation process, it was typical for a school to emphasize accomplishments, focusing on high achievers during an accreditation team visit. The new accreditation process was looking for the ability of a school system to accurately identify its current reality as part of an ongoing self-study and to sustain a continuous improvement process. Scott was familiar with these concepts having just recently been through the state’s new accreditation process at his previous school.

Scott sensed that even though Hunter Hills’s formal accreditation visit was scheduled two years ahead, the school’s current CSIP development process and the new accreditation process should be one and the same. Setting up a process for this kind of collaborative work would require major cultural and structural adjustments, however. None of the administrative leadership at the school had been trained for this kind of work. “I was just wingin’ it,” Scott said about the two days they spent in collaboration and reflection about the direction of the school. When the two days were over, the school’s formal mission statement was determined and DRSLs had been established.

Most participants had been a part of a strategic planning process before and most, unfortunately, had experienced unproductive results of such planning processes—focus had been on planning with little resultant action. The CSIP leadership had a different game plan in mind this time. They had a genuine interest in an authentic process that could really make a difference. They knew that to be genuine, however, it would require the whole school to be involved in the same process this group had just experienced. Although the group had completed important work,
they felt that school improvement planning couldn't be left to a representative group; so, the CSIP committee planned to take the whole school through the same process the following year.

In the meantime, the CSIP was due to the district in October. Scott, Steve and the principal cranked out the first CSIP in the administrator's office. Scott and Sandy didn't, however, consider this to be the real plan. To them, the real CSIP was just beginning to form. This 2002-2003 CSIP provides a good snapshot of the school's understanding of school improvement at the time and in that respect, provides a baseline for change. This first CSIP was not sophisticated and included a scanty profile. The October version of the 2002-2003 mission read:

The mission of Hunter Hills is to combine the resources of students, parents, educators, and our community to foster a safe learning environment where mutual respect is evident, students are valued as participants in their own education, and students acquire the desire and skill necessary to become life long learners. With this collective effort, Hunter Hills will continue to be a source of pride and a valued asset to our community.

The Desired Results of Student Learning reported on this first CSIP plan in October of 2002 came from the state's Life Skills curriculum and included: Responsibility/Character Development, Collaboration, Complex Thinking, Employability, Lifelong Learning, and Effective Communication.

**Student Data**

From his previous year's conversations in the district-level SLC study group Scott could see that the CSIP and the formal accreditation process would both require a robust school profile. Scott also knew from his experience with the accreditation process that a good profile should contain student achievement information, stakeholder perceptions and student demographics. The school had access to some demographic data, but student achievement data was limited to state-level Criterion-Referenced Test (CRT), Standard Achievement Test (SAT) and American College Test (ACT) scores, and this data was not disaggregated. While gathering data to put in a CSIP report, and eventually an accreditation manual, would not be difficult, what the CSIP committee
found difficult was how to use this data to establish a genuine continuous improvement process at their school. To this end, they were working under several frustrating conditions: they were limited in how they could use the data as it was considered very private; the school, overall, performed lower than the rest of the district and the state on every one of the subtests of the state’s criterion-reference tests (CRT); these were the tests upon which the school’s NCLB Adequate Yearly Progress was based; and the principal did not allow them to compare the data with the district or the state.

Scores on state-level Criterion-Reference Tests (CRT) had always been provided to the school from the state long after the school year was over. As such, the scores were rarely received by individual teachers, and therefore, not highly valued by them. In fact, the scrutiny teachers feared might come out of NCLB had turned teachers’ once neutral feelings about standardized assessments, negative. Teachers were afraid of being evaluated based on one test. So, they were naturally defensive—certain departments more than others due to NCLB’s targeting of certain subject areas. This led to some divisiveness in the school.

Even though the CSIP committee could not compare the school’s performance, perfunctory analysis revealed obvious problems in core content areas. The CSIP process required the listing of every student who was not passing each CRT. Teachers in all departments began to feel uneasy. Scott explained:

When Dean asked for a listing of students, it seemed like everyone started to feel a little vulnerable. Although our averages were high, because our passing students were passing with high scores, still 70% of our students were not passing math CRTs. This caused some discord. Departments were used to just looking at averages. Now we had to face our weaknesses...When we did our first initial research, for the first time we actually started studying who we were, and really trying to look at who [the data] said that we were. And what we found was not only were we a failing school as far as AYP...we were not serving kids very well at all. They were not having great experiences; they did not enjoy school and
our test scores were below the school district. There was just a lot of different things. We had never talked about these things before—never. There was no communication about student learning. There was very little discussion.

**Defining Moment—Perception Data**

That fall the faculty, students and parents’ perceptions about the school’s programs and processes were ascertained using the NSSE survey of Instructional and Organizational Effectiveness (National Study of School Evaluation, 1998). The results of this survey heavily impacted change at Hunter Hills. As soon as results were available, a letter was sent to the faculty from the CSIP committee summarizing the results. Letters to the faculty and members of the CSIP committee became a common means of communication for Scott. He regularly used inclusive wording like *we* and *our* throughout these letters as in, “we are studying” and “our students.” The tone of these letters was usually direct as in the first of these letters to the faculty wherein he discussed, “our low test scores and attendance.” That first letter, like the others, was intended to keep teachers informed about CSIP committee activity. It explained that the CSIP committee was “correlating test scores and attendance.” The letters established Scott and the CSIP committee as learners, expressing their desire to “get better” at what they are doing. A quick turn around of survey results and other information became a hallmark of the CSIP committee in the entire process.

The CSIP committee followed up this first letter with a presentation of the entire school profile, including the perception data, to the whole faculty and some student representatives in the spring. Scott referred to the NSSE survey as the school’s “first real peek” at student and teacher perceptions. A tremendous thirst for information about students’ lives, attitudes, and perspectives was generated at that time and still continues five years later. The results of this first survey revealed wide discrepancies between the general opinions of teachers and students. Students weren’t as positive about their school program as were the teachers. Teachers weren’t as positive about students’ efforts or those of their parents, as were students and parents. On the positive
side, teachers felt that a common mission and goals were driving their work, but this was offset by a perception that the administration was not involved in their work and that they did not feel free to state opposing views to the administration.

These differences were surprising to the faculty leading some to challenge the survey’s validity. A few experiences have become defining moments in the history of Hunter Hills’s transformation and the first of these involved this challenge. As recorded in Hunter Hills’ 2004-2005 accreditation manual:

When survey data was presented stating that seventy percent of our students held jobs, faculty members immediately questioned the validity of the data. However, student-body officers were present at this meeting. Their advisor turned to them and asked how many of the twenty-two student officers presently had an after-school job. Twenty-one of the twenty-two student officers raised their hands. This one experience gave credence to the data shared that day and helped establish with faculty members, the importance of being fully aware of our current reality.

The experience had served as data that was somewhat disconfirming. It had sparked an interest in discovering just who they really were. Many discussions throughout the rest of the year began with a presentation of the current school profile accompanying the question, “Who are we?” Considering the school profile with its student achievement and perception data, research on Smaller Learning Communities and the National Association for Secondary School Principal’s (2004) Breaking Ranks report with the faculty, the whole group determined that high class sizes, high teacher loads and the lack of daily interaction with students were barriers to high student achievement. The whole faculty then decided that the CSIP committee would search out SLC structures and strategies that might remove these barriers.

The presentation of the school’s profile had been made to the faculty that day by Sandy. Scott’s decision to have Sandy present the information was intentional. Nate, a history teacher and previous coach, explained, “Sandy has a different relationship than most coaches do. She is
viewed as a teacher first. Scott wasn’t.” Nate further addressed his perceptions about male coach stereotyping in general:

A lot of teachers don’t like coaches, and there are two reasons for it in my view. One, many coaches do not fully address their responsibility to the other teachers. So [the other teachers] see that disparity and they see that disparity [rewarded]. And the second thing is they feel challenged, personally threatened because of all of their charisma, their personality, their walk-in-the-room ‘I am here.’ Whether they say it or not, you know and you feel that presence.

As such, Scott felt the information might be better accepted coming from Sandy.

District SLC Report

A district report to Nadine, at the district office, about the school’s movement towards the establishment of Smaller Learning Communities explained that the structure of Hunter Hills’ SLC was now under the direction of the CSIP committee. The report explained, “The CSIP committee will now decide, given the federal, state, and district guidelines, what our smaller learning community will look like and the criteria that will guide its creation.” The report explained that because of the scores and attendance rates at the school, the committee had decided they needed to strengthen their instructional expertise and align their curriculum with the state core in all areas. The school was considering an Academy approach because they felt a need to create an environment where students would feel ownership in an area of study that they would enjoy and would facilitate greater choices after high school. They were considering alternate schedules such as the trimester, to help reduce class size and ease the burden of increased workloads for teachers. The report also explained the other SLC structures and the data that helped them make those decisions.

Professional Learning Opportunities

The CSIP committee took advantage of several opportunities to expand their own understanding of school improvement. Trustlands money, earmarked for the improvement of
literacy, was used to send the CSIP committee to the Instructional Leadership in the 21st Century Conference. Committee members were motivated by DuFour and Eaker's (1998) ideas of a Professional Learning Community (PLC). Marilyn, the new assistant principal, explained that the ideas from this conference formed a common conceptual framework for the future direction of school improvement. A session about research-based decision-making was also influential. In addition to the conference, a group of teachers were sent to visit a high school which had been offering Academies for ten years.

Hunter Hills also took advantage of a district-level training with Grace Sammon (2002), an expert in Smaller Learning Communities. Nadine had arranged for Sammon to present information about Smaller Learning Communities to high school teams throughout the district. Sammon was also contracted to follow-up this initial training with one-on-one consulting sessions with each participating school team about how they could improve efforts towards personalizing educational programs and processes. The CSIP team was glad to get this personal consultation.

Outside Consultancy

The CSIP committee also engaged this researcher, as a consultant, to assist their school in establishing collaborative professional development. Scott had read an article I authored in which I described my work with teachers who were struggling with a growing English Language Learner population. I had reported that teachers involved in a year-long study group demonstrated 100% implementation of new knowledge and skills at the classroom level. This information, along with Scott's own experience with the district-level study group for the previous two years, convinced him that ongoing collaboration was necessary for substantial change at his school. The CSIP committee invited me to share with them my experiences with collaborative professional development based on collective reflection and an improvement process of input, planning, implementing and reflection.
At this meeting, we discussed the relationship between the school’s CSIP process, accreditation processes and the school’s efforts to establish Smaller Learning Communities. Our relationship was referred to later in the school’s 2004-2005 accreditation manual: 

As our own process evolved, it became clear to us that district-mandated comprehensive school improvement, accreditation and smaller learning communities were not mutually exclusive. Each of these components reflect the elements of a professional learning community; continuous self-study, collaboration, and reflection. To that end, we hired a consultant, LuAnne Forrest, to assist us in developing our ability to engage in continuous self-study, collaboration and reflection.

I was contracted for four two-day visits to the school during the next school year. The first visit would focus on preparing teachers to work in collaborative groups in the Late Start component of their CSIP (described below).

*Federal SLC Grant and the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan*

In the spring, the school gratefully accepted the district’s offer to pay for the services of a grant writer to help them put together a federal grant proposal to procure Smaller Learning Communities funding for the school. Scott saw this as not only a great resource to the school, as it would mean approximately $400,000 over the next three years, but the grant writing process itself would force the school to formalize its real CSIP plan.

Drawing from their hard and soft data, extensive faculty input, research they had studied and what they had learned from conferences, school visits, and experts thus far, the CSIP committee put together an action proposal for the CSIP. The CSIP now consisted of a mission, DRSL’s, four goals each with specific objectives and an explanation of six key program components. The following are the four school goals listed for 2002-2003 along with those six program components:

1. Raise academic achievement levels for all students.
2. Improve student attitudes toward school.
3. Prepare all students to successfully transition to post-secondary education and careers.

4. Build Hunter Hills’s capacity to create, support and sustain a professional learning community for students.

Program Components

1. Late Start—A later starting time would allow for professional learning community collaboration three mornings a week, and time for the study and design of all of the rest of the components. The CSIP committee felt the school needed a substantial amount of time on an ongoing basis to discuss teaching and learning, and particularly the changes and feelings relative to what was happening at their school. Late Start would also provide time for teachers to give students additional instructional support two mornings a week.

2. Mandatory Instructional Intervention—The remediation plan, which was planned to result in a timely, directive and systematic program for intervention, was scheduled to take three years to fully implement. In the first year, the school would begin aligning curriculum and determining power standards. The second year teachers would continue in department teams to create common, formative assessments of these power standards and the school would use grant money to pay for teachers’ preparation time to give extra support to students. In the third year they would implement a mandatory intervention program three mornings a week using the created assessments. This intervention program was contingent on the implementation of a trimester schedule.

3. Trimester Schedule—Although the trimester schedule would represent a significant change in school operations, the CSIP committee felt that it was necessary to implement a formal, mandatory intervention program. Several high schools including Hunter Hills had made the move to the block schedule a few years before, which was itself considered a big change. The trimester change would be even more radical, requiring changes in the district’s busing system and other inter-district systems such as its EDNET broadcasting system. But as the faculty, especially the CSIP committee, was feeling confident and empowered, they decided to pursue it.
4. Sophomore House—In Jackson School District, and most of the state, students in ninth grade are technically high school students, but attend school at a middle or junior high. Sophomore House would assist their incoming sophomore class in transitioning to a large high school by implementing a schedule wherein students would share teachers across the curriculum. In addition, each sophomore would take a sophomore core which would include a twenty minute advisement/study skills component daily throughout the year.

5. Partnering Adults With Students (PAWS)—Every student would be assigned a faculty or staff member in the school building who would act as an adult advocate to offer support, provide timely information and help students to track educational progress.

6. Integrated Careers Focus—An Academy model would increase relevancy to the classroom experience by integrating English and history into Hunter Hills’ well-developed career focus program (United States Department of Education, 2001).

Community Approvals

Following a presentation of the grant proposal, the faculty was surveyed as to their desire to move forward with this school improvement plan. The results of this survey were provided in an April letter to the faculty. In this letter Scott expressed his thanks for their work that year. He acknowledged that change was hard and scary but the right thing to do in this case: “Although we are nervous, we want what’s best for kids.” He reminded them of the rare opportunity they had to make these changes, “The district is allowing ‘us’ to study ourselves and do what we think is best.” He presented the results of their survey, which showed a high degree of consensus for continuing with their plans. On May 1st, the faculty was surveyed again, this time as to their support of each specific component of the plan. All components of the plan were supported by a majority of the faculty as follows: Late Start-80%, Sophomore House-69%, Integrated Career Focus-75%, Remediation-79%, Content literacy-70%, A and B Block-70%, Trimester-70%.

During the month of May, Sandy spent two days presenting the entire initial school profile and the action plan created by the CSIP committee to small groups of teachers during their prep
times. Seventy-five percent of the faculty were involved in these small group conversations. During this time Sandy was able to field questions, address concerns and gain helpful feedback about the plan. The CSIP was then presented to the School Community Council who approved the plan.

Hunter Hills’ plan represented a significant and radical departure from the status quo for high schools in the district. As such, it required several levels of district approval. As the plan would affect some district-level systems such as busing, a special district feasibility committee was created. The feasibility committee approved the plan except for the busing. Although this was disappointing to the school community, they problem-solved and found a way to work around it. On May 5th, Scott presented their proposal to the district Cabinet and it was approved. Eight days later the plan was submitted to the School Board and was approved there as well.

Following the faculty, SCC and district approvals, the entire profile and plan was then presented at an informational parent meeting. The CSIP committee was disappointed that despite the fact that notices of this meeting and its agenda were sent to all parents, only thirty-five parents attended.

*District SLC Report and Grant*

At the district level, Nadine used the Hunter Hill’s end-of-year report submitted to her about the school’s progress in establishing a Smaller Learning Community that year to create a matrix of SLC structures and strategies and their corresponding implementation costs. Nadine used this matrix to petition the school board to increase its funding of SLC implementation from $100,000 to $150,000. The school board granted her request for extra funding. Since Hunter Hills had been notified that their federal grant proposal had not been selected for funding, Nadine was now able to offer them a portion of this extra district funding in the form of a district SLC three year grant to help support the implementation of their plan over the next three years. This funding allowed them to continue with their professional development plans to support change.
School-based Professional Development—End-of-Year

On June 6th, a day after school let out, a professional development day was held at which the faculty was able to increase their understanding of the concept of Professional Learning Communities. Sandy led a discussion about the priorities of Professional Learning Communities which they listed as: (a) focus on learning, (b) focus on collaborative culture, (c) focus on results, and to (d) provide timely, relevant information. Sandy and Scott led the school in a discussion and collective reflection of the school’s mission, school goals and action plan using a set of reflective questions: What is it we expect kids to learn? How do we know they’ve learned it? How will we respond when students do not learn? For a focus on results, the group considered: What is our current reality? What do we want to become? Can we make incremental improvements? What are our Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time bound (SMART) goals for the school (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005)? Steve, the assistant principal, explained the Late Start schedule for the next school year along with administrative expectations for teachers (see Table 1).

Table 1

Late Start Collaboration Schedule 2003-2004

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<tr>
<td>Department Teams—Power Standards and Enduring Understandings</td>
<td>Instructional Support</td>
<td>Instructional Support</td>
<td>Week 1 Faculty Meeting</td>
<td>Department Teams—Power Standards and Enduring Understandings</td>
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<td>Interdepartmental Study Groups</td>
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<td>Week 3</td>
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<td>Department Teams</td>
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<td>Week 4</td>
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<td>Study Groups</td>
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The school-wide content literacy component of the plan was reviewed in depth on this professional development day. The CSIP committee also reviewed the remediation and instructional support program components and provided by way of power point a synopsis of the school’s hard and soft (perception) data. This presentation provided a direct description of the current reality of their “low-performing school” backed-up with data. They reviewed the school’s new intervention model called, A Pyramid of Services (later they would refer to this as a Pyramid of Interventions). This model included a range of services each increasing in intensity for students who required extra support. The services ranged from voluntary extra instructional support to systematic, timely, and mandatory intervention. In this presentation, each program component of the plan was presented with its definition, the research supporting it, a reminder of why it was being considered for Hunter Hills, along with data showing stakeholder support. It also included an explanation of how the component would be implemented, its governance structure, and how it would be evaluated. The structures, strategies and interventions for comprehensive school improvement were represented by an eight piece puzzle as shown in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. Structures, strategies and interventions for Comprehensive School Improvement Plan at Hunter Hills.](image-url)
In order to get a feel for the faculty, in preparation for my own professional development work with the group later in the summer, I attended this meeting, and because I was there, I was introduced to the faculty. It was my sense that the faculty didn’t realize that they were about to embark on something that was still rather unique for high schools. While an increasing number of school leaders throughout the nation were trying hard to find a way to build in time in the school day for regular collaborative activities, here at Hunter Hills, they had found a way to do this collaborative work several times a week. The faculty’s naïve understanding was even more evident at their Summer Leadership Conference held later in the summer.

Second Annual Summer Leadership Conference

The school held its second Leadership Conference in the summer of 2003. Faculty members were paid $200 for voluntary attendance at the two day training. About twenty teachers attended. The subject for the conference was facilitation of small collaborative groups including the establishment of norms, the clarification of group goals, the setting of SMART goals and peer coaching. As the facilitator, I asked the group to consider the following questions about their future teams/study groups: What will the groups look like? What do we anticipate as challenges and what might be the barriers that might keep us from getting there? What are the resources we needed to get there? The faculty participated in an exercise to practice prioritizing and summarizing small group discussions, asking reflective questions to encourage members to expand on their comments. The group also discussed ways of keeping small work groups accountable.

Many of the participants seemed uncomfortable with the topics we were discussing. Very few of the teachers had worked in long-term collaborative working groups and it was difficult to foresee the inherent challenges. Some teachers were uncomfortable with the idea of facilitating work with a group of peers. The school had been operating in a culture of isolation; some teachers at Hunter Hills had never spoken to one another, and some had never even met. Peer coaching
was a threatening concept and they had a difficult time imagining its value. After determining a need for contextualization of professional group work we discussed their prior experiences in small group work situations. From this they were able to conceive more readily the idea of group norms. They then engaged in a fishbowl activity in which the group discussed certain aspects of teaching and learning with half of the group observing.

In later processing of this activity with the group, some of the teachers shared that they had never had a deep conversation about teaching and learning with their colleagues and that it was very satisfying. One teacher expressed her surprise to hear an athletic coach (Scott) speak so knowledgeably about education. The nodding of others in the group validated agreement. The participants had experienced the value of professional dialogue. The group was then introduced to Quinn’s Questions (Kelly, 2004) as a basic protocol for individual and collective reflection: What am I teaching? Why am I teaching it? How am I teaching it? Why am I teaching it that way? How will I know my students are getting it? How will my students know they are getting it? What have I learned in the process? These questions would not only help teachers be more intentional about their instruction and more tuned in to their student learning now, they would also help the faculty develop effective interventions for their students in the future. To this end they were provided tools to help them begin a close examination of their curriculum, instruction and assessment.

Participants at the conference were introduced to the concept of power standards using Wiggins and McTighe’s (1998) methods for determining enduring understandings and essential questions.

Conflict in the Community

That summer, the need for effective two-way communication with parents became a front-burner issue as conflict arose over the trimester component of the school’s plan. Hunter Hills was situated in a community characterized by a single, predominate religion. Seminary, religious study accommodated through a one-period school release option, was an important part of the school day for many families of that faith. The trimester component of the school’s plan, it was thought by some, threatened this tradition. On the trimester schedule, students, while benefiting in
many ways, would not be able to choose year-long electives as they were accustomed to doing. This could mean that a student might be able to fit seminary into his or her schedule during only one or two of the three semesters of the school year.

This possibility had been previously discussed at length with and approved by the SCC many of whom were parents of students who would be affected by this change. It had not been addressed, however, with the seminary teachers. One seminary teacher who did not think the trimester was a wise move started a campaign to inform parents that he did not support this change by disseminating a letter to the local clergy of the religion. The communiqué appeared formal, as having come from the church leadership and was assumed by some to be. Marilyn, assistant principal, recalls that this letter was read or referred to from the pulpit of several congregations in the area. As part of the campaign, the letter was sent to seminary students' households as well. A group of vocal parents became outraged and complaints were made to the school and the district office. The school year, which had began in a spirit of excitement and possibility, ended amidst conflict and confusion.

School Year 2003-2004

Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work. -Thomas Edison

(used in school-based professional development at Hunter Hills, October 2005)

The school year for Hunter Hills began amidst a mushrooming conflict between the school and the community due to one religion teacher’s active campaign against the trimester component of the school improvement plan. Students in this state are allowed one released time period wherein they can take religious studies referred to as seminary. Often times, the dominant religion holds these courses in nearby buildings so that students can attend seminary just like any other class period. Scott and the entire CSIP committee were surprised at the dramatic reaction of the community. While they had anticipated that the change to a trimester might be difficult, they assumed that because they had the approval and full support of the School Community Council,
which had held an informational parent meeting, and still had an entire year to prepare for implementation, that they were in good shape. “We knew there was a lot of work to do in preparation for the change to trimesters,” says Scott. “We anticipated many talks about it in the future with the community.”

The assistant principal in charge of school improvement, Steve, was no longer at the school as he had accepted a principalship at another high school in the district, and no other assistant principal was ever formally assigned to school improvement. Therefore, it fell on Scott’s shoulders to handle the situation with the community. In an effort to dispel fears, Scott sent a newsletter to the homes of parents addressing “rumors” and “misinformation.” In the newsletter, Scott explained the work of the CSIP committee for “all of last year.” He explained all of the components of the school improvement plan and included the data to back up each component. However, the community had already alerted the district level administration to their dissatisfaction. Hunter Hill’s Area Executive Director required the school to hold three community meetings in September to explain the trimester and to get public opinion.

*District Rescinds Approval*

In preparation for the meetings, Scott and Sandy put together a PowerPoint presentation entitled, “Our Community School: Constantly Improving to Serve our Students.” The presentation included the mission and goals of the school, student achievement data, perception data, an explanation of each program component, and a summary of research supporting each one. It also included an explanation of how the program components could work at their school, the governance structure for each, and several examples of possible student schedules under the trimester configuration. The presentation also showed how other critical components were dependent on the trimester schedule.

Marilyn, assistant principal assigned to the SCC, attended these meetings and remembered them as, “nasty, ugly and awful.” Sandy remembered, “They ripped us to shreds over the trimester.” Scott explained that even though the population at these meetings was mostly the same.
group of vocal people each night, the district level administrator rescinded his approval for the trimester.

The cancellation of the trimester, especially in the manner that it occurred, was disheartening to the faculty. Scott remembers the frustration. He exclaimed, “Seventy percent of the faculty was in favor of changing the school block time schedule in some way. Seventy percent of these teachers were in favor of implementing the trimester schedule.” Even those who had been “on the fence” like Marilyn, felt the wind knocked out of them. She remembers, “I think we learned a really good lesson about communication and another good lesson about who our community was and who needed to be communicated with.” The word stakeholder gained new meaning.

At the school, some teachers felt betrayed by the district. Some felt that it validated the lack of support they already felt from the principal. Some CSIP committee members quit the committee. In retrospect, Karl, a teacher at Hunter Hills thinks the idea was just far too radical for the time. “That was just very early in the process.” The disappointment did not deter the school’s efforts. Marilyn attributes this to the strength of the teacher-leaders. She said:

[They] decided, ‘We can let this knock us down and set us back or we can just pick up the pieces and move on.’ The attitude and the personality of everybody on that team was, ‘No, we’ve worked too hard. No way do we let this set us back. We’ll just find another way to get where we want to go. It won’t be with the trimester schedule, but let’s move forward.’ And that was based on very positive leadership amongst the teachers.

*Defining Moment—Unity and Purpose*

Although trust in the system was shaken for some stakeholders, the movement continued. In fact, Scott reported that several lessons were learned about communication with parents, which ultimately improved the efficiency of their organization. The organization’s resolve seemed to dramatically increase as well. A school-based activity documenting this resolve is recorded in the school’s 2004-2005 accreditation manual as the organization’s second defining moment:
Each year our school holds its own version of the Olympics. Each grade as well as the faculty puts together a team to compete for the school trophy. The faculty and administration had experienced a very trying fall semester while attempting to implement our school improvement plan. Some decisions, made at the district level, had unfortunately undermined the confidence the faculty had previously felt in their ability to forge ahead and make difficult, but substantial, research-based changes. Some members of the CSIP committee resigned as a result. Many faculty members began to question the improvement process and wonder if the effort required was truly worth the time commitment. However, this was the first year that collaborative professional development had been built into the school schedule and teachers were meeting in Inquiry Teams. Many of the Inquiry Teams were cross-departmental and teachers were meeting colleagues they had never met before. In the past, only teachers participating in or having gym assembly duty would attend the Olympics. This year, however, was very different. Almost all of the teachers came to the assembly. We all sat together, cheered on our competing colleagues, and for the first time felt a true sense of camaraderie. Even though some of our reform efforts were thwarted, what we were gaining was the ability to communicate with one another and a sense of unity and purpose.

School-based Professional Development—Back-to-School

The CSIP committee had scheduled two days in August, before the teachers’ regular contract began, another in October, January, March, and June right after school was out to provide training and support for the collaborative work of school improvement. During the professional development days in August, the faculty revisited the school’s purpose in order to come closer to a shared vision. They explored the question, “What do we want our school to look like?” Although this discussion seemed redundant to some of the faculty, the CSIP committee considered a shared vision central to the work of a professional learning community. The school mission and goals were reviewed in terms of this vision. Each component of the plan was reevaluated as to its purpose and usefulness in light of the school’s current reality. It was
important to them that each of the structural components of the school improvement plan could be traced to an actual need determined through the school's hard data or perception data. Work commenced towards an articulated vision and a slogan for the whole school as well.

**Late Start—Collaborative Professional Development**

It had been the CSIP committee's aim for this year to "tackle school improvement through a two-pronged approach—one that focused on instruction and a second that focused on inquiry. In order to do this we began a shift toward Professional Learning Communities (PLC)," as stated in the year-end report to Nadine. This would require, they surmised, time and opportunity built into the school day for on-going, collaborative professional development. The concept of collaborative professional development required a paradigm shift as most teachers recognized professional development as training, classes, workshops or attendance at conferences. Collaborative professional development, as the CSIP committee envisioned it, would consist of opportunities for teachers to work together on curriculum design, collective reflection, analysis of student work and peer observation. This was important as the school's three-year CSIP now contained staggered starts of major program components so that while one structural change was being implemented another was being studied or designed. Collaborative professional development was made possible by the implementation of Late Start.

**Late Start Schedule**

To facilitate collaborative professional development and to provide extra Instructional Support for students as a component of their Pyramid of Interventions (formerly Pyramid of Services), the school start time was moved from 7:30 AM to 7:55 AM. Teachers, however, continued to work from 7:00 AM to 3:00 PM. This small schedule change resulted in a fifty-minute block of time every morning which could now be used for a combination of teacher professional development and student instructional support. According to teachers interviewed for this study, the ultimate result of this small schedule change has been the establishment of ongoing collaboration and dialogue as a cultural norm. According to Scott, "It made ongoing
discussions about teaching and learning possible and it allowed us to really involve all teachers in the school planning process.” The authenticity of full participation in the school planning processes was of utmost concern to the CSIP committee. They envisioned a process that would include the collective voice of everyone; a more participatory mode of decision-making.

Late Start made possible additional instructional support for students as well. The most immediate effect of the cancellation of the trimester was the delay of the school’s plans for a mandatory intervention program described in its Pyramid of Intervention. For now, the three mornings a week wherein students could receive extra support from the teacher or just work on homework and other projects with a teacher close at hand was voluntary. Originally, two mornings per week were going to be dedicated to student instructional support and three mornings to collaborative professional development. This was reversed with the cancellation of the Trimester as the teachers no longer needed the extra design time. See Table 2 for the updated version of the Late Start Collaboration Schedule for 2003-2004.

Monday Department Teams—Power Standards

The major activity of the Department Team meetings on Monday mornings for that year was curriculum design, specifically, the determination of power standards. The first two of Quinn’s Questions (Kelly, 2004) were used to guide this curriculum analysis: What am I teaching? Why am I teaching it? Using Wiggins and McTighe’s (1998) ideas about Understanding by Design, teachers worked on developing enduring understandings and essential questions.

Friday Inquiry Teams—Best Practices

The teachers also met in bi-monthly Inquiry Teams on Friday mornings. The work in these groups in 2003-2004 focused on particular research-based instructional practices, selected from those listed in the research by Marzano, Pickering and Pollack (2001). These study groups reflected upon Quinn’s third and fourth questions: How am I teaching it? Why am I teaching it that way? Some teachers worked in a study group that focused on a particular research-based SLC program component which was scheduled to be implemented by the school in the near
future. Inquiry Team findings were shared with the faculty at the end-of-year professional development day.

Table 2

*Late Start Collaboration Schedule 2003-2004—Updated Version*

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department Teams—Power Standards</td>
<td>Instructional Support</td>
<td>Instructional Support</td>
<td>Instructional Support except for leadership meetings:</td>
<td>Week 1 Faculty Meeting</td>
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<td>Week 1 Department Chair</td>
<td>Week 2 Semester 1—Departmental Analysis Semester 2—Interdepartmental Focus Groups</td>
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<td>Week 2 CSIP Committee</td>
<td>Week 3 Interdepartmental Inquiry Team</td>
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<td>Week 3 Instructional Support Leadership</td>
<td>Week 4 Semester 1—Departmental Analysis Semester 2—Interdepartmental Focus Groups</td>
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*Friday Departmental Analysis*

In the first half of the school year the teachers spent Friday mornings, bimonthly, to analyze instructional processes. Departments were to determine their strengths and areas for improvement and to make recommendations for future action. The results of these departmental analyses were shared with the rest of the faculty as part of the January professional development day. These department reports also included group findings, a narrative of their journey, a vision and a
slogan as part of their department work. The vision and slogan from the P.E. department was shown as an example at the October professional development day.

Stakeholders—Teachers

Developing a norm of collaboration, however, was not easy and “would never have happened without the Late Start,” says Scott. The built-in time allowed opportunity to design, study, problem solve and reflect. It also provided time and a forum to work through the conflicts and differences of opinion, which were a constant part of the process. Madelyn commented that she didn’t think things ever went smoothly in those first couple of years. Sandy actually used the word “terrible,” as she recalled the process in the beginning. Marilyn remembered that even in the absence of overt resistance there was at times a passive aggressive element, “We thought a lot of good work was going on, but it wasn’t necessarily true.”

Several possible reasons for this rough period were postulated by interviewees. Although the Late Start allowed collaboration, teachers were not accustomed to this kind of collaborative activity. The habit of professional dialogue was not established and norms of collaboration were non-existent when the school first started its journey of self-study. In some cases, groups developed negative habits before they had a chance to learn how to have productive dialogue.

The culture of isolation typical of many high schools had been the mode at Hunter Hills. Teachers often didn’t know others outside their departments or those whose classrooms and schedules kept them in other areas of the large school facility. Even within some departments there was limited opportunity for even perfunctory interaction. Now the faculty was expected to work closely with people they were just getting to know. Almost everything the teachers were doing was new to them. They had to think, dialogue and interact in new ways.

As they studied together, some teachers were finding they might have to give up favorite classroom units and activities and teach in new ways. Teachers were also somewhat protective of their instructional practices. Jackie, member of the CSIP committee shared the following insight:
I really think that the reason that the teachers fight change is that they're afraid they're not going to be able to do it...they're sensitive to showing weakness...I'm going to be embarrassed. This is going to be hard for me.' And so they put up a barrier and that barrier is a negative barrier. It's a let's-not-do-it kind of a thing.

Some of the facilitators of small groups and work teams found taking the leadership role with their peers difficult and uncomfortable, especially with work that was equally new to them.

Teachers in some subject areas experienced major disagreements about how to focus their curriculum, and whether focusing should be done at all. Some teachers felt that the type of work they were being asked to do didn't apply to their departments or subject areas. Some counselors, for example, didn't find the professional development topics applicable to their work.

While the morning collaborative time allowed for a great amount of work to be accomplished that year, there was stress among teachers who saw all the various components as disparate pieces. The connections between various tasks weren't always clear. There was a tendency for the big picture to go in and out of focus. As Sandy explained:

If you are directing it, it is clear...and all the dots are quite well connected. It helps you to recognize, 'Okay, they are not connected for everybody.' We need to do for our teachers what we do for our kids, which is to teach it in multiple ways. They have different learning styles and until you address each one of their learning styles it is unintelligible. So now it is part of our learning process and we meet on it month-to-month to talk about what's working and what isn't working and how we're going to make it better.

Resistance was quiet at Hunter Hills. The faculty was typically polite and respectful with each other. The majority didn't like making waves. Unfortunately, this kept some issues smoldering. Some of the negativity was targeted at Scott, who was in Nate's words "the visible head of this during this change." Madelyn agreed, "Scott took the brunt." The absence of the administrator put Scott in an awkward position with his peers. There were jealousies and resentment at what some teachers felt was privileged access to the principal. Some of the teachers
had experienced difficulties with the principal in the past. To some of these teachers, Scott’s apparent closeness with the principal was considered a threat. The fact that teachers were being held to more demanding levels of accountability now, seemingly at his hand, fueled this flame, especially because Scott was a peer and not an administrator. Ferrol, a counselor, and now a CSIP leader and change advocate, remembered feeling, “You don’t know my job. You’ve never done my job. You don’t have the right to tell me how to do my job. The only one who has that right is my boss. You’re not my boss.”

In September, Scott attempted to alleviate teacher’s stress levels with a letter to the faculty in which he expressed thanks for the faculty’s patience, while acknowledging, “Power standards work has been difficult, frustrating and confusing.” He offered assistance and addressed the confusion people were having connecting pieces of the plan, specifically, where various subjects “fit” into the Integrated Career Focus. While giving some ideas of his own, he assured people that departments would need to decide for themselves. He acknowledged their expertise and stated that even he “hadn’t...figured out where his own subject fit yet.”

In this letter and many more like them, Scott used strategies that helped to lessen tension among the faculty. He complemented teachers’ expertise and acknowledged their hard work, showing confidence in their abilities to do the work. He placed the solution-finding squarely in the hands of the teachers—the professionals, expressing that he did not see himself as the man with all the answers. He saw his role as a facilitator of the questions. He showed that he was sharing their experiences by giving an example of his own department’s struggles. Scott’s tendency to approach them as a peer and not as a pseudo-administrator seemed to curb jealousies and nurture trust. Scott’s tendency to keep the students at the center of the conversation also seemed to ease contention. The constructivist approach Scott desired was a little uncomfortable for others at first, especially those who were used to being given a task with clear-cut expectations, but to Scott this was necessary for the cultivation of not only a shared
understanding, leading to a shared vision—the heart of a true professional learning community—but to nurture habits of professional problem-solving which would be key to future sustainability.

Stakeholders—Students

In 2003-2004, students, parents and faculty all felt a need to increase collaboration and communication with the students themselves. Recognized by the CSIP committee as another important stakeholder group, their involvement and ideas were highly valued. After receiving special training, AP Psychology students conducted the stakeholder perception survey that year by calling all homes listed in the student phone guide and interviewing the parents themselves. A student officer also began meeting regularly with the SCC. To keep students informed and to clarify why changes were being made at their school, the school improvement plan was presented to all sophomores and juniors in the fall with the same information presented to other groups: hard and soft data, research, what works, and what doesn’t. In a survey conducted following the presentation, the students expressed mixed feelings about various components of the school improvement plan.

Stakeholders—Parents

Parent involvement had always been frustrating for the CSIP committee at Hunter Hills. From their perspective, numerous attempts to involve parents in the past seemed to have been fruitless. Parents seemed apathetic towards schooling in general with only a small number of interested parents involved in formal leadership roles. The committee expressed the difficulty they had getting parents to attend functions at the school. As demonstrated by the trimester incident, communication with parents, students and even among the faculty members themselves seemed to be the major challenge in the change process at Hunter Hills in 2003-2004. The CSIP committee had to find ways to establish and maintain ongoing, two-way communication between and among all subgroups in their large high school organization. One improvement was to begin adding an update about the school improvement process in the PTA newsletter. The first newsletter explained:
Through the past two years, our school improvement committee has been studying first, who we are, and secondly, what has been proven to work for education nationally in schools that look like us. We created a plan for school improvement that consisted of eight parts. One of the pieces of the plan, the trimester schedule, has been eliminated as an option due to a lack of community support. The elimination of this piece required us to revisit our school improvement plan.

The committee then explained the changes to the school plan. They also made parents aware of the successes of their efforts:

We are very excited to see some of the gains we have experienced with student academic achievement levels already. By simply knowing who we are, who is learning and who is not, and through creating strategies for student learning, our Biology and English CRT scores were raised dramatically this past year.

They established the faculty as learners and learning as an ongoing process by stating, “As we continue this process of learning who we are and what specific strategies can assist us with our students’ needs, we look forward to continued improvement in student learning.” They also announced an annual stakeholder perception survey and invited parents to the Focus Groups analyzing the effectiveness of school-wide organizational processes, as well as a new study group which would be concerned with school/community communication and interaction. On March 20, 2004, the newsletter read:

We have need for parent volunteers to serve on two study groups. These study groups will be studying the following:

1. Parent Involvement Study Group—this group will be focusing on studying methods of parental involvement in the high school. How can parents feel more welcome and more included at the high school level? What can and should be the role that they play in the high school education of their students?
2. Business Partnership Study Group—this group will be focusing on the role businesses play in the high school and how to increase that role. As we prepare students for post-secondary education and work in careers, we need an advisory council that can give suggestions, support, opportunities for student involvement, and options on funding that will allow us to improve our preparation of students for the ‘real world.’

This letter like many others throughout the next few years demonstrates a shift from one-way communication to two-way. The school was attempting to avoid merely presenting information to parents, especially post facto. They were now trying to keep parents abreast of events as they were occurring and encouraging authentic involvement. The numbers of parents involved in SCC and PTA increased the next two years through intentional efforts to build relational trust. Marilyn said:

[Scott] was very instrumental in keeping them on board with the comprehensive school improvement plan and those kinds of things. He was...a good listening ear and I think he developed a trust factor there, which I really think helped them with the buy-in when it came to accreditation and their feedback to the accreditation team.

She also commented on her own role with the parents:

I feel like that's where I made a difference...having a good relationship with the community council. Dean, in his more quiet, distanced way...I don't think that they’d ever warmed up to each other. I think that maybe...I was the right person at the right time. They did need somebody that would listen and follow through.

_School-based Professional Development—October_

By the time of the professional development day in October, many teachers were feeling overwhelmed. Marilyn, who was concerned about the morale of the faculty, showed the popular _Fish! Catch the Energy; Release the Potential_ (1998) a motivational/customer service training video designed to encourage positive feelings among participants. Scott attempted to help bring clarity to the teacher's work with a presentation to connect all the pieces of the school
improvement plan, explaining the relationship of the accreditation process to this work. A visual of the school improvement process showed how far they had come and where they were going.

To help the PLC collaborative work in small groups become more effective and comfortable, the October professional development focused on how to collaborate effectively in study groups. The teachers had been working in Department Teams since the beginning of the school year, but they were just getting ready to begin interdepartmental Inquiry Teams. Teachers actually met with their new interdepartmental Inquiry Teams and held their first meeting there at the training under scaffolded conditions. Teachers could choose an Inquiry Team topic from the following: Best Practices (Marzano, Pickering & Pollack, 2001), Instructional Support, Integrated Focus-Business and Technology, Integrated Focus-Fine and Performing Arts, Communication, Sophomore House, and Content Literacy. Each group established norms, defined roles and set goals right there in the training. Groups were asked to discuss what they already knew about their topic and what they were already doing with it. Then the groups developed an action plan and made preparations for their next meeting which would be held at their regular early morning collaboration time.

Sandy explained that they were expected to gather data and periodically share what they were learning with the rest of the faculty. To this end they were asked to discuss ways they might disseminate what they would be learning. A study group cycle was shared that made clear the role of reflection in the process. This cycle included a four-part learning loop: input of new information, reflective planning and design based on that new information, implementation in the classroom, reflection on the results of that implementation through the analysis of student work/data.

Data—Stakeholder Perception

The data shared with the faculty that day, from the previous year’s stakeholder perception survey showed conflicting understandings. For instance, only 52% of parents, and an even lower 26% of students, perceived that students see a relationship between what they are studying in
school and their everyday life. Even more disconcerting, were the 72% of teachers who felt they
gave students personal encouragement and the 28% of students who agreed. Finally, 72% of
students planned on attending college, but historically only 12% of students actually attended.
Seventy percent of students reported working more than five hours per week and 50% of students
worked to help support their family. Only 46% of students felt prepared for post-secondary
education and only 25% of students looked forward to school.

Also of interest, 77% of parents perceived that teachers were willing to help students outside
of class and provided their child enough time and support to be academically successful. Overall,
82% of parents felt both welcome in the school and were satisfied with the education their
children were receiving. For teachers, 77% perceived parents as not involved in their children’s
education with 70% of teachers feeling parents didn’t understand the school’s programs and
operations. This perception data helped to form the direction for school improvement efforts in
the coming years.

Data—Student Achievement

As literacy was identified as a critical need, and the school was actively seeking useful data to
drive instruction, the faculty decided to administer a reading assessment to their tenth grade
students. This would help them identify the reading levels of their students. Sharing the results of
the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) assessment led to another defining moment for the school.
Without including English Language Learners or Special Education students, a significant
number of the largest subgroup of students was reading below grade level. They found that at
least two hundred students were comprehending texts independently at the DRP level of 50 or
approximately an upper elementary text like Charlotte’s Web (White, 1974). The DRP test
findings were presented to the community in the May Parent Newsletter and the CSIP committee
planned a content literacy conference for the summer to address this issue. The school’s annual
federal government Trust Lands report stated that the whole school’s commitment toward
improvement in this area, “Reading and writing are not simply an English teacher’s
responsibility. We will have each of our teachers involved in teaching reading and writing skills as they relate to their content area." With their Trustlands money they planned to provide extra periods of reading classes for those students identified by low performance on the UBSCT (state writing test), CRT and DRP tests, and provide a program specialist for Content Area Literacy in the school.

As the school’s second quarter came to a close, the achievement results of several of the school’s efforts became available. They were excited that Biology and English CRT scores had increased. At the end of the second quarter, the grades of students in the Instructional Support remediation class were examined. A significant amount of students received better grades and less F’s than those not in the class, raising confidence in the value of this program component and a decision to continue. These and the perception data results were shared with the faculty, SCC, PTA, Chamber of Commerce and published on the school website.

These results seemed to generate new energy among the faculty. Morale seemed to be higher the second half of the school year according to Scott. Positive student achievement results may have contributed to this raised morale. It may also have been affected by coming to closure on the new and difficult projects of the first semester, specifically the departmental analyses, which had made some feel vulnerable. The second half of the year the focus changed to a more general and less personal analysis of school-wide organizational effectiveness.

**Focus Groups—School-wide Organizational Effectiveness**

As the departments concluded their Departmental Analyses in December, each submitted a record of their findings, strengths, weaknesses, recommendations, group roles and assignments and presented this information to the rest of the faculty on the January Professional Development Day. Using the Survey of Instructional and Organizational Effectiveness (National Study of School Effectiveness, 1998) as a framework for analysis, the morning collaborative work shifted to interdepartmental Focus Groups analyzing leadership for school improvement, culture of continuous improvement, educational agenda, assessment systems, and communication-building
systems. In several cases, the Focus Groups surveyed the faculty for their perceptions regarding these school processes.

Each Focus Group included a number of students and parents. Awareness and involvement in school-wide organizational processes was new to most teachers, as their focus is more typically classroom-based. Groups were expected to turn in a final report, which would include a meeting log book, a narrative explaining what they had learned, and a suggested plan. Their progress was to be shared with the entire faculty at their March professional development and their findings were to be presented at their June professional development. It is important to note that all assignments given to teachers were made by teacher-leaders. Although it was assumed that the principal approved of such assignments, the administrator did not give these assignments.

School-based Professional Development—January

In order to provide teachers training and support for their Focus Group work, this researcher met with teachers during their prep times in January. The goal for this day was to help teachers expand their vision to include awareness of school-wide processes and how they might go about analyzing the effectiveness of those processes. In February 2004, additional training and support was provided for Focus Group Chairs and a special training was also held for students who would be involved in these collaborative school-wide Focus Groups as well.

Professional Learning Opportunities

The CSIP committee took advantage of as many professional learning opportunities as possible. In the spring, a group of teachers was sent to the Instructional Leadership in the 21st Century conference. This was the third year that the school had sent personnel to this conference. Each year, they sent a new group of teachers. The conference served to inspire and motivate the faculty and administration at all levels. It helped increase the awareness of the general faculty, stretching the teacher-leaders, expanding their vision and helping them determine their next steps with the faculty. The national perspective provided them a broader lens with which to view their work and a better awareness of research to check their progress against.
Scott, Sandy and an assistant principal took advantage of the state’s accreditation training where they learned how to function on a visiting accreditation team. Later in the year, these three participated on a visiting team in the actual accreditation process of a high school in their state. This training and experience helped them to better examine their own school processes providing better leadership of their school’s accreditation.

Sandy and another member of the CSIP committee also attended a Smaller Learning Community conference that summer. They learned the importance of emphasizing the question, “What are we going to do if students don’t learn?” As was typical, this new understanding on the part of the CSIP committee became incorporated into the school’s self-study the following year.

**Smaller Learning Community Federal Grant**

Scott continued his third year as a participant on the district-level SLC study group. With the added SLC funding from the district, Scott had been freed up for half-time CSIP committee leadership. Nadine continued to gain confidence in the Hunter Hills’ change efforts and offered to provide the services of a new grant writer to help the school try again to procure federal Smaller Learning Communities grant funding. Heather, the new grant writer hired by the district remembered, “They were getting very frustrated with the federal grant process.” This was Scott’s third try at the federal SLC grant. Heather continued, “They were almost saying, ‘We’re going to have to try one more time and then [forget it], we’re just going to do this on our own.’” But, Heather was very hopeful: “I knew that they had an articulated vision and if they have an articulated vision you can get a grant.” She added:

Scott is very charismatic and he was really able to go around and get people to agree to things—whether they would agree just so he would go away or they would just agree because they thought it was the right thing. One or the other, but he had them ready to go someplace and I think they were just looking for that next big place to go.

Heather tells of the challenge it was to write the grant because of the complexity of their program. She asked Scott to just, “Tell me in your words what’s going to happen here. Now let’s
just say it like that.” As Sandy reflected later, “Sometimes we make things in education so complicated.” They had a desire to create a grant document that would serve as a planning document for the school whether or not they got the grant money. Heather offered, “[Scott] was able to help people understand where things had to go from point A to point B to point C, and so we just made sure that that grant document became something that they could understand and use.” She explained:

We really tried to create ownership of the school in that grant process. I said, ‘Let’s write it and I want you to farm it out to as many people as you can.’ He farmed it out and they read it and we brought it back in and we met with different people. He’d just have other people come in or somebody would walk by when I was there and he’d say, ‘Oh, come in and let’s talk about the grant for a few minutes.’ So he made that a very transparent process this time when we rewrote it.

With the promise of $400,000 to the school over a three year period, the budget for the federal grant proposal included a full-time project coordinator, a quarter-time professional development coordinator, and one period for a parent involvement coordinator. It included stipends for teachers to attend the Summer Leadership Conferences, substitutes for teachers to attend intensive bimonthly, three-hour study groups, stipends for school level facilitators to provide school-based professional development and professional development materials and supplies. The plan for this grant was a three-year plan with seven SLC components.

Comprehensive School Improvement Plan

The school’s second CSIP developed towards the end of the previous year had to be adjusted to reflect the cancellation of the trimester component. The resulting plan submitted to the district that spring had a much more robust profile than the previous year. The CRT scores were disaggregated by ethnicity and subgroup. The profile also included a comparison of perception data collected from both years. The plan’s goals were aligned according to the school’s greater
understanding of its current reality, the school’s mission, vision and DRSLs. Scott explained the changes in the program structures in a letter to parents:

At this time, we are unable to offer school-wide advisement, Partnering Adults With Students (PAWS), and Instructional Support for students at the level initially designed. This is due to class size and teacher load restrictions under the current AB block schedule. We are planning on implementing an Integrated Career Focus in Fine and Performing Arts and in Business and Technology. We are also studying new ways to incorporate a Sophomore House within our current AB block schedule. We also are offering small pieces of systematic instructional support to sophomore students only. Our teachers are meeting two mornings a week in collaborative teams studying instructional practices and school improvement strategies.

**Defining Moment—Breaking Ranks II Report**

In April, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (2004) produced the Breaking Ranks II report listing the seven cornerstones to successful high schools. This report was validating to the CSIP committee. Scott reported proudly, “Our school improvement plan for this year included all seven of the cornerstones.” It bolstered spirits and a sense of pride within the school; they were doing what research was saying was good for kids. The report also validated the school’s systemic approach. As stated in the report, “Piecemeal change may lead to some positive results, but it is not apt to be as effective as efforts that reach into the various parts of the system, in other words, systemic reform. High Schools need more than tinkering” (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004, p.6). The report and its motivating effect on the faculty were recorded in the 2004-2005 accreditation manual as another as a defining moment for the school.

**Faculty Survey—Late Start**

Despite difficulties in the beginning of the year, teachers surveyed in May as to the value they placed on Late Start that year rated it quite high. Ninety-three percent said Late Start was helpful for students making up assignments, quizzes, and tests. Ninety-four percent said Late Start was
helpful for students seeking extra help during classes. Ninety-four percent said Late Start was helpful in coordinating department business and goals. Eighty-nine percent said Late Start was helpful in evaluating course goals. Ninety-three percent said Late Start was helpful in developing and practicing power standards. Ninety-one percent said Late Start was worth the extra meetings. This information was encouraging for the CSIP committee and helped to re-energize them.

**School-based Professional Development—End-of-Year**

The end-of-year professional development helped to validate change efforts at Hunter Hills, bring greater coherence to their work with school improvement and accreditation, increase the knowledge-base of the faculty, and focus attention on school-wide issues in preparation for their work at their third annual Summer Leadership Conference. The CSIP committee showed how the school’s improvement components related to the Breaking Ranks II Seven Cornerstones (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004). Inquiry Teams who had studied best practices shared their learning and recommendations with the faculty. Focus Groups shared their findings from their analyses of school-wide processes.

The Leadership for School Improvement Focus Group in particular evaluated the school’s progress toward school goals by surveying teachers and students. Concerning teachers, they found:

...teachers perceive themselves as offering a high-quality educational program, using teaching strategies that are proven effective in helping students learn, and using a variety of strategies that involve students in the learning process. Teachers appear to have sources of information that lead them to believe that the language arts, science, math, health, and foreign language departments are less than satisfactory at Hunter Hills and that the social studies department is doing well. Teachers feel that Hunter Hills is a safe place that provides for the needs of the students with adequate resources and technology.

Students’ opinions about the educational program at the school continued to differ substantially from the teachers. The group reported:
There is a major divide between the teachers and the students on many of the items on the survey. Most students find little relation between what they are studying and their lives. Most students find that technology has not been adequately provided. Most students find that the educational program at Hunter Hills is of poor quality. Most students are not motivated to do their best work. Most students see little relation between homework and success in studies.

The Leadership for School Improvement Focus Group also found that while teachers felt that the school was improving in its ability to employ effective decision-making that was data-driven, research-based and collaborative, they felt that the school made limited use of assessment and evaluation data for the purpose of improving student learning and instructional effectiveness. They felt that with no methods of accountability in place they couldn’t ensure consistency with schools beliefs, mission and goals. It was their perception that while the school offered great opportunities to collaborate there were still some individuals who did not get involved.

A survey given to the Department Chairs by this same Leadership Focus Group revealed disconcerting perspectives on students and learning, which conflicted with values the school had been promoting. They did not believe that the school had a clear focus on instructional goals. One Department Chair expressed, “Is a clear and strong focus even possible? Do 90/90/90 schools even exist?...I just wish that kids would be more goal-oriented. Most are completely lost,” and “What do we do with the kids who refuse to come to the table?” They pointed to a need to maintain rigorous, consistent, standards-based curriculum and instruction. In this respect they felt that they were not “matching our goals with our behaviors.” They also acknowledged that their departments could do better. “Periodic checks have been good. It keeps you on your toes. We can even get better.” As a strategy for school improvement the Department Chairs felt that the instructional support offered in the morning could be more effective. They felt that “most teachers are available, but students are not taking advantage of the extra help.”

The Department Chairs reported what they perceived as a disturbing trend, “We used to have a small top and big middle population. Now we have a small top, small middle, and big bottom
[student] population." The Department Chair report expressed no confidence with struggling students who they described as “apathetic and unmotivated, and don’t give a darn.” At the same time the chairs expressed frustration over using CRT’s as an evaluation tool suggesting that “they may just be too hard and not fair.” They were much more comfortable with assessment results that occurred in their Advanced Placement (AP) classes. The Department Chairs were proud of their AP and concurrent enrollment programs, which were some of the district’s most successful, and felt that high-end programming needed more attention, reporting, “There are some very bright students in this building. They are the backbone of the school.”

As to the management of the school’s resources, the Department Chairs felt well supported as to materials and reported that administration didn’t say “no” very often. When asked how collaboration is happening at the school within and between departments, Department Chairs responded that they feel better about collaboration this year than last. “We used to be more departmentalized. We need to stay the course of collaboration between departments. We have had to set aside old habits and start something new. Beliefs had to change.”

Content Literacy Summer Conference

All teachers received a memo from the principal early in the year inviting them to attend a Summer Conference at their school focused on Content Literacy. They were told:

All teachers in the building will need to receive this training over the course of the next three years. This year, we have money to pay teachers a stipend of $150 a day, for each of the days of the conference. We do not know what money will be available in the future.

As leverage, the letter explained that a grant was written for the 2004-2005 school year to hire “readers” who will come in to read, grade, and record scores of the graded written assignments for teachers who attended the conference. Hunter Hills called on this researcher as a consultant to plan for this day. I asked Sonya, the district’s Secondary Literacy Specialist, to facilitate a discussion about the DRA reading assessment results at the conference. At the conference, she also helped provide ways of supporting the literacy demands of content areas and offered initial
training on assessing with Six-Traits of Writing. By including the Secondary Literacy Specialist, a position newly created in that district, Hunter Hills gained a resource that supported Hunter Hills in their literacy efforts for the next few years.

District SLC Report

At her request, a concise summary on the school's progress towards establishing an SLC was submitted to Nadine at the district office. The year-end report demonstrated a high level of involvement and accomplishment:

This year there were twenty-five teachers involved in the creation of two SLC Academies ready for piloting: the Fine and Performing Arts Integrated Career Focus and the Business and Technology Integrated Career Focus. There were fifteen teachers studying a SLC called a Sophomore House. Skinny with our English, History, Biology, and Math classes for our Sophomore House are ready to be piloted. Ten teachers are working on Instructional Support for students. We will also have a group of teachers that will submit a plan to implement Content Area Literacy, a group with a plan to implement Best Practices, a group with a plan for better communication with our community, and a group with a plan for student Instructional Support.

Third Annual Summer Leadership Conference

Hunter Hills's third annual school-based Summer Leadership Conference was held in the summer of 2004. The leadership team now included parents and students. They now had survey data, demographic data, climate data, departmental analyses, and focus group reports to consider when reviewing their educational agenda. This year the main task for those at the conference was to develop a six-year school improvement plan, including goals and objectives, which were determined by identifying problem areas, determining possible solutions for each identified area, and considering the research gathered about each possible solution. Activities in the plan were selected by determining which ones most closely impacted the largest number of students and which were the most efficient and reasonable.
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<tr>
<td>Integrated Career Focus (Academies)</td>
<td>Implement Performing Arts &amp; Business and Technology Academies</td>
<td>Select Deans and determine school-wide Academies</td>
<td>Implement school-wide</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skinneys—an integrated team of content area specialists which share the same group of students and have a common planning period (Sammon, 2002)</td>
<td>Pilot two Skinneys</td>
<td>Implement four Skinneys</td>
<td>Implement school-wide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore Advisement</td>
<td>Create curriculum</td>
<td>Implement school-wide</td>
<td>Implementation support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sophomore House</td>
<td>Design program</td>
<td>Implement by randomly assigning all sophomores to teacher teams</td>
<td>Implementation support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent Involvement/ Empowerment Workshops</td>
<td>Study and design</td>
<td>Implement</td>
<td>Expand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th to 10th Grade Transitional Activities</td>
<td>Study and design</td>
<td>Implement</td>
<td>Expand</td>
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<tr>
<td>11th and 12th Grade Advisement</td>
<td>Train teachers</td>
<td>Design</td>
<td>Implement</td>
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The group began by streamlining their vision, mission, and school DRSLs. For each DRSL they asked: Do we still think this should be an outcome? How valuable is this DRSL? How are we measuring this DRSL? What tools are we using? This same level of analysis was completed for the school’s vision, mission, and slogan. They used a reflective protocol to help them examine their beliefs and underlying assumptions. This protocol guided an exploration of the following: “If we desire…then our guiding principles are…and our behavior looks like…” Participants at this conference also explored the question, “If this is what we believe, what are we willing to do?” As part of this program evaluation they also listed each objective and asked for each: How did we do? How important was this activity? Participants at this conference, including parents and students, also critiqued each of the departmental analyses to give each department helpful feedback. Participants also reviewed the NSSE Stakeholder perception survey data, providing additional interpretation.

The work at the Summer Leadership Conference resulted in adjustments to the school’s CSIP, which was now a six-year plan spanning the school years 2004-2010. While the mission remained the same, a vision had been articulated. The goals on this document were stated as measurable outcomes, and each was aligned with the DRSL it was designed to meet. These outcomes were focused on written communication, accurate and timely data, connectedness, and communication throughout the school community. Each major component was planned with a year for study, a year for design work and a year for implementation (see Table 3). A professional development plan had been also designed to align with the new school plan.

Hunter Hills Vision

We believe that Hunter Hills is a Professional Learning Community and will be a school chosen as exemplary by students and parents for its safety, academic excellence and school community.

1. Our staff will be respectful and involved and endeavor to develop curriculum that is integrated, relevant, and applicable.

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2. Our administration will visibly and proactively support teachers, students, and the community.

3. Our students will graduate as good citizens with skills necessary for lifelong learning.

The school now had a slogan as well, "Learning is not a spectator sport!" This slogan typified the major theme of the year's efforts at bringing all stakeholders to the table, and finding ways to create ongoing dialogue. This slogan would become a reminder that moving from a work environment of isolation to one of communication necessitates everyone on the playing field. There can be no one sitting on the sidelines in this game!

School Year 2004-2005

The block of granite which is an obstacle in the pathway of the weak becomes a stepping stone in the pathway of the strong. –Unknown
(used in school-based professional development at Hunter Hills, October 2005)

By the 2004-2005 school year Hunter Hills had a genuine community-developed, six-year CSIP plan with an articulated vision and mission. The school had selected and prioritized four specific DRSLs, now known as the “4Cs”, on which to focus: communication, collaboration, critical thinking and citizenship. The mission, the 4C's and the new school slogan, “Learning is not a spectator sport!” were painted on the school walls. The school's goals were refocused to be measurable and align with DRSLs. The CSIP reflected plans to provide students with a rigorous, relevant curriculum, and a personalized environment. To this end teachers in department teams had determined power standards and aligned them with the school’s DRSLs. The CSIP also included plans to implement two SLC structures—at introductory levels this year—to increase connections for students with people and ideas: A Fine and Performing Arts Academy to reduce fragmentation of the curriculum; and Skinnis (Sammon, 2002) for sophomores, to assure daily contact of teachers and students. Skinny teams consisted of one Biology/Geometry Team and one World Civics/Language Arts 10 team.
Hunter Hills had made substantial changes to its day-to-day operations, which set it apart from the other schools in the district, as well as from most high schools in the state. Changes had been made in the school schedule to reduce teacher isolation typical of secondary schools. Time was built within the school day to provide for teacher learning and collaboration. Rearranging minutes within the teacher's contract had affected the teachers' work and their interactions with each other and their students. As stated in the school's 2004-2005 accreditation manual, "Late Start time had allowed for more teacher collaboration, more departmental and cross department coordination, more common assessment of student performance and more sharing of ideas and strategies." Where before the CSIP committee had been the ones studying and applying research, now the whole school was learning. The operational culture at Hunter Hills was changing. See Table 4 for the Late Start Schedule for 2004-2005.

Table 4

Late Start Collaboration Schedule 2004-2005

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<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department Teams—Power Standards</td>
<td>Student Remediation (Instructional Support)</td>
<td>Student Remediation (Instructional Support)</td>
<td>Student Remediation (Instructional Support) except for meetings:</td>
<td>Study Groups, Best Practices, Content Literacy</td>
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<td>Faculty Meeting</td>
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<td>Instructional Support Group</td>
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<td>Week 3</td>
<td>CSIP Committee</td>
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<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Department Chairs</td>
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Accreditation Visit

Hunter Hills's formal accreditation visit was scheduled for 2004-2005. Each department had already completed an initial analysis of their educational program based on eleven guiding questions and focus groups had examined school-wide organizational processes—both parts of the self-study required by the accreditation process. In addition, all teachers had been involved in studying and reporting on best practices and/or various school and instructional structures and strategies the school planned on implementing.

Data gleaned from school-wide summative assessments and their subsequent analysis had yielded useful information about student performance, as well as stakeholder's expectations for student learning. The Hunter Hills faculty had made an intensive effort toward establishing a professional learning community in which all stakeholders were involved in collaborative data analysis at several levels, as opposed to an administration and/or a leadership team doing this work alone as is typical for most accreditations. A result of this involvement was a school community more knowledgeable about data driven decision-making and a more sophisticated understanding of the continuous improvement process.

As a newly formed professional learning community they had worked to establish and maintain rigor and relevancy of their curriculum through the determination of power standards, enduring understandings and essential questions. Having identified their power standards, teachers this year turned their attention to the development of common assessments to measure student achievement against these standards to be prepared for the school-wide, mandatory, targeted intervention program, which was a school-wide, long-term goal.

School-based Professional Development—Back-to-School

During the first two days back from summer vacation teachers were introduced to various protocols for looking at student work with their colleagues. Formal reflective dialogue about student work and test data was still foreign to most of the faculty. Monday mornings were set aside for departments to work on developing common assessments upon which this dialogue...
would center. The CSIP committee provided the Department Chairs the following questions to help them guide their group’s thinking about curriculum and assessment: What is worthy of understanding? What is evidence of understanding? What learning experiences and teaching promotes understanding, interest and excellence? What is evidence of in-depth understanding as opposed to superficial understanding? Where should we look and what should we look for to determine the extent of student understanding? What kinds of assessment task and evidence needs will anchor our curriculum units and thoughtfully guide our instruction?

Although the school had conducted much of the analyses required for the formal accreditation process the previous year, there was still much to do if the process was going to be an on-going, self-study as opposed to a one-time report. The CSIP committee needed some departments to revisit superficial department analyses reminiscent of the old accreditation reports. Some department analyses showed a tendency to blame poor student achievement on unmotivated students without a consideration for activities within that department’s control. The revision of the six-year plan provided leverage for the CSIP committee to ask departments to review their work, because their standards would have to be aligned to the DRSLs in the revised plan. The CSIP committee asked the Department Chairs to facilitate the instructional analysis taking collaboration, professional growth, and assessments into consideration by asking: What are you doing? What would you like to be doing? What resources do you need to do what you would like to be doing?

SLC Federal Grant

In the fall, the school received the news that the federal SLC grant proposal they had submitted the previous year had been approved, meaning approximately $400,000 over three years in extra resources for their school improvement efforts. With this funding came a higher level of accountability, and higher expectations for implementation and results. Even though the school operated from the assumption that student achievement was the umbrella under which all programs existed, and approaches like SLC structures, accreditation processes, and CSIP were all
parts of the same process, the reality was that each of these approaches had their own reporting requirements, timelines, deadlines, schedules, vocabulary, and even their own separate goals. As such, the federal grant actually added a level of complexity to operations within the school. The grant was a reality check for the school. Jackie, a teacher-leader, reflected:

It sounded good until they thought they really had to do it. So the concept was good. The theory was good. But then when it came down to, ‘This is exactly how we’re going to do it,’ then it was like, ‘Well, I don’t want to do that. I like the theory, but I don’t want to do the pieces—the nuts and bolts.’

Outside Consultancy

Two of the required activities for the federal SLC grant were Scott’s and Sandy’s attendance at a technical assistance meeting in Washington D.C. and a team’s attendance at the Smaller Learning Community conference in San Francisco in January of 2005. This conference was attended by Nadine, from the district, the principal Dean, a vice-principal Marilyn, and Sandy. It was suggested at this meeting that the school change the Sophomore House structure to a School-Within-a-School model in order to increase personalization and connections throughout a student’s experience at Hunter Hills. Upon the group’s return, this idea was discussed with the CSIP committee and the school faculty who agreed. The CSIP was modified once again.

School-based Professional Development—October

The October professional development was held in small groups in 2004, which was in direct response to the results of a professional development survey conducted the previous year. Findings from this survey showed that faculty desired the same kind of relevant, supported, differentiated professional learning they wanted for their students. The development was then planned to draw on the high levels of expertise of the faculty when appropriate, and was delivered in small group settings as often as possible. As the school was working on the development of assessments, this researcher met with individual department groups during their prep times to discuss how to get useful information from data.
To address the constant need for more coherency, a visual of the action research cycle helped the faculty conceive of the continuous nature of the self-study in which they were engaged (see Figure 2). When asked, at that time, about the major differences they had experienced between past accreditations and the current process, the teachers reported: “We have always felt isolated and fragmented, until now;” “We have never talked so much;” “Accreditation was a team of people or someone in the office—an administrator;” “Accreditation was somebody else…this is much harder;” “It didn’t really reflect me;” “It sat up on the shelf;” “It was one thing. Then we didn’t hear about it until next time;” and “I didn’t even read it. I don’t think anyone did.”

![Action Research Cycle](image)

*Figure 2. Action Research Cycle used by the CSIP committee at Hunter Hills*

**Mock Accreditation Visit**

Because the new accreditation process was very different from that which the faculty and administration had experienced in the past, and because teachers and administrators needed
encouragement to complete tasks before the formal accreditation team visit in March, the CSIP committee decided to hold a mock accreditation in December. Scott felt that the mock accreditation might also root out some of the negativity that he was sensing among the teachers and relieve the tension building up in the school. The mock accreditation visiting team was made up of this researcher, a professional developer from a neighboring school, and the former assistant principal, Steve, who was involved in the beginnings of the school improvement at Hunter Hills. This team’s job was to give helpful feedback to the school as a critical friend group. The team observed teachers in classrooms, talked to students in their classrooms, interviewed teachers, met formally with a student group, a parent group, and the administrative team. The agenda for the visiting team was very similar to a formal accreditation visit, and just as in the formal accreditation process, team members were supplied a copy of the school’s accreditation manual to preview prior to the visit.

Accreditation Manual

The CSIP committee resisted the tendency to make their manual showy. It was important to Scott that this manual focus on student learning, specifically who was learning and who was not, and what the school was going to do about it. The committee intentionally did not cover up the school’s warts. Marilyn remembers being a little embarrassed by the book:

Our book had everything it needed to have. It was an accurate, complete and fair assessment of our school and the work that had been done and the direction that we were going. And it was honest about our strengths and weaknesses, but it was pretty plain and basic. I remember Scott saying, ‘That’s the whole point. We need to show them that we’re not about the book. We’re about the work that’s going on in the school.’ I remember that being a significant conversation.

The Hunter Hills accreditation manual is different from other manuals in that it gives the history of the Hunter Hills’s transformation in the form of a story. In fact, the history is entitled “A

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"Never-Ending Story" depicting the nature of continuous improvement at Hunter Hills. The manual also included the research and philosophical basis for the process they had taken.

**Student Group Interview**

The student group who met with the mock visiting team included students from a variety of formal and informal leadership positions. The students generally liked their school and they appreciated “the good feeling” in their school. They reported they were friendly and accepting of each other. They were proud of the fact that there were very few cliques. Students were a little nervous about the future, particularly college and the prospects of living on their own. Students valued and appreciated the help of counselors, but expressed frustration with the lack of timely access. This same feeling applied to the value they placed on Late Start. Several interviewed had taken advantage of the time for extra help. However, they complained that sometimes teachers weren’t in their rooms, expressing a perception that teachers were not able to be in their rooms because of daily meetings. The students’ after-school work schedule continued to make homework expectations an important issue. Throughout the discussion, students joked about not knowing who the principal was.

**Parent Group Interview**

The parent group, which was made up of PTSA board members, was appreciative of the school and its efforts. Parents agreed that communication between the school and community could be improved. The PTSA board felt like they were welcome and had positive things to say about Hunter Hills and their involvement in the planning processes. Parents wanted better counseling services, however. Parents also identified the principal’s lack of visible involvement as a concern. One parent shared that she didn’t think her child could point him out in the hallway.

**Informal Teacher Visits**

The mock accreditation team observed engaged students and a variety of instructional strategies being used in the classrooms. However, among the teachers Steve sensed an undercurrent of negativity. In a processing meeting after school Steve shared with the CSIP
leadership the mounting frustrations which had been voiced to him during his conversations with teachers.

The first area of contention involved the confusion some teachers were feeling about what was going on at the school. A few teachers complained that they didn’t know why they were doing what they were doing. They didn’t know how the structures, programs or components connected or even if they connected at all. Supporting this frustration was the observation that although teachers seemed to believe in the initiatives at the school and had worked hard to make significant changes, they were largely unable to articulate the work—undoubtedly due to the complexity, comprehensiveness and systemic nature of school improvement at the school.

The second area of contention involved some teachers’ negative feelings toward the administration and CSIP leadership. Some resisters harbored resentment towards Scott. Scott is “running this school” was heard more than once. Nate shared in his interview:

Scott was called ‘Principal Scott’ which wasn’t really fair. Scott took a lot of hits for [the principal]. To [Scott’s] credit, he didn’t try to shift responsibility. He bought into the fact that this is supposed to be teacher-driven and he just happened to be the one teacher in charge of it at this time...But to his credit, he was one to stand up and shoulder that. The problem was that the reason he got that was because of how this principal operated.

Some teachers were upset that the principal was not involved in the change movement. The principal’s invisibility allowed fear and uncertainty to grow. The issue of the principal’s perceived absence had been festering for a long time. Dean didn’t discuss school improvement with the faculty generally, nor had he as yet expressed any vision of teacher-driven school improvement. Nate expressed, “[Dean] was just so far behind the scenes.” Some teachers didn’t trust the relationship that Scott had with the principal. It seemed to them that he was the only one who had access to him. Some were afraid that any dissenting opinions would be passed on to the principal.”
Steve also expressed to the leadership group his worry for Scott's physical condition. Scott's hands fidgeted and his legs shook incessantly. Steve knew that Scott was serious about his work and that his health would break long before he would give up this effort. Steve was adamant that the administration had to step up and give the CSIP committee clear backing and support in order to continue.

The frustration Steve reported from the faculty was matched by the frustration of CSIP committee leaders themselves. Scott and Sandy wished for a visible and clear expression of vision and public confidence from their principal. They felt that although the principal’s hands-off approach allowed teachers a measure of freedom to apply their professional wisdom in creating a work environment more apt to achieve positive student results, the lack of a clear statement of intention had bred confusion and negativity, which may have actually hindered the process. It was also allowing those who secretly hoped that, "This too shall pass," the justification they needed to simply wait it out. At best, it had put the CSIP leadership in an awkward position with their peers. There was very little relational trust within the organization.

Steve was seriously worried that without action on the part of the principal, there was the possibility of sabotage at accreditation time, if not an all-out mutiny. Madelyn, a teacher and long-time CSIP committee member, validated those fears. She remembered the emotion of the time, "We were doing ten things at one time and all of us were overwhelmed. Some of the dissenters were like, 'I'm not doing anything that's change. Back off. Let's not do it. Let's just do something else. Let's just do nothing.'"

Mock Accreditation Report

A written report from the Mock Accreditation Team extended kudos to the school for their obvious efforts but also included some recommendations that addressed concerns that surfaced in the process. See Appendix C for these Recommendations from the Mock Accreditation Team. Between the Mock Accreditation Visit in December and the formal accreditation visit in March, several efforts were made at the school to improve its processes. The most significant of these
efforts was that the administration acknowledged the need for visibility and made moves to address it.

*Formal Accreditation Visit*

When the formal accreditation team visited in March, the school received the highest rating possible. The visiting team provided a long list of commendations acknowledging the effort of the school community to be flexible and responsive to student learning needs. They wrote, “Change can be difficult; however, the faculty and staff at the school embrace the opportunity to improve upon and adapt to new structures that support student learning.” As was typical of the school community, all of the recommendations in both reports were acted upon.

*School-based Professional Development—January*

The principal conducted the professional development day in January. His introductory presentation was perceived as a very clear attempt to provide the formal leadership teachers had been seeking. The principal gave a history of the school improvement process, punctuating the overview with clarifying “I” statements, such as:

- I told Scott to facilitate the committee the first three years and selected an individual from each department to serve on the committee...I assigned the CSIP committee to follow the action research model...I instructed the CSIP to use the three-step process: study, pilot, implement.

The presentation articulated clear lines of authority for the CSIP leadership and helped to clarify where the principal stood in his own beliefs and vision for the school. Nate explained, however, that the effort may have been too little too late, “He made a little bit of change, but by that time the trust between teachers and him had just been destroyed.”

*New Energy and Institutionalization*

While the completion of the accreditation process brought a measure of closure and the validation from the visiting team energized the organization, it did not mean the end or even a break in school improvement efforts at Hunter Hills: Improvement had become a continuous
process. The school’s commitment to continuous improvement was expressed in the accreditation manual as such:

We believe that comprehensive school improvement is a long-term process. The most important steps are the creation of the procedures that will ensure the continuance of this process. Our vehicle (process) is one that we have been engaged in for three years. The process is becoming more efficient and leadership is shared across the building. This shared leadership (everyone having a driver’s license) allows for the vehicle to continue moving to its ultimate destination: All students have the skills to graduate as productive citizens with the skills necessary for life-long learning.

Several efforts were undertaken which helped to institutionalize the continuous improvement process. The CSIP committee leadership, for example, changed its name to the Comprehensive School Improvement Facilitative Team (CSIFT) to emphasize the facilitative role of the committee. A letter to the faculty explained, “CSIFT’s function is to facilitate the compilation and updating of school data, make that data available to all stakeholders, and to facilitate the research, design and implementation of school improvement initiatives.” The CSIFT designed a formal, recognizable template to be used for a regular, bimonthly communiqué to the faculty, “to keep the faculty informed regarding school improvement issues” and to collect “thoughts, ideas, and input regarding school improvement.”

The SLC grant funding permitted the hire of a part-time CSIFT data secretary, and the CSIFT set up an office in the library, which held all school data collected by the CSIFT, research on school improvement, and a professional library. This office and its resources was available for anyone’s use, and was fitted with a large table in the middle of the room and a white board across one wall, becoming a “headquarters” for all things having to do with school improvement.

Emphasizing the Why?

With the pressures of the formal accreditation lifted, the CSIFT felt that they needed to once again revisit the central purposes for the school improvement movement. In fact, Scott says that
the need to keep the why, or purpose out in front of everyone is one of his major learnings from his leadership experience at Hunter Hills. The CSIFT became even more diligent in making sure every presentation and discussion included aspects of the "why?" The first communiqué from the CSIFT, for example, included the heading, "What’s going on and why" in big, bold letters and two subheadings, “What’s Happened Thus Far?” and “What’s Happening Next?”

*School-based Professional Development—March*

As the decision had been made earlier in the year to replace the Sophomore House with a School-Within-a-School concept as the school’s vehicle for student connectedness Pam, a CSIFT member spent two days in the faculty room meeting with small groups of teachers during their prep periods to discuss the School-Within-A-School concept. Using Pam to conduct these discussions instead of Sandy was a deliberate attempt to build capacity and expand leadership.

*Student Data*

Reflecting on data had become central to the continuous improvement process at Hunter Hills. That fall, the perception data from the third annual NSSE survey was gathered, analyzed and interpreted. The findings were placed on the school’s website. The faculty also heard the good news that Language Arts CRT scores had increased by eight percent. The school administered the DRP reading test for the second year in a row to continue their efforts in this area. “Hunter Hills realized that they didn’t have specific data to see if there had been growth in writing, or to see which students might need more support in their content area classes because of their writing skills,” explained Sonya, the district’s Secondary Literacy Specialist. Utilizing her assistance, the school developed and administered a school-wide writing assessment. Sonya continued,

It’s not because they just wanted more numbers. They wanted to be able to have their teachers have more options and be more knowledgeable about writing. The school had administered a school-wide six-trait writing training a couple of years previous to this. They had a lot of faculty who had a lot of writing going on, but the talk was not about the quality of
writing—yet. So they wanted their teachers to be more informed on that. They also wanted to see what kind of role writing could have in their classrooms as well as what kind of a role the assessing of writing could have.

**Professional Learning Opportunities**

The increased funding of the federal SLC grant expanded learning opportunities for the faculty. In March, thirteen members and an assistant principal attended the Instructional Leadership in the 21st Century conference. Sandy reported:

>The feedback coming out of the conference centered around two key issues: how to create connectedness for our students, and how to assess the power standards we have developed to determine what students know and don’t know in a timely and useful fashion.

Information gleaned from this conference and others like it was passed on to the faculty in various forms of professional development. Another assistant principal and a team of teachers attended a state-level technology conference to learn more about how the school could “use technology that is already available to us to improve what we do.” Sandy reported in a faculty communiqué, “There were several valuable pieces of information dealing with assessment tools, core curriculum tools and web site tools that would be helpful for educators. This information will be shared with the faculty at an in-service.” That spring, a team of teachers attended the National Education Service Summit and another team attended the Models Schools Conference.

**District Impact**

In the spring, Scott arranged for the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory to visit Hunter Hills to share the Breaking Ranks II findings and help Hunter Hills leaders learn to facilitate the change process. Nadine leveraged this training by hosting it on behalf of the district and opening it up to all the high schools in the district. Leadership teams from each school shared what was working to increase student achievement. In this way Nadine was able to have Hunter Hills share their progress and process with the other schools in an unobtrusive way without casting too much of a spotlight on one individual school. Being the only school in the area
involved in deep transformation was challenging. Sandy felt that if more of the neighboring schools “came on board” they would benefit. Sandy shared:

We have some resentment within our own building because we are asking our people to do these things and very few people [outside the school] are and that’s the difference. I think it breeds less resistance when you know no matter where you go that there’s going to be a process in place for self-renewal. Then you approach self-renewal differently. But when you believe you’re the only ones engaged in a process and you know that if you transfer to another school, even in your own district, that you wouldn’t have to do this, you may be more motivated to leave. Right now within our own district they could transfer to several different schools and not have to be engaged in all this.

State-wide Impact

In the south part of the state a group of administrators, who were themselves working as a collaborative team to study ways to create ongoing, collaborative time for their teachers, had heard of Hunter Hills’ efforts. They contacted their legislator to propose that he introduce a bill to the House for increased funding for additional time in each teacher’s contract for consistent collaboration time. House Bill 100 eventually was passed, without extra funding, but with approval for schools to use time already in the teacher’s contract for this purpose on condition that school’s show increased student achievement as a result. In a round about way, Hunter Hills benefited from House Bill 100 as it helped to increase awareness throughout the state of the need for ongoing collaboration statewide.

School-based Professional Development—New Approaches

Hunter Hills continued to concentrate on improving its own programs often in unique ways. In terms of improving professional development, in the summer of 2005, they provided each teacher with the book *On Common Ground: The Power of Professional Learning Communities* (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005) and a study guide with some reflective questions. For the first time, teachers were provided compensation for their time spent reading during the summer.
The school was also trying to maximize time and space to further school goals. Although it took much head scratching they were able to arrange teacher schedules for the next year to ensure common preparation periods for five teachers who would provide leadership to five Academies (at that time called Integrated Career Focus) in the future. They also were able to stagger preparation periods for CSIFT committee members. By staggering preparation periods, they ensured a teacher-leader would be available every period of the day for such matters as facilitating small group professional development.

They also created a plan to move teachers within the building to better accommodate the Academy model. As in traditional secondary settings, teachers with common subject areas were housed in close proximity to each other. This change would cluster a variety of subject areas involved in a particular Academy. Ironically, the building had been designed fourteen years previously for this very purpose. Scott commented, “[The school board] had built three schools, including Hunter Hills, following that model, and didn’t realize until we made our presentation asking for approval to move forward that it was not happening in any school in the whole district.” The building was designed to accommodate Academies with labs in different areas of the building and an oversized room called the Tech Atrium which could be used for several classrooms of students engaged in collaborative activities. This room had become an invaluable asset to the school improvement effort thus far as it provided a space large enough for faculty conversations which had become so central to the process. No one was thrilled about moving classrooms; for this reason, changes this first year were voluntary and teachers who moved the first year were compensated for the time it took. Sandy herself made the change although it meant giving up a room she loved.

The CSIFT became more involved in the hiring process at the school to more proactively influence the culture at Hunter Hills. Also, in addition to the district’s New Teacher Induction which was to be held at the end of each summer, Hunter Hills held its own New Teacher Induction in the spring, just after the hiring at their school was completed. The CSIFT felt that the
new teachers would benefit from acculturation to Hunter Hills’ unique culture. Included in this New Teacher Induction was information about the school’s philosophy and aligned plan, as well as how the various unique programs and aspects of Hunter Hills worked.

*Fourth Annual Summer Leadership Conference*

The Summer Leadership Conference typically held in June was moved to August in 2005 just prior to school opening. As was typical, the school community analyzed school student data, and reviewed the vision, mission, DRSLs and school goals checking for alignment. The group reorganized their vision and mission in such a way that helped them better conceptualize their purpose and work ahead. See Appendix D for the evolution of the school’s mission, vision, goals and DRSLs.

The CSIP report this year stated that the school was working to identify struggling students earlier, provide students with more intensive instructional support, becoming standards-based and using content literacy strategies throughout the school. Reading and writing were assessed using school-based assessments. They also reported that they had done more focused work with parents and the community council this past year, acting on their survey results and improving their parent communication.

*Isolation — Communication — Collaboration*

At this point, the CSIFT saw the school community as having made significant effort and progress to move toward a professional learning community. As a faculty, they had worked collaboratively to improve education by developing power standards, common assessments and instructional support systems. They had evaluated their students’ needs, their school’s systems (in Focus Groups), their departments, and even their teaching practices. They had collaboratively developed a vision for their school and a mission to get them there.

The CSIFT saw the school as having moved from a “state of isolation” to one of “communication” and finally to one in which “collaborating” teams supported one another. The accreditation manual read:
Major changes have occurred at Hunter Hills. We have experienced the confusion, frustration and a bit of chaos which typically accompanies this process. In three years, we have begun to create a culture of shared leadership and professional learning. Every day, there are formal conversations about student learning, school processes, and school goals...The community has been divided at times and we are all still learning how to work together.

Leadership Capacity

In the last four months of the school year, the school had been preparing for a significant change in leadership of the school improvement process. Scott’s experiences with school leadership and school improvement had moved him to apply for a position in a special leadership preparation program sponsored by a local university to obtain his administrative certificate. Scott was one of three applicants selected by the school district and university that year to be a part of this program. The program would involve full-time study and an administrative internship. Just as Scott had shared leadership with Sandy, plans were made for Sandy to share the leadership of the CSIFT with another teacher at the school the next year. Heather, district grant writer recalled:

When Scott left the one thing that I appreciated very much about his leadership is it didn’t fall down because...he had made other people an integral part of this. I see a lot with grant programs that one person leaves and it all goes to hell in a hand basket. They stepped up and they moved it across the next hurdle...What I’ve seen is that every year every director has had their own set of hurdles. Scott’s was getting the ball rolling, overcoming the inertia. I don’t think there was anybody else who could have just overcome staff inertia like that. He got it moving and then it had reached the next point where we now needed to look at data. We needed to start looking at student performance...We needed somebody that could come in and really look at those pieces and Sandy was all primed and groomed and she was ready to step up and take it from there.
School Year 2005-2006

The real voyage of discovery consists not of seeking new landscapes, but in seeing through new eyes—Marcel Proust
(used in school-based professional development at Hunter Hills, August 2005)

The faculty, staff, students and parents of Hunter Hills had been working on school improvement formally since the 2002-2003 school year. Establishing a professional learning community, as defined by Mitchell and Sackney (2001, p. 1), had been integral to that work: “A learning community exists in a group of people who take an active, reflective, collaborative, learning-oriented, and growth-prompting approach toward the mysteries, problems, and perplexities of teaching and learning.” In addition, the Hunter Hills’ community view of a professional learning community included four characteristics identified by DuFour as a shared vision, effective teams, collaboration, and a results-orientation (Eaker, DuFour & DuFour, 2002). According to this definition, Hunter Hills had succeeded in establishing a PLC.

In 2005-2006 Hunter Hills continued its school improvement plan despite the loss of Marilyn, the assistant principal who had been the most interested in school improvement the previous two years, although not formally assigned, and Scott, the teacher-leader who was the catalyst for the school improvement initiative at Hunter Hills. It is not unusual for change initiatives to suffer due to leadership turnover; this one, however, did not. Several conditions existed in the school by this time to sustain its prior momentum.

Conditions of Sustainability

The change effort at Hunter Hills had been instigated and led by teachers; its success was fairly independent of formal administration, thus it was somewhat protected from administrative changes. The work of school improvement at Hunter Hills had been system-wide, reaching all departments, processes and stakeholder groups. Innovations were the creation of many people due to consistent mechanisms for continuous input and feedback; teachers and students had become accustomed to being asked for their opinions and seeing clear connections between their input and resulting decisions. In addition, there had been an intentional effort to expand the knowledge
base beyond the original few teacher-leaders, so that there were others who were equally familiar with the research and theoretical underpinnings behind the current changes.

Instead of focusing on surface-level programs and projects, the work that teachers had been involved in for four years was student-centered and fundamental to teachers’ work in the classroom. Habits of reflection had required them to look deeply into their curriculum, to question their own instructional decisions, as well as school-wide processes, procedures and programs. Several program components were integrated to the point that dropping them might have been perceived as having added to the teacher’s workload instead of decreasing it. Some curriculum and courses had already been integrated which created an interdependence between teachers; teachers needed each other. Some teachers had moved their classrooms to accommodate the Integrated Career Focus (soon to be called Academy) approach. Schedules had even been manipulated to allow for common preparation periods and increased collaboration.

The school was committed to a few significant funding sources and accountable to the district as well for annual comprehensive school planning, data analysis, and professional development. A Hunter Hills school improvement office had been set up and data secretary hired which according to Scott, represented commitment by the administration and lent importance to the work. New procedures helped to professionalize the movement such as a website which now housed school improvement documents, reports, and assessment results, keeping student achievement in full view of the school community. Partnerships in the community had been established which would have represented a loss to the school if brought to an end.

Late Start, which had been in place for two years, had helped to establish a norm of professional dialogue about teaching and learning. Teachers were now practiced in working in teams and had established relationships with others outside their departments. Interdepartmental respect for each other deepened as teachers learned to understand one another’s purposes and special curricular challenges; the recommendations from almost every department analysis listed a desire for more opportunities of this kind (see Table 5). A New Teacher Induction offered a way
to pass on certain valued aspects of the culture, and a rapidly growing number of new teachers had never experienced any other way to do school.

Table 5

*Professional Learning Communities Schedule (formerly Late Start) 2005-2006*

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<td>Department: Blue Book, Academy Models, SWS, Advisory, PAWS</td>
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<td>Week 4</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Department and Whole Faculty Trainings: Academy Model, SWS, Advisory, PAWS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ongoing, job-embedded, collaborative professional development was firmly established. The faculty had come to expect access to a wider range of data than what was available from the state’s CRT. They had felt the pride of collective accomplishment; the impact of the changes at Hunter Hills was increasingly felt in neighboring schools, districts and even at the state level, so that there were now expectations of success beyond themselves.
Shared Leadership

As the 2005-2006 year began, foremost on the minds of Sandy and the new CSIFT Co-Chair, Becky, was the establishment of shared leadership as a cultural norm. Three “spheres of influence” were now operating at Hunter Hills: Department Teams, Inquiry Teams, and the CSIFT Committee. Each sphere had a teacher-leader and was made up of several sub-teams each having a leader as well. The year-end SLC report states, “We have increased the number of leadership positions from twenty-six, half of which were minimal leadership roles at best, to fifty-four key leadership positions.”

Department Teams

The job of Department Chair had become clearly central to school improvement. Sandy explained:

The roles of our department leaders are instruction and assessment and best practices. Their realm is standards-based instruction, common assessments, content maps...and assessment pieces. It is very clear that this is the function and the focus; and it is valued, not just important, but we value that service to the departments, because without it, the number one important thing would not be happening, which is a highly effective teacher in every classroom.

As such, these leaders were accountable to lead departments in the determination and annual review of power standards, DRSL alignment, development and implementation of common assessments, and continuous departmental and instructional analyses. Each Department Chair was now accountable to an assistant principal. The Department Chair’s sphere of leadership was assigned to Jackie, the school’s new professional development coordinator. Jackie, an English teacher, had been a professional developer for the state-level Teacher Academy before coming to Hunter Hills just four years before and had been overseeing the content literacy focus of school improvement up until this time.
With the status of the Department Chair reestablished and its role as leader of the educational program clarified, relationships between the departmental leadership and the CSIFT steadily improved. "Specifying roles and valuing the roles of that group of people reduced some of the animosity that was accruing over what was happening with the CSIP team," explained Sandy. She continued:

We had made a huge mistake. We set up an adversarial situation between our CSIP team and our department leaders. It cost us time and movement forward. [The CSIFT] were doing the school-wide goals which was a bigger umbrella, but some of our department leaders felt that some of their position or authority had been usurped. [Now] their role was highly specific and was valued; that made the difference.

Specific tasks for 2005-2006 included the development and implementation of four standards-based, common assessments to assess department power standards. This year every teacher was also expected to implement two of Marzano, Pickering and Pollack's (2001) identified classroom strategies and to determine a Unit of Improvement for each as a means to assess classroom implementation. A Unit of Improvement, as defined by Hunter Hills, was a predetermined, measurable gain either on a classroom level or a department level. Department Chairs had the responsibility of keeping track of this implementation and to ensure writing was being emphasized in every classroom.

Each Department Chair was given a binder, which was to be reviewed by the supervising assistant principal at the end of the school year, to house department norms, goals, meeting feedback sheets, power standards/standards and objectives, common assessments, and the team’s instructional and departmental analyses. Department Chairs were given special training for their new role during the Back-to-School professional development days in August. At this time they also reviewed the teacher’s PAWS survey results from the previous year and planned the Summer Bridge (soon to be called SOS), a ninth grade orientation. Both PAWS and the Summer Bridge were scheduled to be implemented in 2006-2007.
Inquiry Teams

The second sphere of influence included Inquiry Teams. Leaders were placed in charge of teams studying/designing various SLC structures and strategies. The Integrated Career Focus Inquiry Team, for instance, included five Academy Deans who were preparing for a wall-to-wall implementation of Academies in 2006-2007. The PAWS Inquiry Team consisted of leaders for each grade level represented within each Academy. Other Inquiry Teams included: Instructional Support Inquiry Team, Community Building Inquiry Team, and Skinmys Inquiry Team. A meeting for all team leaders was held as part of the August Back-to-School professional development days to advise them of the expectations concerning their roles as leaders. Each teacher-leader was asked to consider his/her main role as a support for teachers, and to continue to frame their study that year around the things that had been important to them such as power standards and common assessments, focusing discussions on student learning, rigor and relevance, a guaranteed and viable curriculum, challenging goals, and high expectations. They were asked to encourage writing, frequent monitoring, assessment for learning, as well as assessment of learning, effective instructional strategies, units of improvement, department goals, alignment with the school’s mission and goals, and the department’s analyses. At this meeting, team leaders also learned more about the Schools-Within-a-School (SWS) concept and reviewed the school’s most current test scores.

Pam, the teacher-leader in charge of the Integrated Career Focus Inquiry group, which had, for legal reasons, changed its name to the Academy Inquiry Group, had been at the center of school improvement since its beginning. She felt inadequate in her role, expressing that she was giving it her all, but felt that she was constantly falling short. She wished that she could have learned everything about school improvement before she started facilitating it. As it was, she felt she was always running, just a step ahead of the group she was leading. With such a long list of new concepts, this was quite reasonable. Pam reflected on leading teachers through this process:
I’m the kind of person that I want to give them the philosophy, and when they’re frustrated I want to make it all better, but that’s not part of the process. They need to wrap their mind around this because I’m not going to be able to go in every classroom and say, ‘Okay, do it like this and do it like this.’ They have to grapple with gaining their own understanding of what this is going to be and so it’s been a nice process to finally get them to the place that they’re taking ownership and they’re having those conversations.

**Comprehensive School Improvement Facilitation Team (CSIFT)**

The role of the CSIFT, the third sphere of influence, consisted of a team of fourteen members who met monthly to facilitate school improvement by coordinating the other teams and leaders. The CSIFT incorporated a new formal template for their meeting agendas in 2005-2006 in order to improve organization and professionalize their work. CSIFT meetings were organized around seven areas of focus which were preprinted on this template as visible reminders to focus attention on their critical needs, SWS, advisement, parent involvement, DRSLs, professional development and evaluation. In 2005-2006 the CSIFT had become more mindful of its own processes. They talked about planning as a process and not just the plan. At their first meeting of the year, they identified their critical needs as: quick wins; a school plan which would include a three year, a six year, and a ten year vision; SMART (sustainable, measureable, attainable, reasonable, timely) goals; identifiable and measurable DRSL’s; a process for continuous department analysis; a systematic plan of response; and a thorough program evaluation to assure effectiveness.

Some areas of responsibility were shifted around to better match skills and abilities to tasks and solve some previous issues and challenges. The CSIFT shifted responsibility of parent and community involvement to the counseling team and the School Community Council. Responsibility for the school-wide Advisement program component was also shifted to the counseling team. To improve two-way communication with students, a Student Community...
Council was formed, which they envisioned would meet monthly to discuss school issues with the CSIFT.

![Diagram of Rigor, Relevance and Relationships Framework]

*Figure 3. Rigor, Relevance and Relationships Framework*

*Rigor, Relevance and Relationships*

Through study and professional problem-solving, the school community had three years previously surmised that their students would benefit by decreasing the impersonality of their school program and fostering a rigorous and relevant academic experience. They had decided that better connections for students both in relationships and through what Marzano (2003) called a viable, guaranteed curriculum, and a timely, directive and systematic approach to intervention, could increase the relevancy of the whole school experience. Therefore the CSIFT adopted Rigor, Relevance and Relationships as an organizational framework for the school’s work (see Figure 3). At the August Back-to-School professional development, the CSIFT shared with the faculty, a graphic organizer showing all school improvement components within this framework. They
hoped it would help keep a focus on the purpose of all the structures and strategies, as well as help bring coherency to the school’s comprehensive efforts.

*School-based Professional Development—Back-to-School*

The professional development experiences held on the teacher’s first preparation day back to school in 2005-2006 were paradigm shifting for many faculty members and are etched in the school’s collective memory. Sandy explained, “This inservice was designed to provide teachers with the knowledge and skills to increase both the rigor and relevance of their instruction. The focus was on viewing instruction through a different lens in order to improve student achievement.” When teachers came to the Tech Atrium that day, they found the windows plastered with nearly two-thousand paper bear paws, each bearing the name of a student. Teachers were asked to put their initials on each paw with the name of a student with whom they had a personal relationship with not related to class. Sandy, Becky and Jackie, the day’s facilitators, then began removing from the windows all of the paws with a teacher’s name. When finished, in clear view of the faculty, nearly two hundred paws were left posted on the windows. The visual image of these two hundred bear paws served as a dramatic reminder that there was still much left to do to build relationships in order to personalize the school experience for students.

Sandy, Becky and Jackie intentionally used two other methods in their presentation that day to motivate teachers to be intentional about the relevancy of their content and instruction for their students. The methods would serve to increase the relevancy of the school improvement effort for the teachers as well. The presenters incorporated actual photographs of the teachers’ own children in the PowerPoint slides, emphasizing, in a dramatic way, the value of every student. While discussing school data disaggregated by gender, for example, they showed a picture of a faculty member’s daughter and son along with the scores. A caption on the slide asked teachers to consider who, at their school, had the better chance? Framed in this way, the teachers couldn’t help but reflect on the hopes and dreams they had for their own children, making the statistics
more personal and therefore more meaningful to them. To lead thinking further, they used the idea of giving as many students as possible, as many choices as possible for grade thirteen. The message internalized by several as shared in interviews was that if they didn’t work “smart,” they would be limiting the choices for students. Thinking of the students as their own children made that kind of limitation unthinkable. By presenting this information in a way that made school improvement relevant to the teachers, the experience served to model relevancy and the importance of relationships for students as well.

Making teaching relevant was further modeled using another technique that day. Using a grading scale similar to that used by many of the teachers, the CSIFT assigned a letter grade to each of the school’s CRT scores. They had, in essence, formed a report card for the school, which received mostly Ds and Fs. This was followed by a comparison using effective school’s research about individual teacher improvement and that of school-wide improvement. The case was made that by collaborating they could make a tremendous difference. The suggestion was put before them, again using photos of their own children, that as teachers who were all working tremendously hard in their own realms, they could choose to continue to work very hard and get the results they had always been getting, D’s and F’s and students with future limitations, or they could continue to work very hard, but collaboratively, for students who would then have many choices following graduation. From this perspective, teachers were led in a discussion regarding school improvement, but this time the emphasis of the reflection was on the willingness to act. Questions included: What is our purpose, the core reason our organization was created? What is our mission, and vision? What kind of school do we want to become? What collective steps will we take and when? What attitudes, behaviors, and collective commitments will we demonstrate in order to advance our school toward our vision?

In other discussions that day they talked about the school’s history of school improvement, current achievement information, the action-research cycle, and the power of school-wide collaboration over individual effort. They reviewed the priorities of a professional learning
community. They also looked at their overall school plan in terms of things we can do now, in one to three years, and in three to six years. Overall, they gave an overview of Hunter Hills’ past, present and future.

The principal led a discussion on the book teachers had been asked to read over the summer, using twenty Talking Points to apply the book’s concepts to the Hunter Hills context. In this session, teachers were also given assistance in determining a Unit of Improvement for each of the two instructional practices they had committed to implementing.

As creating common assessments would be the major task of department work for the year, the group discussed the concept of assessments for learning as opposed to assessments of learning. They reconsidered how they were using assessments and discussed how to design assessments aligned with required standards and how to assess for rigor and relevance. Teachers met with their Department Teams during this meeting as well to develop a common assessment on the core standards and objectives they were planning on teaching and assessing that very first quarter, demonstrating a high commitment to job-embedded professional development.

It was a busy fall semester with teachers implementing two instructional strategies, collecting data from their experiences, meeting in departments focusing on creating and implementing assessments and in interdepartmental Inquiry Teams. According to the perception data that year, 77% of the teachers were feeling a strong sense of accomplishment and 92% of teachers felt that their work was challenging.

Perception Data

Much of the other perception data results gleaned from the NSSE survey conducted in the fall of 2005-2006 varied only slightly from the proceeding year. Some of this year’s changes in results, however, were perplexing. Although there was a perception among students that school spirit was down and fewer students felt that the environment was safe and orderly, more students reported being happier at school. Teachers felt the quality of teaching had decreased at their school, but they reported having high expectations for students. One hundred percent of teachers
reported that they were willing to help kids outside of school time; however, fewer felt that students were taking advantage of that available support. In spite of the fact that more teachers felt better about the tools in place to support teacher communication with parents, fewer teachers felt that parents were interested in school matters.

There had been a twenty-seven percentage point increase in teachers feeling that the administration provided teachers with adequate support, from 50%-77%, and while 82% of teachers perceived that administration and staff supported school improvement, a surprisingly low 47% of teachers perceived that their fellow teachers supported the efforts. Only half felt that power standards were helping them in their teaching and an even lower number felt that their work in Inquiry Teams were helping them improve their teaching; however, 88% reported commitment to continuous improvement, and 86% felt that the school had a clear mission and goals that provided their staff with a common purpose and sense of direction. So, while teachers were committed to continuous improvement, there may not have been a consensus on how to go about it. Teachers felt a common purpose and direction and students felt better about being there.

School-based Professional Development—October

At the October professional development, the school continued its quest to understand its current reality, deepen its understanding of the continuous improvement process which they approached as a school-wide action research cycle, provide differentiated support for teachers designing common assessments and provide a forum for sharing their instructional strategies while providing some accountability. As in August, teachers were expected to bring with them a standards-based assessment which they had or would be administering in the second quarter. At the first general session, the school’s current hard and soft data were shared and analyzed to determine, “Who’s learning?” and “Who’s not learning?”

The CSIFT worked hard to differentiate professional development for this day. They arranged, for example, for the Counseling Team to work on parent involvement issues while
teachers were looking at instructional strategies. For the first break-out session of the day, teachers were divided into the following groups: (a) Teachers who had given a common.

Table 6

Professional Development Sessions October 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Work Session</th>
<th>Guiding Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Common Assessments (Differentiated Session)</td>
<td>What evidence will I accept as evidence of learning? What are the indicators of learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Defining and assessing the 4Cs: critical thinking, collaboration, citizenship, communication</td>
<td>What is it? What do students need to know? What do students need to be able to do? How can it be demonstrated in the classroom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>New Attendance Policy</td>
<td>What are the student’s responsibilities when it comes to being absent? How should unexcused absences be handled by teachers and the administration? How should unexcused tardies be handled by teachers and the administration? What do you think the make-up policy should be for missed work due to an excused absence? Should all teachers use the same grading scale? If so, what should it look like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>CRT Data Review</td>
<td>Analyze current English, history, math, science Criterion Reference Test data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Action Research Cycle</td>
<td>How will you close the gaps? What’s out there that is already working in schools similar to yours? If you can’t find anything that you think will work for you, do your own action research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Instructional Strategies (Differentiated Session)</td>
<td>What did you do? What worked? What didn’t work? What would you do differently?</td>
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</table>
assessment and had resultant data; (b) Teachers who had an assessment written and aligned but had not implemented it yet; (c) Teachers who did not yet have an assessment; (d) Teachers who had written a common assessment that was not aligned were asked to bring standards and objectives they planned to address in the second quarter; (e) The counseling team. Table 6 shows a list of the Professional Development Work Sessions, their content and the questions used to guide their study.

Difficult but Necessary Dialogue

In another general session at this training, this researcher was asked to discuss with the faculty data and student work analysis. Using their own school’s achievement data, we discussed several ways to glean valid information from it. While addressing the whole group, I sensed agitation in the room which steadily escalated. One teacher openly challenged the fact that there were schools in the nation that were improving through their efforts at continuous improvement. “I don’t believe it! I want to know where!” she confronted. A few other teachers joined her in a barrage of complaints regarding school improvement at Hunter Hills. This display of open resistance was unusual for Hunter Hills in this type of setting. Jackie reflected later:

That was hard because the disappointment was tremendous to think we’ve gotten everybody on board and in reality they weren’t…A lot of times you go to the faculty meeting and they’ll say we’re going to do this and then you go to the faculty lounge and the discussion isn’t going in the direction that you want it to go. So we do see that. The way to deal with that probably is more education. I really think that. I really think that the reason that the teachers fight change is that they’re afraid they’re not going to be able to do it. They’re afraid that this is out of their ability and they’re sensitive to showing weakness.

After a few tense moments, a teacher stood up and shared an equally strong confirmation of the value of the work they were doing at the school. Several teachers seconded his comments by sharing information about places that had visited, research they had read, and experiences they

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had in their own classrooms which helped validate for them that significant improvement was possible. There ensued a difficult but important conversation about the work at the school.

They experienced a level of openness that day that was needed for critical dialogue within a professional learning community and the development of a shared vision. Pam stated, reflecting on this day:

That had to happen before this could happen. That might not have been enjoyable, but we are here because we were there...It all had to happen the way it happened and that's why we are so much further than other schools, because we were in those ugly places and we did ask the ugly questions and we did have those contentious moments when we were unsure.

Community Identity Crisis

In October, another situation occurred that was difficult but growth producing. A local magazine company published an article comparing public and private schools, using Hunter Hills as the featured public school and its comparison a very exclusive, high-end private school. The article touched a tender chord with many parents as it actually was a comparison of the disparities between the two ends of the city’s valley, one with a lower socioeconomic history and the other, the more affluent.

Unfortunately, in addition to bringing this tender subject into the spotlight, the statistics quoted by the principal in the magazine article were incorrect and parents were offended by his reference to being a “blue collar community.” This was offensive to some of the newer residents of the community who did not perceive themselves this way. Sandy had to field the complaints. She explained, “He said 8% of our kids go to college, which was so not true, but only 21% of our parents are college educated.” The community didn’t believe the correct statistics either. She continued, “They were calling me and telling me my numbers [were all wrong].” She had to justify her information.
The surprising result of this “crisis” was that it mobilized the community. Many community members joined with the school and put on a College Prep Night at which they helped sixty-three students actually fill out college applications. Kelly shared,

We had people from the community come in—police, doctors. All kinds of people from the community come in and help the kids, inform them. ‘Okay, if you want to go to college this is what you’ve got to do. There is help out there for you. You don’t have to go and flip the burgers and stuff like that. There is actually a way that you can get started even if your parents didn’t.’ And so it was an eye opener for a lot. Some kids had no idea what was out there. They sat down with a doctor and [the doctor] said, ‘Okay, I’m going to walk you through this.’ One of the doctors was saying, ‘I’m actually looking for an intern person.’ College representatives were available to help as well. The event used the highest number of volunteers in the school’s history. Barbara, who later became the principal at Hunter Hills, said in reflection, “That’s sixty-three students we may have missed otherwise.”

**Expectations**

“The area was becoming more diverse,” shared Vance, a health teacher and coach, “not only ethnically, but financially as well. It is probably a school that has a reputation of being a lower-level school, but it doesn’t really, in my mind, earn the reputation.” Vance shared his concerns about the reputation of the school and its effects on the student body. Vance like others in the school community had been concerned for a long time by what he hears from students, community members and people from other schools who comment about what they perceive are Hunter Hills’s discipline issues, behavior challenges, attendance rates and success rates. He hears over and over again, “‘What do you expect? They’re Hunter Hills,’ and ‘Oh, they lost again. That’s Hunter Hills for you.’” The expectation was even voiced by one of the parents interviewed for this study, “We can’t expect the scores to be as good as the ‘east side’ because of our diversity. You can expect your own child to score high, but the overall score will be brought down by the whole school. That’s to be expected.”
The situation is made worse, Vance feels, by the fact that the school does not have a winning tradition especially in athletics, largely due to the school choice policy of the district. Vance explained that it takes time to build any program. The trophy case at Hunter Hills represented very few first, second or even third place winners. He explained that traditionally the school’s star athletes are students who might not have received much playing time at one of the other high schools that have been building their programs for many years and have a good reputation as winning schools. He and a few other teachers worry that this has had a negative effect on the school and perhaps even on the expectations teachers have for students. Nate said:

It’s a huge factor. It’s a fact of life. Sports games become our identity, wrong, right or indifferent. In our culture we’re only as good as our sports games, in our minds. If you have unsuccessful teams you are going to feel unsuccessful whether or not the evidence shows that. Human beings aren’t very logical. We don’t look at evidence. We revolve around our feelings and our feelings aren’t disciplined very well as a culture.

He feels that, “Until the students believe that they can walk into the community with self-respect,” it will “impact every aspect of their life.” These concerns mirror Vance and other teachers who have been concerned for a long time that the students seem to be satisfied with mediocrity. Pam shared her concerns, “If these kids just knew how amazing they were, they would maybe put forth that next bit of effort that it takes to be great instead of just be okay.” Kelly, a parent and former SCC leader, expressed the same frustration in her own way, “The kids just need a... umph. The parents just need a... umph, so the kids have umph!”

Awareness of the Change Process

The school community, especially teacher-leaders, had developed a much more sophisticated understanding about the change process by this time. With a PowerPoint entitled, “Insanity: Continuing to do the Same Thing Expecting Different Results,” teacher-leaders made a presentation to the Chamber of Commerce suggesting that people don’t change unless they share a compelling reason, ownership in the change and not until leaders model that they are serious
about the change. In this same presentation they listed as factors influencing their change process: shifts in leadership, working in teams, CSIFT, a bottom-up approach, shared leadership, district mandates, and a shared vision. They saw fear of the unknown as the biggest barrier to change.

Another PowerPoint used for discussion in December 2005 directly addressed the school's evolution. The school improvement components were graphically represented by the same eight piece puzzle used in the first years of change. The school's evolution was represented by systematically crossing out each piece of the puzzle and replacing it with its new structure. Each showed an improved alignment to goals based on new information and changing needs. These changes are listed in Table 7.

Table 7

*Hunter Hills' Evolution*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What started as</th>
<th>Became</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Late Start</td>
<td>PLCs/Instructional Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remediation</td>
<td>Identification for Instructional Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAWS</td>
<td>PAWS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore House</td>
<td>Summer Bridge Sophomore Advisement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trimester</td>
<td>Skinneys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internship</td>
<td>Senior Projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Area Literacy</td>
<td>Instructional Strategies</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Leadership Turnover*

There had been many changes at Hunter Hills, but the most significant change occurred midway through 2005-2006 and involved the principalship. Quite unexpectedly, on the return from Winter Break, the principal of Hunter Hills retired. It is not known why the principal left so abruptly and he was not available for interviewing for this study. Despite his real reasons for
leaving, it was the perception of some teachers that he was worn out. At least one interviewee suggested that the criticism from the public in the fall was the last straw for Dean. The school community's puzzlement over the principal's leaving, however, did not compare to their quandary over his actions while he was there. The leadership dynamics of the past few years at Hunter Hills had been confusing.

The most consistent perception that came out of the interviews for this study regarded the absence of this principal. Nearly all faculty members interviewed mentioned that Dean was a nice guy, but his involvement in the school improvement process was sorely missed. Students had expressed their feelings about the principal's absence in their yearbook with an entire page parody on "Where's Waldo?" in reference to their principal. In this researcher's past experience with the school as well, I saw and heard from the principal only once, when I was first introduced to him. All my subsequent communications and interactions with the school were through Scott, Sandy or other teachers at the school. Sonya who had worked with the school for five years and felt as if she was a part of a team related, "I don't know if I ever met the previous principal. I think I heard his voice in the background on a phone call once." In the December 2005 newsletter, Dean explained, "My philosophy as a leader has always been to stay as much as possible in the background."

The movement had been teacher-driven in an extreme sense. Sonya offered that the principal's absence may have even contributed to the change effort as then the changes could be attributed to many people rather than to a single person.

I've worked in different schools and I've seen different principals. Some are micro managers, and some are more laid back. I think [Dean's] lack of involvement and his encouragement of teachers to take the reins allowed an unusual level of teacher involvement and subsequent leadership for them. It was almost luck that the reins were handed to those who were go-getters, and had a vision and understanding of education and teaching and learning.

Scott offered:

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We had a principal that believed in having people do their jobs, that wasn’t a micro manager at all, but didn’t necessarily have a singular focus on student learning improvement either, but, was okay with teacher leaders moving forward. So it became where he actually [passed on] the responsibility for student learning, responsibility for the building, school improvement, to this teacher team, which really facilitated almost a sped up process.

When asked how he felt it had sped up the process he responded:

Well it’s a facilitation style of leadership. There’s good and bad to it. It was allowing your leaders in your building to make decisions about the building, where it was going. This was a foreign concept to most schools that teacher teams would be able to create—find their needs, and get answers. Where in the past it had always been administrative teams, if anyone, that had gone out and done that. To allow a teacher team to go forward and do that was different. It also allowed some movers and shakers, pushers to go out and do some things. And so that was the new style of leadership, facilitating your leaders to push your organization forward.

School Improvement Plan Continues

Though aware of the possibility that the direction might change with a new principal, following the announcement of the principal’s retirement and before the arrival of the new principal to the school, the Hunter Hills community continued with its programs and plans. Three new strategies were put in place in January, all having been in development for a long time. The counseling center implemented Parent/Student Empowerment workshops, a series of evening classes designed to provide students and parents with skills necessary for school success. Seventy-eight individuals attended these classes held in January, February, and March and by the end of the year the counseling center was making plans to hold classes in local elementary schools and the public library to reach more families. An early morning remediation program, CARES, was instituted for seniors at risk of not graduating. The students met four mornings each week to receive tutoring and monitoring of graduation credits. The Student Community Council was instituted as well.
School-based Professional Development—January

For the January professional development day, teachers received training on how they could support numeracy in their classes due to the new math achievement goal in their plan. Teachers shared what was working with their implementation of best instructional practices and several Inquiry Teams presented their insights as well. As there were important programmatic decisions needing to be made, the professional development day was used to present information to the faculty for feedback. The Community Inquiry team presented the new attendance policy. The PAWS inquiry team presented their proposal for next year's school-wide PAWS approach. A tentative plan for Advisement for 2006-2007 was also presented. The school had by now set up an online website at nicenet.org, so that teachers could post opinions, comments, and grievances as a whole community.

New Principal

On February 1, 2006, Barbara began as the new principal at Hunter Hills. Although Barbara had strong beliefs about teaching and learning herself, she respected the work teachers had done at the school and she did not come in boldly with her own agenda. She felt it critical to take the time upon arrival to study the history, discover the culture and understand the idiosyncrasies of this particular school community before implementing any agenda she herself might have. In the first few days of her assignment, Barbara interviewed all of the faculty members. From these interviews she gained at least an initial understanding of their teaching philosophies, desires and current efforts. She said that teachers were more than anxious to share their feelings about things going on at the school.

Barbara also immediately threw herself into the activity of the school, participating in classrooms and attending student activities; indeed, it was difficult for this researcher to arrange time to meet with the principal because of her total involvement in student activities. Her priorities were clearly established early on—she would not cancel her involvement for interviews or meetings. The faculty at the school was well aware of the priority status of their students with
this principal. They knew the students were at the center of Barbara’s radar screen. Over and over again in interviews for this study, teachers made statements like Pam’s: “Barbara likes to be much more involved in every aspect of the school. She wants to be at every game, and every classroom, and in the hall, and every hour, and talking to teachers about every aspect.”

The changeover of administrative leadership was tricky. While Dean had been content to allow carte-blanche as to teacher-leader decision-making, it was clear from the beginning that the new principal was going to function differently. She brought with her a new relationship-orientated leadership style. Barbara allowed the CSIFT and Department Chairs to continue with the program as they had been doing, but involved herself in their work, showing herself to be a significant presence at the school.

Barbara leaned heavily on Sandy during those first few weeks at the school, as many of the administrative staff were also new to the school. Sandy explained, “One of the disadvantages to her situation was we also had VPs with very limited experience at Hunter Hills. They’d been here half a year. We had one that had been here a couple of years.” With immediate decisions to be made, such as the staffing board, Barbara appreciated the assistance of someone who knew the faculty well and was aware of some of their issues. Much of the conversation between Sandy and Barbara those first few weeks was meant to help Barbara understand not only what was happening, but why it was happening and how changes had come about. Sandy explained how she envisioned her role in this transition, identifying the learning that had taken place from her previous years in this leadership position:

The communication process from my end is to give her the history. Here’s where we started and here’s where we are and here’s how we got here and here’s where we’re headed. This is our vision. And basically that is pretty much what I said...‘We really need to sit down and you need to evaluate how you feel about this, and if you feel like this is where you want to go or if you have some input that you would like to provide that we want to look at this in a whole different light.’ And I think we’ve tried to do the same thing with our teachers, rather
than be directive and anal about everything. We kind of were that way for the first little while and learned that that didn’t work very well. I think what we’ve tried to do now is say, ‘Tell us what you think.’ Here’s what the plan is, but tell us what you think.

Barbara had known Sandy as a student. She remembered Sandy as being bright and levelheaded; as such, Barbara trusted her judgment. This respect was mutual, Sandy expressed, ‘And she’s very bright and she understands the school process and the leadership role in the school and has a great number of gifts that she brings to the position she holds, which we’re very fortunate to have.’

Without knowledge of Hunter Hills’ programs, Barbara could not be sure she could fully support all the aspects of the movement. Although Barbara allowed Sandy to continue according to the plan, at least at first while she was getting to know the school community, Sandy was hoping for and felt a strong need for a clear endorsement of their school improvement efforts. When Barbara couldn’t immediately endorse the school plan, there was a period of nervous tension. While this was frustrating to Sandy, she respected it and knew it was necessary: Barbara needed some time to assess her own commitment to the school improvement efforts at the school. Barbara was trying to watch more than act, and act with an authoritarian approach only when necessary. She shared that she’s had to take some action, but had reserved that action for items she found critical, such as reassigning a few Department Chairs. Sonya said of Barbara:

She’s not micro-managing. At Hunter Hills, I hear her saying, ‘How do I support you? It’s our school. How do I best support you from my role as principal?’ verses ‘Here’s where I think we should go. Here’s what I see your school missing. Here’s the direction that should happen.’

Even so, the first few weeks together were somewhat trying for them both. Sandy explained:

I think for her the hard part was the learning curve because we are different from a lot of other places and we do have a lot of things going on and so there are so many things to come up to speed on. There’s the federal grant. There’s the Smaller Learning Communities grant.
There’s the CSIP monies and what they’re spent on. There’s Trustland monies and how those are spent and then there’s all the programs that we’re spending those monies for and who.

Sandy explained another dynamic that needed to be understood:

A lot of the things that I do are things that are, I think, probably done at other schools by the VPs. Because it’s been a part of our school process for so many years, it’s just always been a part of our teacher process, or we’ll at least have been engaged in those.

*Mediocrity*

One thing that disturbed Barbara in her first few weeks was the feeling among some teachers that “good” was “good enough.” She explained, “Their image of their school was that it was good enough.” She questioned the school’s resigned expectations, such as a satisfaction with CRTs that hovered just below district and state averages, which seemed to almost contradict the movement for improvement. Another thing that concerned her was that it appeared to her that the school wouldn’t be prepared to move to the school-wide Academy model as planned for the next year.

Regardless of the possible ramifications to her relationships with the members, Barbara was upfront with her concerns to the CSIFT on which she was an active member. The CSIFT concurred on the basis that the PAWS advisement piece of the plan needed to be implemented completely as a foundational element to the Academy. Together they planned to take one more year to allow full implementation of PAWS and the other Advisement pieces. When Barbara announced the decision, it was met with relief by some and frustration for others. By choosing her sticking points, Barbara established herself as a principal who respected teachers, was wise in her leadership and was not going to impose her ideas in lieu of her position. It was also clear to those who might otherwise be hoping that a new principal meant an end to change that this was certainly not going to be the case.

*Celebration*

Finally, it was obvious to Barbara that there was a need for people outside the school to know what was happening at Hunter Hills. This validated the recommendations of the accreditation...
team the year before who also advised the school to let people know what was going on there, to
“bring them along.” Barbara found that the school just didn’t think that way. None of the leaders
or the school as a whole desired to be in the limelight. Barbara felt that they needed to “toot their
horn” to help institutionalize what was happening and instill a sense of pride throughout the
school. Barbara submitted Sandy’s name to the competition for her district’s Teacher of the Year,
which she won and went on from there to win second place as the Teacher of the Year for the
entire state. The CSIFT committee followed suit by starting a campaign to recognize students.
They sent a notice around to the teachers asking for information concerning any student or
student group who had any type of accomplishment that could be recognized. They planned to
use a bulletin board in the school to post these recognitions.

_School-based Professional Development—March_

For the March professional development day, teachers once again instructed each other by
sharing their progress and insights gained by their experiences implementing new instructional
practices. A new team of teachers attended the Instructional Leadership in the 21st Century
conference. They also arranged for a team of teachers from a school in Grand Prairie, Texas,
which had been functioning under the Academy model for ten years, to come to Hunter Hills to
share their experiences with school improvement. Following the visit, a team of teachers from
Hunter Hills went to Grand Prairie to observe the school in action. School visits such as these
were identified by interviewees as the most helpful form of professional development. Teachers
attended other conferences to increase knowledge and expertise in their content areas as well.
Barbara explained that there were those who felt that in previous years this kind of opportunity
was reserved for a privileged few. She explained, “The feeling was that nobody ‘let them’ or
‘asked them’ to go before.”

_District Impact—High School Progress Teams_

In order to interest and involve all eight high schools in meaningful school improvement at
the district-level, Nadine had made changes in her approach to institutionalizing SLC. Nadine

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invited a leadership team from each of the eight high schools to come to school improvement
team gatherings five times that year, which operated much like the SLC meetings of the past, but
with a shift in focus from SLC to the broader umbrella of student achievement improvement. She
called these teams High School Progress Teams and they included a teacher, counselor, assistant
principal and principal. All eight schools joined this initiative, now that the stigma of Smaller
Learning Communities was not attached. Nadine asked Scott to co-facilitate this district-wide
school improvement effort for the 2005-2006 school year while he was in his administrative
training program. Scott reported that the teams were all at different levels of change, but all
moving forward. Two high schools received million dollar federal SLC grants and others were
coming on board. “Hunter Hills’s success bred success in the other schools,” said Nadine. She
said, “Because of their success, Smaller Learning Communities is institutionalized.”

Vertical Teaming with the Middle Schools

The 2005-2006 school year also marked the implementation of the Summer Bridge program.
Sandy went to the middle schools to meet with ninth graders to let them know about the Summer
Bridge, a sophomore transition program, which would be implemented that year. In April, Hunter
Hills also began vertical team meetings with leadership teams from these feeder middle schools in
preparation for the Summer Bridge. They discussed concepts of rigor, relevance and relationships
and creating a culture of respect. Questions guiding the discussion with the middle schools
included: What can we do to facilitate the transition from middle school to high school? What are
the vision, mission and goals of each of our schools? What do we have in common? How can we
help each other? How do middle level students feel about school, learning, learning
environments, education etc? They also shared what they had learned about developing a
professional learning community and implementing smaller learning community structures and
strategies at their school. They discussed the integration of their philosophies. Sandy and Becky
also made a presentation about their experiences with school improvement at a national
conference that summer.
In order to differentiate professional development, the decision was made to allow teachers to pursue individual professional development activities in lieu of the professional development day typically held at the end of the school year. Because of the school’s literacy goals, teachers were given the opportunity to participate in two district-sponsored literacy offerings. Several teachers attended the Secondary Literacy Conference and a team of eight attended the Secondary Literacy Institute with Jeff Wilhelm, which was an intensive week-long course in the summer, with an additional four days throughout the next school year, where the participants would implement literacy strategies and inquiry units with peer coaching, and return to analyze student work and go deeper into concepts of literacy. Schools typically apply with a team and are chosen at the district level. Sonya explained this process:

They were chosen, because they were a high priority school, because they were not passing AYP. We knew that at Hunter Hills with that many people there is that critical mass, and we knew there were systems in place where that knowledge wouldn’t just stay with those few people, that it would really be processed within their department with the other initiatives they had like Skinneys.

Sonya also explained some of the unique aspects of Hunter Hills’ involvement in this program:

Their application was for...8 or 10 people, which is twice as many as any of our other schools. And these were all people who volunteered! I would say half of them have been antagonistic at some point about change, about literacy in ‘my’ classroom. I’ve worked with them in different realms, so I knew that’s who they were, and then they volunteered and wanted to go do this. I think what it was [was] that each individual had each reached a point where they were ready to do something differently. They had had the room to make the changes that they saw appropriate. Their views of teaching and learning were respected through the process even though they weren’t always the same. You know, they would say comments earlier like, ‘I’m not going to do more writing in my class. That’s the English
teacher’s job.’ Instead, through the week that I spent with them at that Institute, then this whole following year, it was this excitement about being given the tools. Some of them have been involved in the Skinnys, and some of them have had Late Start work for them, and now that they’ve been given some resources, or some time, and now they’re ready to implement some things that they saw as extra before, but now they see as the tools to make those things happen.

This case is an example in which staying the course, and providing consistent and long-term implementation support for teachers paid off.

Grant Resources and Sustainability

As reported in the year-end report:

The grant money that Hunter Hills has received has allowed us to train personnel, provide professional development, provide resources to teachers and staff, provide compensation for school personnel and increase a sense of professionalism among faculty and staff. Grant money has also allowed us to increase instructional support, provide parent empowerment workshops, and develop leadership capacity.

This leadership capacity, they felt, would be important to sustainability of their program. The CSIFT expressed, “because of the breadth of responsibility and shared ownership for school reform, the common vision is greater than any one individual and drives the reform process.” Therefore they believe that “if one individual leaves the balance is left with the others to see it through.” Confident in its sustainability, the district year-end report read, “When one leader moves on another will take that person’s place.”

Fifth Annual Summer Leadership Conference

The fifth annual Summer Leadership Conference was held in June. The teacher-leaders invited a student leader from each of the schools’ clubs and athletic teams to meet and discuss school issues with the group of school leaders. Teachers who had attended the Model Schools Conference earlier in the year shared what they had learned with the other teachers. The school’s
vision, mission, goals and slogan were reviewed once again. A goal focusing on establishing a culture of success was added to the CSIP (see Appendix D).

Evaluation

Just as teachers were working on common assessments and data analysis in the classrooms and in their teams, so was the CSIFT on a school-wide basis. They felt that the combination of school reform efforts and SLC’s were indeed increasing student achievement and improving students’ sense of connectedness to Hunter Hills. Evaluation was important to the CSIFT, but data had always been difficult to obtain. It was their hope that the third party evaluator hired for their federal grant project would be of more help to them. Upon meeting with them one year after the grant was awarded, the group, including this researcher, went over the grant’s goals and possible indicators of success. Sandy came to that meeting prepared with a comprehensive list of possible types of data that could be used to determine various objectives. However, the federal grant project evaluator was limited in what they would do for the school and stuck closely to how he interpreted their contract. Never the less, program evaluation received a lot of attention that year. They were beginning to get some very encouraging results back from their own program component evaluations that energized them and motivated them to keep moving forward.

School Year 2006-2007

Some change when they see the light. 
Others change when they feel the heat. –Carole Schroeder
(used in school-based professional development at Hunter Hills, October 2005)

Stepping inside the front doors of Hunter Hills early one February morning in 2007, this researcher observed a school bustling with life an hour before any school bell rang. Several groups of students visited in the large open quad area that faced the front doors. About eleven students bunched together in the office noisily waiting for their turn to talk to a secretary. Three oversized trophies sat obtrusively on the front desk along with several certificates of accomplishment taped to the counter. A troupe of dancers in leotards practiced their formations
over and over again in front of the office door. I observed through open classroom doors, several students in each of about twenty classrooms, reading or writing. Students were busy in labs. At least fifteen students sat alone or in groups in each hall visiting or studying. Over one hundred students filled all the tables in the library, and sat doubled up at computer screens. The cafeteria was equally as full as breakfast was being served.

An assistant principal greeted students at the entrance and every so often his voice was heard on the loudspeaker encouraging students to take advantage of the extra support available that morning from their teachers. I observed the same feeling of purposeful busy-ness each morning I was there to interview faculty about their experiences with school improvement at Hunter Hills over the past few years. Students were full of activity whether teachers were in their classes actually interacting with students or working in their Professional Learning Community team meetings. Madelyn explained that students use the PLC (Late Start) time to work on homework, science labs, make-up exams, and one-on-one explanations. “The kids now expect it to be this way and if they were to go to another school, it would be a shock. I think overall [the study time has] been really good as far as morale.” Perception data confirms this improved morale; students are happier about coming to school and attitudes toward post secondary education remain positive.

Most interviewees commented on the overall positive emotional climate of the school, describing a feeling of friendliness and caring. Becky commented:

I think the things we’re trying to do are really helping the students feel comfortable and want to be here and want to learn and to create a nice atmosphere for everyone, even those working here. We’re trying to really help each other out and just build good relationships all around.

Vance agreed, “[The school] provides a great working environment for educators where the administrators have empowered the educators to move.” Much of this is due to a feeling that has permeated the change effort at Hunter Hills—they play an important role in a worthwhile movement that is genuinely about “the right stuff.” Although class loads remain high and the
workload intense, there is renewed energy among teachers this year as well. Teachers and administrators share an almost tangible excitement and fervent hope that the work they are engaged in will help “their” students be better prepared for successful lives beyond their high school experience. All the teachers interviewed felt confident in their abilities to make a difference in student’s lives, as Dana expressed, “We’re trying to affect the students now and later too, and it will make a difference. We’re all ready to get in there and to make things happen.”

Organizational Change—School-wide Processes

Despite the numerous program components that have been implemented thus far as part of Hunter Hills’ school improvement and those being designed and/or studied at this time, none of them were mentioned by interviewees when asked to describe the school’s unique features or changes they had experienced at Hunter Hills over the years. Instead, interviewees’ answers were focused on students and community. The changes at Hunter Hills have become so routine they are no longer perceived as special; they have become “the way we do things here.” They have become part of the culture at Hunter Hills. Hunter Hills has indeed experienced significant change over the last five years in their educational agenda, educational program, leadership, community-building processes and in their culture of continuous improvement.

Education Agenda—Vision, Mission, Values and Goals

One of the most obvious changes at Hunter Hills is that the school community has become solidly student-centered. They are more aware of who their student population is and are more understanding of their students’ needs. Pam shared, “It makes me more aware. I’m more patient.” A large percentage of students (64%) still worked after school; 25% of these students work more than 20 hours per week. Eighty-five percent of these students are still working to help their families out due to economic realities and 21% of these students are from economically disadvantaged families. The student population has now increased to 2,104 students and the percentage of students who are English Language Learners has increased to 13% in that time.
Regardless of the challenges inherent in these increases, Vance’s perspective is shared by many, “The students face a lot of challenges in their personal lives and in their family lives, but it seems to me that they do a good job at overcoming those challenges and are successful in school.”

Sandy addressed that in the past there was a tendency to blame parents for students’ underachievement. Now, she and others are becoming quite bold in their affirmation that as teachers they are hired to find solutions. She explained that once in awhile:

You still get, ‘Well, we can’t help them because their home life is terrible,’ or, ‘They don’t care,’ from the teachers. My response to that is, ‘That’s a lame excuse. They’re in our building for three years and you’re telling me over the course of three years, eight hours a day, 188 days that you cannot make a difference in a child’s life? You better quit because you shouldn’t be here if that’s what you believe!’

She believes that it would be unethical to accept money for work, if you believe that what you are hired to do is impossible. Several interviewees shared the same sentiment and are becoming more frank about their dissatisfaction with dissension. Madelyn shared:

Those that do want to jump ship, I think, if they’re totally against it, they can go to another school. And I don’t think there’s that many of them here that are like that. Most of them go along with the flow and see how it’s going to work and try to invest. And those that don’t, they’re going to create waves no matter what.

Becky, a teacher, shared:

I think there are some [resisters] but I don’t know how strongly they resist at this point. I think the more we move towards this, the more successful we find it and we might say to those resisters…you know, ‘You need to be on board or you need to leave because if it really is better for the kids then that’s what we need to do.’

Vern, assistant principal, spoke from a more official stance:

We’ve let teachers know that if they can’t support these things then we don’t dislike them, we understand, but perhaps they need to find another place. And that’s done very tactfully, I
think, very pleasantly. And some teachers have told us, ‘We have enough on our plate. We don’t want to do more.’ Those teachers quietly tend to go away and we have not been harsh with them. We’ve let them know that this is not just mere tokenism that we’re engaged in here at the school. This is here to stay. If they can’t support these things then they maybe need to find a better match, you know, for lack of a better word.

He shared a specific example: “One teacher who was struggling with this issue responded with, ‘I’ll think it over.’ And they did and they came back and they said, ‘I will support Academies 110%.’”

This may have been affected by the new principal’s own firmly stated commitment. According to interviewees, the principal made a huge impact by announcing her own full support for the wall-to-wall Academies this year. Pam shared:

Barbara stood up one faculty meeting and she said, ‘Academies are good. We are going to Academies.’ This seemed to solidify everyone’s resolve. It turned the whole thing around because it made everybody understand, ‘Oh, my leader feels this is valuable and she is requiring this of me—that I participate.’

Barbara explained that before that time participation seemed more optional, but now the vision had become clearer in everyone’s mind. Barbara articulated, “They didn’t lack knowledge, enthusiasm, or talent. [Those resisting] lacked vision.”

The school’s vision and goals were clarified at the Summer Leadership Conference held right before school this year as the community explored: Where are we? Where do we want to be? Special protocols were used for this “self-check” to re-evaluate the school’s purpose and mission, which were subsequently modified to reflect the “I can make a difference,” attitude that is more characteristic of the norm today. The school community wanted their students to have many opportunities and choices in life, and rather than blame parenting or the socio-economic situation of the area, the focus was clearly on what they could do as a school. The faculty shared a belief in

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the potential of their students to be successful and the school goals clearly stated their desire to work together to establish a "culture of success" within their school environment.

* A focus on academic climate.

Interviewees also referred to a change in the school from a climate that was more behaviorally oriented to an academic climate. "It used to be all about behavior," Pam shared as she discussed her interactions with the assistant principals, "Now it's about, 'How did you do on the test?'" Ferrol agreed, "You know it's changed over the years. I think right now that Hunter Hills is probably academically the best that it's ever been." The school had always been proud of its Advanced Placement (AP) scores and concurrent enrollment programs. Becky explains, "I think we pass more AP tests than any other school in the west side." Now, the school had even more to boast about as the school achieved Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) this past year. AYP was not the only indication of student achievement improvement that year; the comparative analysis they conducted on the Skinny's program component also showed good results as well. These and other "wins" were energizing for the faculty. Pam shared:

> We all celebrated. We all cheered... It's made me more passionate about teaching because I realize that I do have a huge affect on students. I'm just not a teacher that they come see every day. I could be a force that could change this kid's life.

* Creativity.

Perception data from 2005-2006 showed that teachers were feeling challenged by their work, feeling motivated and a strong sense of accomplishment. Creativity was being exhibited as well. Nate, for example, excitedly shared that he and a colleague had created a teaching tool that is now being accepted by noted educational leaders. Rejuvenated by the experience, Nate shared that his creativity was stimulated by attending the Instructional Leadership in the 21st Century conference held two years before. When asked what spurred him and his colleague to action, he replied:

> You know, we heard various ideas and it just got us to thinking and what we came up with was probably a composite of everything that we heard. It's stunning. It's one thing to talk
about an idea and a practice and it's a far different thing to actually put it into play, far
different.

He explained that he had examined his curriculum that summer at the Secondary Literacy
Institute with his school team, all of whom had volunteered to participate in the year-long
professional development opportunity. In the process of re-evaluating his curriculum and
instructional methods he ended up pruning much of what he had done in his classroom before. He
related:

For two weeks before the school year started I could not sleep because I didn’t know what
was going to happen. It was like I was starting my very first year of teaching over again, but
the result of that was that not only did it work, but it brought energy into the classroom.
When you walk into my classroom now on any given day, you will see focused energy. You
can walk in a class and see energy, but it’s focused energy and you may look at it and if
you didn’t know what was going on and say, ‘Well, they’re just interacting.’ Well, they’re
interacting with a purpose because they have these things that they’re initiating, that they’re
developing, that they’re learning. I still deal with issues of being overwhelmed. It’s of a far
different nature than what it used to be because I am not master of my classroom; I am master
of my curriculum. And for me, first of all, to make that realization and then to make the
change and go through that was very exhilarating. And until a person goes through that
process where they know their material so well, they are going to be reluctant to make that
change, and that requires self-confidence.

_Accomplishment._

Whether or not there has been an actual increase in accomplishment, more accomplishments
are being recognized and celebrated at the school this year. Each of the monthly newsletters from
the principal spotlights various people, teachers and students for a variety of accomplishments.
The April 2007 principal newsletter, for example, highlights twenty-four “amazing things
happening at Hunter Hills.” The Hunter Hills girls swim team won their regional championship

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and advanced to state, breaking seven of their own school records. A Hunter Hills student won the state's championship for wrestling and another won the state-level Master's Award in Art. Very surprised, this student is quoted in the March student newspaper about his submission, “I didn’t think I would win. I just thought it would be good for me.” That the student thought he probably wouldn’t win and the fact that he entered anyway because he thought it would be good for him is indicative of this transitional period in the school’s changes, a shifting expectation of mediocrity to an expectation of excellence.

Confidence, involvement and proactivity.

Students are also more involved in school activities and behaving in more proactive ways indicative of a general increase in confidence. Vern shared:

I would say that there’s more interest now with students in post high school progress of some form, whether it be college or some academic or vocational type of training, whatever it is. There seems to be more talk about those things. So we believe that the students are understanding the importance of school and a link between money and participation in our economy and success in high school.

The positive and hopeful attitude exhibited by teachers this year is evident in students as well. One parent explained how in the early days, “the school wanted as a goal to increase school spirit and participation of the student body in extracurricular events. The school now hosts many clubs and fills the bleachers.”

The student body, which has participated in the school’s change efforts, has become quite proactive. Vern shared that he feels the students’ proactivity is a result of a change in the decision-making style of leadership in the school. He shared:

In autocratic relationships you don’t have very much feedback. Students tend not to talk. They tend not to [be approachable]...Now, again, intuitively we have much more participation, I think, with students in decisions of the school. For example, they recently approached our principal and administration and wanted to revise a dress rule for dances,
which we thought was a great idea. It was awesome and it was completely self-directed. They came to us...coming from the ground up as opposed to from the top down.

*Educational Program—Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment*

The educational program of the school, its curriculum, instruction and assessment has undergone much change over the years. The faculty has worked hard to answer: “What are we going to teach? How will we know that students have gotten it? What are we going to do for those who don’t get it?” They have instituted several interventions. This year the major school-wide implementation task—following several years of conceptualizing and a full year of lesson design and planning—was the Partnering an Adult With Students (PAWS) and S.O.S. components of their Advisement plan.

*Student advisory—PAWS.*

The purpose of PAWS is to increase opportunities for student personalization and connections. All faculty and administrators, including the principal, now lead weekly advisory groups to make personal contacts. Lessons, designed by the faculty, focus on subjects such as study skills. One day a month, during PLC time (formerly referred to as Late Start), teachers receive and review the activities they will be facilitating with their PAWS groups the next month. Some teachers have concerns about the results of the PAWS program this first year of its implementation. Becky said:

I was really on board with the idea of PAWS and what it’s supposed to do and I’m just not sure that this year we have achieved that. We’ve already seen and heard in CSIFT of teachers who haven’t done PAWS correctly. So we’re already hearing of teachers who say they’ll do it and then when nobody’s looking, do something entirely different.

PAWS is only one type of student support available this year. Vance commented on how the morning Instructional Support is going:

It provides a great opportunity for the teachers to spend more quality one-on-one time with their students. I spend a good portion of the time working with students. I have a lot of
students who come in for help in understanding an assignment or project that they’ve been
given. I have a lot of students come in who simply want to talk, who feel like they can
confide in me to be that person that lends a listening ear.

S.O.S.

S.O.S, formerly known as the Summer Bridge component, was also implemented this year
after much preparation. Sandy went out into the school’s feeder middle schools and met with
ninth graders for a series of twelve weeks to better prepare them for choices they would be
making at Hunter Hills. On the S.O.S. day, new tenth graders came into the high school one day
carlier than the juniors and seniors and had an orientation to the school and its culture. All faculty
members who teach tenth graders, student leaders and the National Honor Society participated. A
survey of these tenth graders later in the year showed they found the day very helpful.

Wall-to-wall Academies.

The faculty has been working every other Tuesday morning on integrating their curriculum in
preparation for wall-to-wall Academies to be implemented in 2007-2008. Integrating curriculum
with teachers from other subject areas, they were discovering, required a sophisticated
understanding of their own curriculum so that they could defend its value, justify their proposals
and rethink how it might be delivered in more relevant ways. Dana commented:

There’s been a lot more collaboration between departments in content areas. We’ve opened
up the dialogue...You can kind of see what [other subject area teachers] are teaching and why
they’re teaching it. It’s been interesting. And there’s still a little bit of resistance because
there’s still curricular ideas that everyone wants to hold onto...certain things we do, things
the way we like to do them and so having to change or shift things is a little bit interesting.

Vance, a health teacher, has increased empathy with teachers who are having difficulty with this
challenge:

I think that [teachers from the core areas] probably get to where they maybe feel a little bit
overwhelmed being asked to implement flavors of Academies within their curriculum. It’s

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easy for me to incorporate history, and what impact times and events in history have had on
the overall health and well-being of the human race, but I can see it to be more challenging
for a math teacher to incorporate health into their lessons and into their curriculum.

Professional development day—Back-to-school.

This year’s Back-to-School Professional Development was designed to offer teachers’
support for the challenging expectations they had of themselves that year. The purpose of the
professional development, as stated in the CSIFT agenda, was to “dispel fears” and come to an
understanding of the curriculum focus in an Academy, particularly the fact that everyone—not
just core teachers—should be “flavoring” their curriculum. A three hour block of time was set
aside for teachers at this professional development session to actually work in teams under
scaffolded conditions.

The Deans of each Academy (new leadership positions) facilitated the work for that day,
building leadership capacity. There were several expectations for the work in their
interdepartmental teams this year, each with a different deadline. They were, for example,
expected to study the academy concept and mission, develop a short academy description, choose
an academy color, gather pictures for an academy pamphlet, gather little blurbs from students
about related classes, and create a simple logo to go on the front of the pamphlet (to become 1/5
of a school logo). Also, the teachers were asked to identify current Pathways (course plan) and
discuss new Pathways, make a list of all classes that a student can take in the Pathway, describe
possible career options in a given Pathway, complete Pathway template, course work offerings,
and career options in each Pathway. This information was to be compiled and plans were made to
create a manual with all of the information from all five of the Academies. Finally, the groups
were tasked to create a PowerPoint about their academy to be presented to the sophomores and
juniors at Hunter Hills and to their feeder middle school students in the Vertical Teaming
activities to be implemented in the spring.
Rigor and relevance.

Teachers have continued to try to maintain rigor in their curriculum, instruction and expectations by maintaining a standards-based approach to their curriculum and a continued focus on the development, implementation and analysis of common assessments. Several teachers mentioned their efforts at trying to raise the bar for themselves and for their students in their classes. Dana, Department Chair shared:

The teachers that I talk to are very conscientious about trying to maintain a high level of achievement and rigor, as we call it. I feel like in my regular junior classes [rigor] seems to have gone down a little bit...I’ve been trying to push it up a little bit again. Teachers also described their departments teaching the same things, although maybe not in the same way, using common assessments and then discussing their outcomes.

Madelyn validated this focus in her department:

We have five...teachers that they’ve come up with common assessments. They tend to try to keep within the same structure. They don’t teach the same, but they have the same content. They have the same tests at the end, and then what they do is they look at those test scores and say where did we mess up?

Several teachers also mentioned that they were trying to differentiate their instruction.

School-wide common assessment—Writing.

In addition to creating and implementing common assessments and analyzing results in their department teams, they were also ready to analyze the school-wide writing assessment conducted the previous year 2005-2006. Sonya, Secondary Literacy Specialist, explained how the school came to using this ultimate common assessment:

A year ago Hunter Hills identified writing as an area for emphasis but they realized that they didn’t have specific data to see if there had been growth in writing, or to see which students might need more support in their content area classes because of the writing. So they wanted to create data that they could then refer to, to make decisions.
She commented that the faculty at Hunter Hills was unusual in that they weren’t just interested in the numbers:

They wanted their teachers to be more informed about their students’ reading and writing skills. They also wanted to see what kind of role writing could have in their classrooms as well as what kind of a role assessing of writing could have, and so I helped them form a school-wide direct writing assessment.

She explained that the whole school gave the assessment in their social studies classes and then the whole school set about scoring the papers, also an unusual activity for a high school:

So they read more papers than a lot of them had read in a long time—the whole faculty, which gave them two things: it gave them a realistic picture of the writing of the students in their school; as well, now we’ve got some data that we can use as a baseline.

This year Sonya, Secondary Literacy Specialist, met with the principal, CSIFT leaders, and data secretary to discuss what to do with the data they now had. Sonya explained,

The decision out of that meeting was based on these questions: What should we do with the data? How should we look at this data? What ways could it inform us as a school? And then, what information do our teachers and our students need? So, how would it be most helpful for our teachers? And our counselors? And our students?

*School-wide approach.*

At Hunter Hills student achievement has been considered a school-wide challenge. Sandy explained how this applied to content area literacy, specifically writing:

It’s every teacher in this building’s job whether a kid can read or write. It’s not an English department issue. It’s not a math department issue. It’s a school issue. So everybody in the building is going to be working on content area literacy. We’re all going to talk about the six traits, and we’re all going to ask our kids to write.

In fact, as Sandy explains, “We look at the academic success of the student...each student, as a team job and the team is our whole faculty, because it’s not personal...Whether a kid can read or
write is not the English teacher's job." With this school-wide approach, the school has been able to make the move from treating data as a "secret," as it was in the early years, to being more open about it. They can now look more closely at data together. Sandy says:

The most important thing is not to cast blame on a particular department or teacher for what that data says. I think that comes down to your leadership and how you present it. You can either present it as 'English department, you suck because your test scores are terrible' or you present it as 'Here is where we're at. Our kids need help, so what are we going to do to help these kids?' It's not about the teacher; it's about the kids.

Program evaluation.

With professional learning communities and smaller learning communities firmly established, the CSIFT turned greater attention toward program evaluation (see Figure 4 for a school-created program component overview). Obviously, the faculty had high hopes that all their work to provide these supports is truly benefiting their students. While some teachers, mostly teacher-leaders, could use actual statistics to refer to successes of various program components, most could not. There was a general sense that things were working. When asked how they knew the components were working, their responses were that they assume, think and hope that things are working. They were aware of the school achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) this year, although Barbara shared that teachers seemed to be unaware of its significance when it was first announced to the school. That greatly surprised her. Data has always been important to the CSIFT and other school leaders at Hunter Hills and they are cognizant of the need and are actively engaged in activities to help their entire organization become more data savvy. Each year the school community is increasing in knowledge and skills to gather and analyze data and interpret its findings, and increasing the amount and quality of technological resources to help them as well.

Most teachers referred very confidently to outside research in their interviews as reasons for doing the things they were doing, such as Vance, "Studies show, time after time, that those
students who are successful generally have an adult within the school that they can confide in and that they can rely on to be a support system for them." Teachers were much more aware of specific student gains in their own classroom experience than they were of specific school-wide program components such as Vance who shared his experiences this year with PAWS:

I have seen the result of that not only in my at-risk classes, but also with my PAWS advisory class, as well as with my regular health classes. I hear comments on a regular basis in trying to evaluate this at-risk program...I’ve had several students who have indicated that that class...
and that their ability to attend a class like that and their ability to interact more one-on-one or more intimately with an educator has been a lifesaver for them.

_Sixth annual Summer Leadership Conference._

The faculty evaluated the school’s other instructional support components the previous summer as part of the sixth annual Summer Leadership Conference by exploring student achievement data and their own perceptions around the following questions: How are teachers involved in supporting student learning? What indicators can you identify that promote student learning in the core, stretch, personal skills, and student engagement? What recommendations would you make to improve student learning in each category? The same questions were asked about teacher learning as well. The group then considered student learning, personal skills and culture through the lens of the following questions: What is most important to our school? What do you want to become? The school community next evaluated the following Common Areas of Focus for School Improvement, compiled the year before in their work with the eight High School Progress Teams in the district, for what was working, what wasn’t working and what they should do differently: professional development/collaboration, quality instruction/student learning, shared leadership, school climate/relationships, system vision/organizational structure and assessment.

_Leadership_

A deliberate emphasis on relationships permeates leadership at Hunter Hills in 2006-2007. Sandy expressed this feeling, “The more I’ve done this, the more I’ve learned that probably the thing that is typically valued least, that matters most, are relationships, and that if you really want something to work for everybody then you have to build those relationships.” Sandy applied this to the current principal, “That’s probably the biggest gift she [Barbara] brings to the table. She does that.” Madelyn would agree. She commented that attention to relationships is the difference between Barbara, the current principal, and Dean, the prior principal. Madelyn observed that both
principals, past and present were smart people, good learners, listened well and they both trusted their professionals. She says:

What’s different about them is I see Barbara as being in an active role, whereas she wants to know all the information from all the different groups and hear it and put her ideas into it.
What I didn’t see from Dean is that it seemed like he was back in this corner listening to it. He wasn’t out here with the people. She seems like she’s right in the middle of the crowd listening.

Becky concurred:

She has been amazing. She’s just stepped in and really just made things take off it seems to me. I think she’s so on top of things and so involved and I think she really listens to the people here and really tries to do what’s best for everyone. It’s amazing. I hardly ever talked to the last principal. I hardly ever saw him, and Barbara, I’ll go in just to talk to her because she’s got a great personality and so open to all of that.

Nate commented on a dramatic contrast in the environment for those who previously had an adversarial relationship with the prior principal:

There was... an adversarial environment in this building... Teachers feared. It was the way teachers were being treated. We’re human beings and human beings respond far more, especially long-term, to love and support and encouragement than they do to fear. Rather, the attitude was if I screw up I’m going to get hammered. If I feel threatened I go into defense mode. The type of change necessary to really impact the lives of individuals and to keep up with the times, if you will, requires an offensive mindset, not a defensive one. It requires acting, not reacting. What is amazing is that we’ve made as much progress as we have in spite of that.

While perception data show that teachers, in general, have felt increasingly more supported in their work, one teacher spoke of not being involved very much until this year as he had not been “invited” before now. Another interviewee who is very involved in teacher-leadership now talked
about feeling “on the periphery” in the early years, in spite of the CSIFT’s central focus on increasing involvement throughout all the years of the school improvement effort. A large part of this change is attributed by interviewees to the new relationship-oriented principal. Barbara’s accessibility and obvious interest and concern for both students and teachers, and her invitational style, may have much to do with the increasingly greater involvement of teachers in the school improvement effort and progress in general community-building.

Community-building—Working Relationships

Teachers are still engaged in early morning collaboration (see Table 8). Karl talks about his morning department meetings:

They are much better now than what they were in years past. Well, and I think it has a lot to do with learning to work together and collaborate more. There’s been a big emphasis on teachers collaborating one with another and that started three or four years ago, I guess. That’s been a big emphasis and I think that caused teachers to take a different look at what’s been going on. I know that our department, we were kind of each in our own little world before. Now that’s not the case and we meet as a department. We all teach, at least for one of our classes, we all have one common class that we teach and in that area we are all doing the same things, giving the same tests. So when we meet, it’s like, ‘Okay, where are we at, where’s everybody this week?’ You know? Okay, this is where we’re going next.

Community-building—parent and community involvement.

While relationships are improving among the faculty, the same is true of relationships with parents and community. Vern shared, “We see good attendance at parent teacher conferences. We see a huge increase in e-mails. I personally am fielding a lot more telephone calls.” Although much has improved, most of the interviewees felt that relationships with parents and the community remains an area that needs improvement at Hunter Hills. Even though the school has been collaborating with parents on school improvement for several years now, and they have
increasing participation of parents at various programs such as Parent Empowerment workshops, Madelyn expressed:

I think a lot of community has seen that we were trying for this vision. I'm not always sure that they see what we're doing because I don't think we still have enough communication with them. I don't know how to do it, but somehow I think we need more [communication].

Table 8

*Professional Learning Community Schedule (formerly Late Start) 2006-2007*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>Instructional Support</strong></td>
<td><strong>Instructional Support</strong></td>
<td><strong>Instructional Support and the following:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Department Teams</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Support</strong></td>
<td><strong>Week 1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Week 2</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Faculty Meeting</strong></td>
<td><strong>Interdepartmental</strong></td>
<td><strong>CSIFT after school</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Teams—Academy design</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Week 3</strong></td>
<td><strong>Week 3</strong></td>
<td><strong>Department Chairs</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>PAWS preparation</strong></td>
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<td><strong>SCC after school</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Teams—Academy design</strong></td>
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Madelyn's feelings are shared by several others interviewed. Sandy shared:

Right now our community's biggest complaint is our attendance policy. I don't know if it's so much that they're complaining as it is that they're trying to figure out a way to make it the most just. So I think a lot of the community focus is on that. As a whole, I think our community does not activate, really, unless there's something major that they want to activate around.
A move from a tendency toward “complaining” to “working together to try and find out a way to make it work” is an improvement that may be hard to see for those too close to the situation. There also remains some confusion over what constitutes “parent involvement.” Although the school’s CSIP outlines a variety of types of parent involvement activity representing several of Epstein’s Six Types of Parent Involvement, Sandy is frustrated with the impression that the various organizations to which they are accountable may be looking for a single type of involvement as the definitive measure. Sandy struggles with this dissonance:

It’s interesting because in our surveys our parents feel like they’re very supportive and I believe that they are. I believe that our parents, like many other parents, do not have the time to race over here for every little thing. I think the best measurement of whether or not a parent is involved is whether or not the parent feels like they are involved. They know what’s going on at this high school. If there’s an issue that they know they can come here and talk to us about it, that they feel comfortable in our environment. And I’m not sure that that doesn’t mean that they’re not involved. I think our parents, with the advent of Power School, perceive that as being engaged and involved. They’re monitoring their kid. They know what’s going on in their classrooms. They’re e-mailing their teachers if they have questions or concerns. I think we’ve been more proactive, too, because we published [information] in our newsletter [and] on our website so that correct and factual information is available to our community rather than whatever other people are putting out there.

The school community continues to try to strengthen their relationships. In December, for example, they also introduced a new section to the school newsletter to keep parents better informed regarding school improvement. It is entitled, ACT NOW which stands for Assess, Change, Transform: Navigating Our Way.

Parent Teacher Student Association vs. Student Community Council.

A miscommunication between the school, the Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) and the School Community Council (SCC) became evident while interviewing the PTSA.
president, who also served as a member of the SCC. It was her understanding that the role of the PTSA was activity-oriented while the role of the SCC was more serious. She saw her organization’s role as cheerleaders of the school and the SCC’s as about “more important” matters. Because of the vast difference in their roles, she did not see a connection between the two. Although she sits on the SCC as the PTSA representative, she did not perceive it as her responsibility to relay information from one group to the other. There is an assumption, however, among school leaders that information discussed at the SCC meeting is being communicated to the PTSA and that when the PTSA president is speaking, she is representing the “voice” of the PTSA. When asked during the interview about the possibility of such an assumption on the part of the school, she responded that it had not occurred to her, although she could not think of any other formal mechanisms in place for this two-way communication.

Culture of Continuous Improvement

Over the years, individuals and various subgroups have developed an increasing awareness and understanding of their involvement in the change process at their school. When asked if Pam could see an end to the process at her school, she responded, “There’s not an end. There’s just a deeper understanding. Ten years down the line this is going to look different than it looks now.” In the last two years of this study the teacher-leaders made a concerted effort to make all stakeholders aware of this process. They have spoken openly and frequently about their “evolution.” This awareness and their own experiences with change over time have made the school community as an organization more tolerant of change. This developing tolerance for change was evident in interviews, which were peppered with comments like: “Well, I think any time you implement something the first year it’s always a challenge;” “We’ve had struggles. It hasn’t been completely smooth sailing, but it has gotten easier;” “It doesn’t happen overnight;” and “I think they’ll be pleasantly surprised that it won’t be as bad as they thought.”

One pattern referenced several times in the interviews was that “difficult things get better over time.” Varied levels of enthusiasm and a range of quality in the initial implementation of
each new component have also been common. This has led some to surmise that the negativity exhibited towards the PAWS program this year is not unlike the reaction to each new program component as it has been added over the years despite how long and complete its preparation.

Fluctuation has become easier to accept. Dana noticed:

In the last five years we’ve seen a lot of turnover and a lot of new teachers and so it just sort of changed anyway. So I don’t know that I would be able to tell you exactly how we work anymore because it seems like it’s in a constant state of flux.

As more teachers take leadership positions, their perspective is changing as well. Dana, for example, said, “I see it more simply because I’m Department Chair. More than I saw before.”

There is also a growing realization that they are co-evolving. With the advantage of time, Madelyn recalled the disappointment of the trimester cancellation, with awareness and appreciation of the surrounding environment, “But things do happen like that and we have to realize it isn’t just our own world. It’s everyone around us too.”

Factors and barriers.

Interviewees identified several factors contributing to this process, their forward movement and their sustained efforts. These include the administration empowering passionate teacher-leaders, working in teams, a shared vision, shared leadership, and a teacher-driven, teacher-led, bottom-up approach. In contrast, they see the fear of the unknown as their biggest barrier to change. Added to this fear is a lack of continuity in leadership, lack of district support, and the “hoop jumping” required by various agencies. They recognize a paradox in each. The high turnover of assistant principals, for example, forced leadership and authority into the hands of teachers which is one of the most distinctive features of this effort, and the one that has had the most impact on teacher involvement and buy-in. In addition, while she acknowledged the support of the specialists, Sandy shared that district mandates, policies and procedures sometimes interfered with the school’s well thought-out plans, and actually became barriers to their progress. In another paradox, while she appreciated the financial resources of the federal grant, Sandy felt
that in some ways the processes for accessing these funds increased their workload and added a level of complexity which again may have actually set them back at times. Sandy further shared that while they appreciated the leverage that the CSIP and accreditation processes provided in the beginning, they came to a point at which the formal procedures associated with these processes began to alter the school’s natural forward progress. The school’s progress, Sandy explained, was based on meaning-making experiences and the community’s reflection upon these experiences. The “artificial” aspects of these outside processes threatened this meaning-making. In another paradox, Sandy felt that their own “too big vision” was a barrier to them in some ways as was their own “too small vision.”

Reflecting on the change process at Hunter Hills, the teacher-leaders, which included an increasing number of people, learned that no matter what attention, efforts and resources were expended, due to the nature of the process they were in, there were always those who felt out-of-the-loop, those who felt that things were unpredictable and chaotic, and those who felt that they had no voice and no say. Therefore, teacher-leaders put intentional and continuous effort into improving communication, garnering input and feedback and clarifying and keeping the vision clear.

*Perceptions about the change process—Beginning, pace, order.*

The school community shared with this researcher their perceptions about how the change process began at their school, its pace, and its order. Considering the starting point, Scott shared:

You have to start somewhere. You have to start some time, at some point. We leveraged what we could from the CSIP requirements, the accreditation process, and grants. These things helped us get started. We would have gotten here anyway, but it would have been slower. Once we knew that we had a problem, even though we didn’t know the answers—the solutions—we knew we had to do something. We couldn’t operate the same, because we weren’t the same people anymore. We used deadlines to help us, some accountability as in certain things needed to be done by certain times and products that were going to be shared
with our colleagues. We also leveraged the chance we had to do something, and that initial excitement of our colleagues.

Vern expressed that the pace was important:

If this happened too slowly the cues that you receive from people is that it is just talk or things will be business as usual. We don’t really mean it...and then, of course, if things happen too quickly people feel coerced in being told what to do. ‘I haven’t had input. I’m not going to support it.’

Teachers differed in their ideas of whether the pace of change at the school has been appropriate. Some teachers felt it had been too fast or that it had taken way too long. Madelyn remembered this issue of pacing as being one of the biggest areas of contention back at the “changeover” in teacher-leadership in the summer of 2005-2006. She said, “Scott, they were upset with him...those that were really upset wanted everything to either stop or slow down or something and those that really wanted it wanted it to just keep continuing that fast.” Dana was one who felt that the process had been too slow and was anxious to move on. She expressed, “Five years is a long time and it’s going to go by whether you make changes or not, and so it’s better that we’re moving in a direction that’s going to ultimately make a difference.” Madelyn felt that, “the initial first two years were extremely fast, but it wasn’t bad. All of us were so into it that it was okay.” Each of the interviewees, who had at one time strong opinions of whether the process had been too fast or too slow, have each come to the conclusion that the timeline has been just right after all. Karl shared:

For me it was okay, the pace that it happened, well, for the most part. Actually, I think we probably could have moved a little faster. It’s taken them probably a year longer than I would have hoped to get to the part where we will have wall-to-wall Academies. And I think the teachers felt that too and I’ve heard that expressed...But at the same time, before Smaller Learning Communities or the Academies could come into place we needed to have one more piece of the puzzle that we didn’t have and that was our advisement period. That particular
area of career choice was missing. We wanted to jump to Academies, but it would have been bad to try and jump right into it. It was kind of an ah-ha moment for the school improvement and academy teams, the leaders of the Academies. It was just like, ‘We want it to be right. If we try it before we have that piece in the middle it’s not going to work.’

Madelyn saw the process in stages, “So I think it’s like any idea: you’ve got your brainstorming stage; you’ve got your initiation stage and then you have to see what’s going to continue working for us.”

Going backwards to go forward.

Madelyn also speaks of a time when they had to go “backwards.” Madelyn shared:

And even for short time when Scott left and then Sandy took it over we had to go backwards a ways to see where were we and then go forward again. I think it was one of those, ‘Hurry up, stop, and then let’s see where we are and let’s see what pace we need to go from there.’

Sandy explained that sometimes you have to stop and even go backwards, in other words, do things so that people have the opportunity to grapple with ideas in the same way that the leaders did. After grappling, she explained further, “the group will come to some conclusions and then the group will come to a consensus…a shared understanding.” She explained that even though the decisions made by the group might be different from what the original leadership team envisioned, maybe even inferior to it, it doesn’t matter:

It has to be understood by everyone, so a weaker program that makes sense to everyone is better than a stronger program choice that only a few people understand. They are not going to care about something they do not understand and you are not going to have the energy it takes to make and sustain the significant changes required to pull it off otherwise.

When Madelyn said, “I think the initial first two years were extremely fast, but it wasn’t bad. All of us were so into it that it was okay,” she was describing the energy spoken of by Sandy, the energy that comes from understanding and believing in the change.
Sustainability and Energy

When asked about what was sustaining school improvement, Madelyn acknowledged energy and effort, both physical and emotional. Madelyn said:

I think most of our energy comes from our teachers and I think that’s wearing us down and that’s going to be our downfall...We’re doing so much that our teachers are wearing out, even though we know it’s a good thing. We can’t just keep going a thousand miles per hour.

We need to go at a pace that we can work for the rest of our lives. It’s something that we want to continue forever, not something that’s just going to happen and be a phase.

She fears that the general negativity towards education from the public and not having their tremendous efforts acknowledged from the legislature as draining. She said, “It’s not so much that I would want a raise. It’s that I want the kids to do well. I want them to have a good life when they get out of here.” Vern also addressed effort and energy when asked about sustainability. He explained that while the financial support had been great from the district and the federal government, he knows that the teachers would have gone forward without it despite the tremendous effort it would take. He said, “They’re good people. I can’t explain it. I don’t understand it. By all rationale they shouldn’t be doing it, truly.”

Simplicity, Moral Purpose, Integrity

What draws them and what will keep them engaged in a process that is difficult, not forced and unchampioned? Vern said:

There’s a lot of power in simplicity, keeping it simple, just changes in how we view things or do things. Keep it simple. There’s a lot of power in that. We’ve done that here at this school.

‘Let’s streamline. Why are we doing it? Is it important?’ Positive persuasion that we’re doing the right thing and we do it for that reason and that’s all it is. That’s the best way I can think of it, that we are doing the right thing to help this child advance.

Sarah, a parent, also noticed that the faculty really does want to do the right thing, that there seems to be no egos or hidden agendas in the way. She said:
They are willing to change, to do what they have to do to make things work well and reach their goals. They are good and willing to say, ‘Okay, what do we need to fix?’ They look at themselves critically. They are not afraid to do that. It’s not just lip service.

Being authentic in their efforts has been a hallmark of the change process at Hunter Hills. It was evident in the professional development they designed as Sonya, Secondary Literacy Specialist, shared:

It’s a diverse group and they’re asking for each other’s opinions and they wanted to make some actual, useful, practical kind of professional development, versus ‘Let’s hear about this assessment.’ Rather they were very concerned that ‘What we do here is something that is going to make a real impact.’

It was evident as well in their work following the accreditation process. Unlike many schools, when the accreditation visit was over, the school community continued the process of continuous improvement in which they had engaged. When the school leaders submitted their first CSIP in 2002-2003 to meet district deadlines, they never considered it their real CSIP because it hadn’t been developed by everybody. They continued their work together to develop a CSIP which then, because of the active involvement of a majority of the school, became for them more than a planning document. It became a decree of sorts. Pam shared in interview, “This year more than any other year [teachers] feel like they have a voice. Real questions are brought to them and they are coming up with real answers and those real answers are implemented.”

A belief that they are engaged in the right thing for the right reason to help “this child advance,” and a belief that they can and will make a difference in a student’s life are the simple principles that have fueled and sustained efforts at Hunter Hills. These principles were expressed in many different ways from different individuals representing different subgroups in interviews, validated in documents, and observed in action at Hunter Hills in the spring of 2007.
Also apparent from this research was that the Hunter Hills professional learning community was actively progressing to its long-stated vision of a “school chosen as exemplary for its safety, academic excellence, and school community.” Their vision has changed very little over the past five years. Sandy feels that is because, “that group of thirteen teachers in a room years ago did a pretty good job of assessing our current reality.” But she is quick to add:

The way to advance toward that vision will look a lot different next year and it will look a lot different the year after that because it will be evolutionary. It will look like whatever we create it to be. It’s adaptive. It’s going to evolve into whatever works for our kids. Our kids change and the times change and what they need changes. So if we don’t do that too then our kids will never be prepared to move to the next level. They’ll be stuck in a time warp that we’ve created.

Since the first group of interested teachers met in the Tech Atrium five years ago and arranged big ideas on little yellow sticky notes, contemplating better ways to optimize student learning through continuous improvement, their organization has moved through several stages of growth, each associated with major learnings and subsequent adjustments in operations. Each stage can be identified by one of the following overarching questions: Can we really make a difference? What is our current reality? Who are we? How are we going to work together and what are we really willing to do? How are we doing? How are we going to keep doing it? A brief summary of each stage follows:

1. Can we really make a difference? In 2001-2002, the faculty was considering a better way to do school and discovering, as they had been empowered with a measure of authority to change existing conditions, they had the power within to make significant changes.

2. What is our current reality? In 2002-2003, the faculty began looking closely at school-wide student achievement data and considering stakeholder perception’s for the first time. A new vulnerability accompanied coming to terms with their current reality.
3. Who are we? In 2003-2004, ongoing dialogue, and new tasks forced deep thinking about curriculum and instruction, underlying assumptions about teaching and learning were challenged frequently. The school gained a clearer perspective about what constituted community. Communication improved and trust began to form between subgroups.

4. How are we going to work together and what are we really willing to do? In 2004-2005, this newly established professional learning community grappled with how to work together. They described their transformation of the past three-year period as going from a culture of isolation, to communication, to collaboration.

5. How are we doing and can we do it better? As new ways of working together became more comfortable, more energy could be focused on the work itself in 2005-2006. An organizing framework of rigor, relevance and relationships provided an organizing structure. Leadership was widely shared. Tasks, although only temporary, were better understood, and roles, although more fluid, were better defined. With timely and accurate data and more sophisticated analysis they began to determine program effectiveness, which became a focus of organizational learning.

6. How are we going to keep doing it? Acknowledgement, appreciation and celebration contributed to high energy levels in 2006-2007, along with high levels of involvement, a solid commitment to the movement, and a significant impact on the environment outside of the school.

A reflective pursuit of answers to these questions has led Hunter Hills's transformation from a traditional, impersonal, mechanistic twentieth-century school organization to one aware of the changing needs of its environment. As a professional learning community engaged in continuous improvement within a culture of success they are now better able to respond intelligently to it.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the five-year change process as experienced by members of a secondary school community who intentionally sought out and pursued school improvement through the establishment of a continuous improvement process with the goal of increased student achievement. The central questions driving this exploration were:

1. What contextual factors contributed to the change process at a secondary school attempting to establish a culture of continuous improvement?
2. How did these contextual factors interact and interrelate to contribute to the implementation and sustainability of the continuous improvement processes?
3. How did these contextual factors interact and interrelate to contribute to the change process itself?

The following is a discussion of conclusions drawn from this exploration.

Change Theories

Change theorists have used several analogies to explain the change process in organizations. The most widely used is the three-stage model of Lewin (1951). Lewin’s change theory suggested that opposing forces bearing on the organization create a state of equilibrium. When change is needed a process of unfreezing places the organization in a state of disequilibrium, which favors change. After changes have been made, a process of freezing once again sustains the new changes. Lewin suggested that education leaders go through a process of analysis to predict
potential forces likely to bear pressure inferring that leaders should be able to manipulate these forces to their benefit. Schein (1985, 1992) added to Lewin's theory an understanding of the psychological states of individual’s within the changing system. He added the need for disconfirming data and its resulting guilt-anxiety as an impetus for change and emphasized the need for positive supports while an individual is in the process of changing. While some of both Lewin’s and Schein’s ideas of the process of change are apparent in Hunter Hills’s experience the past five years, particularly those focusing on disconfirming data as an impetus for change, as a model for future planned transformation, it is unlikely that the Lewin/Schein model would have been sufficient to explain the change process at Hunter Hills. Due to a wide set of variables, many of which were unseen, time and energy spent on prediction would have been difficult if not impossible. Rather than looking at cause and effect, the teacher-leaders at Hunter Hills learned over time how the environment shaped the school organization and how through a process of co-evolution the school organization helped shape the environment.

Co-evolution with the Environment

As an open social system, the school organization maintained an interdependent relationship with its environment. A myriad of unplanned actions and events, and their connections—even in retrospect—are difficult to identify. Some of the more obvious events are those dealing with geographic, demographic, economic, religious, legal, federal, and district influences, which provided impetus for organizational change at Hunter Hills and kept the organization in a continual state of disequilibrium: a state considered optimal for growth and learning (Prigogine & Nicolis, 1997). As the school organization became more responsive over time to its environment, and a partnership ensued, it became “more intelligent.” It became, in essence, a learning organization. The school then benefited from the autonomy it received from the environment. Co-evolution was necessary for the survival and progress of the school organization. The evolution process was sometimes slow and subtle as was evidenced by simple word changes in Hunter
Hills's stated vision, mission and goals, such as the term *intervention* used in place of *remediation*. It was also sometimes very sudden as with the cancellation of the Trimester in year 2003-2004. Most important is that the organization's survival and growth depended on its ability to adapt to changing conditions. A discussion of some of the ways in which environmental factors interacted and inter-related to contribute to the continuing improvement process at Hunter Hills follows.

*Geographic, Demographics, and Economics*

The geographic location of the school, its demographics and the socio-economic status of the surrounding community had enabled an image of a low-performing, and therefore, substandard school. This contributed to mediocre expectations of various subgroups including students themselves. The policies of the district perpetuated this image by including the right of parents to choose the school their children would attend. This made it difficult for a fairly new school like Hunter Hills to build competitive programs, such as an athletic program. Although the student population at the school had come to accept and even expect athletic losses, some interviewees felt this condition affected the school more than anyone wanted to admit. It did contribute to the articulated vision of the school as one that would be "chosen" as exemplary.

The high number of students who worked after school to help their families influenced the school's choice of new programming structures, such as the early morning Instructional Support component. In addition, a large number of parents in the area did not have college backgrounds and data showed that a relatively low number of students from Hunter Hills were successful in college. An emphasis on the success of students beyond graduation became an articulated area of focus as well. This "blue collar" community generally left "schooling" to the professionals, contributing to low levels of traditional forms of parent involvement. A pattern of mobilizing only around larger issues, such as boundary changes, which to teachers were generally considered secondary in importance to the actual learning that goes on in the classroom, led the faculty to conclude that parents did not care much about education. However, less blame was placed on
parents over time as more and more teachers came to believe that there were variables to student success that were within their own control. New growth in the geographic area during the last year of the study also played a role in the change process at the school as new houses were being built in staggering numbers in the empty fields around the school. The population was shifting to include more professionals, possibly contributing to what teachers perceived as a growing dichotomy between high achievers and non-achievers.

Religion

The area also had a strong religious culture and tradition which played a role in the change process at Hunter Hills, as a disgruntled religion teacher incited a community group to protest the Trimester component of the school’s plan successfully thwarting it. The ultimate effects of this perturbation however was eventually more unity among the faculty, a clearer sense of purpose, a greater understanding of the term stakeholder, and ultimately better two-way communication with parents, community and students.

Legal—Federal Mandates and Regional Accreditation

The federal mandate No Child Left Behind resulted in a district requirement for an annual comprehensive school improvement plan from every school in the second year of this study. Hunter Hills was able to leverage this requirement to formalize their grassroots movement toward establishing Smaller Learning Communities. The school also capitalized on the district’s Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) planning process which included one day for school faculties to analyze current school data and a few other days to provide school-based professional development by including their data analysis as part of a much larger context of ongoing, job-embedded, purposeful, and eventually differentiated professional development. The urgency of their upcoming regional accreditation process was also leveraged to meet Hunter Hills’s goals. The collective self-study required by the accreditation process was approached very seriously by teacher-leaders at the school. It provided the “first real peek,” as they described it, at the school’s current reality, provided its first disconfirming data, creating what Schein (1985,
1992) called guilt-anxiety among the faculty, and generated an energy which was then channeled toward change. Unlike most schools, Hunter Hills continued using the tools and processes of the accreditation self-study, such as the stakeholder perception survey and the departmental analyses, annually, institutionalizing their collective self-study, making it an integral part of its ongoing, continuous improvement process.

**Federal and District—Grant Funding**

The three-year district Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) grant awarded to the school in 2003-2004 and the three-year federal SLC grant received in 2004-2005 boosted change efforts by increasing the number of teacher-leaders involved in the movement. Grant funds freed up time for teachers who then took on new roles for parts of the workday. The resources also made possible the annual Summer Leadership Conference, which had become a stabilizing component in a seemingly chaotic endeavor and an opportunity for the school to self-reference. Despite the efforts to synergize the effects of the numerous mandates, grant programs, and the accreditation process, the conflicting plans, reports, timelines, regulations, vocabulary, and even goals added to the confusion and was perceived by some to slow progress at times.

**School District Support**

The school district, while not considered a part of the actual school organization before the transformation at Hunter Hills, became an important member of the school community during the process. As the leader of a much larger initiative of school improvement district-wide Executive Director Nadine was the catalyst for change in Jackson School District. Her relationship with Hunter Hills was also a factor in its forward movement as she was in a position to advocate for the school. She was also able to intercede with the school board, procuring a three-year SLC grant to assist them in their efforts. The district SLC study group Nadine put together in 2001-2002 continued for three years, allowing Scott, Hunter Hill’s Local Site Facilitator, to maintain a broad perspective; access to current research and other information to infuse into Hunter Hills’s
programs; a sounding board with other colleagues, a gauge by which to reference his own school's progress; and opportunities for growth in the area of leadership.

Another personnel factor from the district level was a curriculum and teaching specialist. She provided long-term professional development in the area of literacy and technical assistance to establish a school-based, school-wide writing assessment.

A district policy of moving administrators every five years and assistant principals even more often was a barrier to the continuity of the process. However, the resulting tendency towards a lack of participation on the part of assistant principals, in this case, created conditions that empowered teacher-leaders to be intricately involved in leading school improvement. Thus teacher-driven and teacher-led aspects of the change process played a key role in faculty commitment and ownership.

Co-creation

In addition to co-evolving with the environment, the Hunter Hills school community was also involved in its co-creation. In the latter two years of this study, Hunter Hills began implementing program components involving other schools in the district. Hunter Hills' teacher-leaders worked with the ninth grade students at their feeder middle schools, preparing them for transition to Hunter Hills. They also worked with the adults in these middle schools coaching them on their school improvement initiatives. Hunter Hills' teacher-leaders began working alongside High School Progress Teams from the other seven high schools in the district sharing their experiences and insights and gleaning information from them as well. By the end of this study all of the high schools in the district had begun implementing various components of the Hunter Hills model.

School Setting

The study began only one year into Dean's assignment as principal of Hunter Hills. The transition to this principal had been difficult as the previous, much-loved principal with a responsive style was replaced by Dean, who possessed a more managerial style. There had
developed an uncertain and insecure climate at the school due to some of the decisions made by Dean who, in contrast to Hunter Hills’s first principal was perceived by many as hard-lined and uncaring. Dean’s style was characterized by one interviewee with the statement, “When I want your opinion, I’ll give it to you.” His invisibility and undeclared commitment toward school improvement were extremely puzzling to the faculty, and as such, were helpful factors in maintaining the needed disequilibrium for organizational change at Hunter Hills.

Chaos Theory, Complexity Science and Quantum Physics

As an open, social system the process of change at Hunter Hills was complex, non-linear and therefore unpredictable. As such, chaos theory, the sciences of complexity and quantum concepts are useful tools to help leaders better understand the change process at the core of the transformation at Hunter Hills.

Transformation

When Nadine was given the assignment of leading the school district toward school improvement through Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) she knew that mandates and policies would not likely lead to change. Instead, she set up conditions conducive to change and supported the growth that emerged. As a member of that first district-level study group, Scott became more aware of the performance levels of students at his own school. Along with this disconfirming data, he experienced a sense of anxiety and urgency about needing to act on this new knowledge.

This opportunity to stand back, see a big picture of the workings of his school, the district and even the nation, with time to reflect, to discuss issues with colleagues, be exposed to relevant research and professional literature, and to other schools and their solutions changed his mental models regarding the possibilities and responsibilities of turning around a low-performing school. This new meaning generated energy which was then channeled toward his own school and was exhibited in his interactions there. He gained a new understanding, and with it, a new hope of what his school was capable of achieving: its real power to make a difference in a student’s life.
A new feeling of confidence in himself and the system was generated, as well as feelings of empowerment. Just as Nadine was a catalyst for change in the district, Scott became a catalyst for change at his school.

Scott acquired approval from his principal to pursue the idea of change with other interested teachers, just as Nadine had done at the district level. Teachers felt great energy in those first few weeks as they studied the issues together. The inspiration they felt the day they put their heads together, articulated a shared vision of a different kind of school, and considered the positive student results they now believed were possible, made this a defining moment in the school’s change process. The hope of making a difference was compelling, so much so, in fact, that it became what is referred to in chaos theory as a strange attractor (Gleick, 1987). The possibility of “making a real difference for kids” acted as a central force, keeping the faculty forging ahead despite uncertainty and stress, attracting a larger number of teachers each year.

That first small group of teachers organized themselves into an SLC committee and received the principal’s approval to pursue further study into its benefits. Self-organization, as a principle of complexity science, occurs through a process of emergence in which an organism, and in this case an organization, experiences a perturbation, a type of feedback in which information is fed back on itself by circulating through networks and amplified until a bifurcation point propels the organization forward, reworking paradigms, and eliciting a change in direction or transformation (Jantsch, 1980). This occurred many times in the process of change at Hunter Hills, always leading to useful breakthroughs. Table 9 lists examples of this process at Hunter Hills. The entire five-year change process at Hunter Hills is an example of system-wide self-organization, which will be discussed later in this report.

Leaning heavily on Scott’s confidence in the system, and a new feeling of empowerment emerging from the freedom they felt to make decisions, as well as the professionalism they felt at having their opinions acknowledged and acted upon, the newly formed SLC committee, in 2001-2002, came to the conclusion that a Smaller Learning Communities approach to school
improvement made a lot of sense. In 2002-2003, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) federal mandate resulted in a district requirement for a Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) from every school and Scott was given the formal assignment to lead his peers through this process, solidifying the SLC committee's resolve to make transformational changes at their school. Scott chose a Co-Chair who had credibility with the faculty, and the teacher-driven Smaller Learning Communities committee was then converted to a formal CSIP committee or leadership team. This was the first formal structural change made at Hunter Hills. The decision to add this second body of teacher-leadership, in addition to the traditional Department Chair structure, gave these teacher-leaders some control over who would be a part of those early conversations. The task demanded interested, well-respected, flexible thinkers who were open to change, representing many different networks in the school. The group capitalized on the energy potential of these people's interactions in their networks. The new CSIP leadership team was made up of a diversity of personalities, leadership styles, ideas, experiences and mental models. A norm of openness led to many lively debates as different points of view and multiple perspectives helped them be more attuned to the multiple realities among the rest of the stakeholders.

Table 9

Transformation at Hunter Hills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Perturbance</th>
<th>Breakthrough</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>02-03</td>
<td>Perception Survey data about students' work schedules</td>
<td>Instructional Support in the morning to help students who work keep caught up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03-04</td>
<td>Trimester Cancellation</td>
<td>Two-way communication with parents and community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04-05</td>
<td>Mock Accreditation</td>
<td>Reorganization of teacher-leadership structure and greatly expanded shared leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05-06</td>
<td>Community Identity Crisis</td>
<td>Community mobilization for College Prep Night</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Networking and critical connections were vital to the flow of information and distribution of energy it generated. The CSIP leadership team worked to encourage as many critical connections as possible. Having two athletic coaches in charge of school improvement was perhaps one of the principal’s most important strategic decisions or depending on his intentions, one of the most serendipitous factors in the change process. Putting a coach at the center of the movement and involving networks of teachers who are typically more peripheral to school improvement efforts immediately changed the human dynamics that are more often associated with school improvement efforts.

Scott and his Co-Chair, Sandy, both athletic coaches, as well as classroom teachers, did not have a plan of action for change, a model to draw upon, or a theory in mind as they began their facilitation of this change process, nor did they have administrative or leadership training, another important factor. Without training or experience, and with free reign, they led by instinct and best guesses. They learned how to facilitate change while facilitating it, keeping just a step ahead of the rest of the group as to their own learning about school improvement and the change process. They experienced numerous set-backs, false-starts, disappointments and made mistakes in the process. However, humility about their own limited expertise, openness about their own learning, transparency of their decision-making, and most of all consistency and unwavering focus on student achievement over the years earned the trust of the faculty and other stakeholders as well.

Co-Chairs Scott and Sandy, then the CSIP leadership team, and ultimately the whole school operated from the following beliefs, which together formed their own unstated leadership code:

- It’s all about the students. Keep it about the right stuff. Always.
- There are things under our control. As a school we can find solutions together.
- It takes everybody and will affect everything we do. Student achievement is all of our concern. Everybody plays. Nobody sits on the sidelines.
• We all need to be knowledgeable about current research and best practices and make
decisions based on them. We need to share what we are learning with each other.
• We need timely and accurate data to understand our current reality.
• We need time to be able to think deeply and reflectively about teaching and learning. We
need the opportunity to dialogue and problem solve together. We need to ask ourselves
good questions.
• Involve everybody in decisions.
• Work in teams. Mix it up. Diversity is good.
• Develop a shared vision and then keep the vision central.
• Stay the course. Don’t give up.

The first CSIP was due early in the 2002-2003 school year. Hunter Hills met this deadline by
submitting a placeholder plan with what they considered their real plan just beginning
development. The desire to be real and authentic about the process and avoid just going through
the motions was a key factor in the success of the change process. The CSIP leadership team led
the faculty in mission building and goal setting experiences that year. In consideration of their
new goals, current school perception data, student achievement data and school improvement
research, the CSIP leadership team made recommendations to the rest of the faculty about
possible program component options. Then, through a number of surveys, small and whole group
discussions and a rigorous grant writing process, which provided structure and deadlines, the
faculty developed their first real CSIP together by the end of the 2002-2003 school year.

A Strategy for Change

The CSIP plan called for two simultaneous sets of actions for this faculty and other
stakeholders at Hunter Hills: (a) personalizing the school experience for students through the
establishment of Smaller Learning Communities’ structures and strategies, (b) setting up
conditions and processes to make their school more conducive to change: more adaptive and
more flexible in order to meet current and future student needs. To this end they commenced their on-going continuous improvement process by establishing of themselves a Professional Learning Community (PLC) and began preparations for the implementation of Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) within their school. The simultaneous nature of these two processes furthered the school's comprehensive, system-wide transformation, ironically by placing the school at the edge of chaos; a place that was uncomfortable but optimal for organizational growth (Stacey, 1992).

The implementation of SLC called for each SLC structure or strategy to be implemented in three stages over a three year period: (a) study, (b) design and development, (c) pilot or full implementation. This assured that multiple structures were not implemented throughout the school all at once. It also provided a sense of order as well as adequate time for emotional and physical preparation.

The structure for PLC collaboration was put in place the very next year, 2003-2004, and was foundational to all other changes in the school. This built-in Late Start, two to three mornings per week, gave teachers the time and opportunity to talk, study, design, reflect and collaboratively grapple with difficult issues and complex problems together. The purposeful work in which they were engaged over the next four years involved core work processes and included the study and design of each of the SLC program components; development and analysis of a standards-based curriculum and common, formative assessments of those standards; the study and implementation of best instructional practices; and the analysis of department and school-wide processes.

Change in Organizational Subsystems

Beginning with the 2003-2004 school year, with new habits of interaction among the teachers, the school experienced dramatic changes in its inter-related subsystems: its structures, tasks, technology, and human dynamics. As is the case in open social systems, changes in one
subsystem affected all of the other subsystems resulting in an ultimate shift in the culture of the school.

*Tasks and Technology*

All stakeholder groups experienced changes in the tasks to which they had been accustomed. Teachers, who traditionally spent their days teaching, assessing, attending meetings and visiting with parents and students periodically, were now spending regular time collaborating with their colleagues as well. Teachers who normally had little opportunity to think deeply about their curriculum, instruction and assessment were being compensated for their time to do so. Teachers who were used to attending trainings were now facilitating job-embedded professional development experiences. Teachers who were used to designing and presenting lessons were now designing and evaluating programs, developing curriculum, and creating new methodologies.

Teachers were learning about implementing new instructional practices as well. For example, all teachers learned about the reading and writing demands of their various content areas. All teachers learned about the six trait writing rubrics and they all participated in scoring the school’s newly designed school-wide writing assessment.

Like their students, teachers now had assignments of their own with deadlines to meet. They were expected to share what they were learning in their Study, Inquiry and Focus Teams with the whole school on the school’s professional development days held six times throughout the year. In the last two years of this study teachers were required to do action research in their classrooms as well, keeping data and sharing these results with peers.

Teachers, who on occasion met with struggling students after school, were now spending three mornings a week working with high and low achieving students. High school teachers were teaching middle school students on middle school campuses and teachers were teaching parents at parent workshops. Plans were being made to begin holding parenting workshops off-campus at the community library as well. Teachers, parents and students who typically worked separately were collectively problem-solving. Students and parents, for example, worked alongside teachers.
in various focus groups and councils and participated in school program evaluation and renewal activities.

Teacher-leaders were also navigating new territory. The concept of a teacher-leader was a new concept for Hunter Hills. Teachers were used to chairing committees, but now they were involved in writing and managing federal grants, maintaining very large budgets and conducting program evaluations. They wrote federal reports and made appeals before school and community boards and councils. They traveled to other schools, regional research centers, and even to meetings at the Department of Education in Washington D.C. They were called upon to solve conflict among their peers, teach parent groups, and lead parent discussions. Teacher-leaders worked with experts, consultants, and third-party evaluators. In the later years of this study, they worked with school principals and leadership teams from other schools, advising them in their school improvement processes. They also presented their new insights about school improvement and the change process at a national conference.

Role ambiguity and role conflict contributed to a feeling of confusion at times. Some roles seemed flip-flopped. Teachers' work at times resembled the typical work of counselors and counselors were now teaching PAWS classes. Teacher-leaders were involved in tasks typically assigned to assistant principals, whereas assistant principals were assigned PAWS advisory classes to teach as well. When the new principal, Barbara, came to the school in 2005-2006, for example, she found that Sandy, a teacher-leader, was more familiar with some school operations than any of the assistant principals. Sandy was able to advise the principal regarding certain budgets, federal reporting requirements, and staffing board recommendations.

**Tasks, Technology, and Structure**

The hierarchy at Hunter Hills was fuzzy and confusing. Whoever was in charge and by what authority wasn’t clear. Although the hierarchy seemed flatter to the teachers as roles became more fluid and task-based, many never did feel that they had access to the principal until the new
principal came on board. Dean’s nebulous role as principal contrasted strangely with the seemingly steadier, supportive role of the district’s Executive Director, Nadine.

Teachers worked on several teams each year for very specific purposes, creating knowledge together. They worked within their departments determining power standards, creating common assessments, developing intervention strategies and analyzing department processes. They collectively analyzed student work together. Teachers also worked interdepartmentally in various study groups supporting each other in the implementation of instructional practices.

In Inquiry Teams teachers worked on the development and preparation of program structures such as the PAWS advisory program and Skinnys. These groups were cross-curricular, which allowed for development of new relationships, cross talk about teaching, and development of new networks. Working with people outside their own content areas resulted in many opportunities to challenge underlying assumptions about teaching and learning. In additional interdepartmental inquiry groups, teachers mapped and integrated curriculum in preparation for wall-to-wall Academies. This forced teachers into situations in which they had to explain, defend and justify their curriculum proposals to their peers. Teachers gained increasingly sophisticated levels of understanding of their own content while gaining new perspectives. The effort was sustained long enough that even those teachers who seemed to get by in the first year with minimal effort eventually could not escape the need to dig deep into their curriculum. The quality of these interactions varied throughout the school, team by team and over time. Despite initial training, facilitating teams of peers proved tricky for some teachers, in the beginning, greatly increasing their discomfort.

Communication—One-way→Two-way

Communication as a factor was an ongoing concern throughout the change process at Hunter Hills. A great amount of attention was put into procedures and processes to make sure information was shared widely and that group members didn’t feel out-of-the-loop. During the period of this study there were substantial changes in modes of communication among the
stakeholders. In the first three years of the study, the teacher-leaders communicated with the faculty face-to-face, through memos, letters and emails. The school’s website displayed more general information. In the latter half of 2004-2005 and beyond, formal CSIFT meeting agendas and communication templates helped formalize and organize communications. A blog was also set up for teachers to communicate informally amongst themselves about school improvement issues and concerns. Communication with parents was mainly facilitated through a monthly newsletter and an electronic student information system.

A shift from one-way to two-way communication with stakeholders increased the effectiveness of communication substantially over time. A pattern for this shift in communication is clear: telling→inviting→partnering. In the beginning, the typical form of communication with all subgroups was to present information in a one-way direction and then ask for input. In the second phase, the faculty members invited other groups, i.e. parental and student, into conversations. This typically resulted in the faculty learning more about the issue and gaining an increased understanding about the stakeholder group and vice versa. In the third phase, the school organization and the stakeholder group actually partnered in problem-solving together. Being able to problem-solve collaboratively assured more thorough understanding among all parties, increasing the probability of effective and sustainable solutions.

Tasks, Technology, Structure and Human Dynamics

Human dynamics were a factor as tasks became more challenging, leading to periods of tension and increased stress for some teachers. Little relational trust was exhibited in the early years specifically between the faculty and administration, parents and the school, students and teachers. Some of the Department Chairs felt their status had been reduced and their power usurped by the CSIP teacher-leaders. Issues of access, power and status, however, lessened over the years as tasks became more familiar and shared leadership increased. Trust and confidence was built over time.
The school building itself, built to accommodate wall-to-wall Academies helped further the change process. The availability of a room large enough for this collaborative type of work/learning was a factor in the change process at Hunter Hills. An entire juggling of classrooms was begun in the latter half of 2005. The leadership team also rearranged their class schedules so as to assure that a teacher-leader would be available during all periods of the day to conduct school improvement business or professional development activities. These were not easy changes for anyone, even the most committed, but conditions of discomfort seemed to define the change process at Hunter Hills.

Change in School-wide Processes—Collaborative Professional Development

In addition to its subsystems, several school-wide processes went through major changes as well. The most dramatic change was in professional development. The traditional professional development approach changed to one that was increasingly more collaborative and job-embedded until it became impossible to separate it from the day-to-day work of the school. Job-embeddedness is a popular professional development term in education today, and as such, its meaning has become somewhat generalized to mean training that is closely related and perhaps school-based. In this study, however, the term is used in the strictest sense. Job-embedded professional development at Hunter Hills was not professional development closely tied to the teachers work; it was the work of the teachers. Teachers learned how to design common assessments by designing, implementing and analyzing their common assessments. They learned how to integrate and map curriculum by integrating and mapping their curriculum. New skills were often put to actual use during professional development activities, taking advantage of opportunities to scaffold new learning. When learning about how to effectively work in teams, for example, real teams were actually formed at the professional development experience and were guided through their first team meetings there at the training, under scaffolded conditions. The job-embeddedness of this professional development was also evidenced in a list of program
components which they referred to as “professional development tools” in their accreditation manual of 2004-2005: School Data Analysis, Summer Leadership Conference, Late Start Time, Smaller Learning Communities, Professional Learning Communities, Collaborative Process, Comprehensive School Improvement Committee, and School Community Council. Even meetings were considered opportunities for learning.

The curricula for professional development experiences were very different than in the past as well. In addition to more traditional topics, which focused on instructional practices, the new collaborative professional development focused on new concepts such as how to work in collaborative groups, norms of collaboration, peer coaching, common assessments, action research, data analysis, backwards curriculum design and the collaborative analysis of student work.

Cognitive and Socio-constructivist Learning Theories

Cognitive-constructivist and socio-constructivist-learning theories can be used to better understand the mental and psychological processes involved in the learning among organization members in this process of change (Bruner, 1966; Vygotsky, 1978). According to these theories, each person came to various understandings at different times related to the connections they were able to make to their previous understandings. The long-term, continuous nature of the movement accommodated these staggered insights as did efforts to differentiate professional development in the later years. Their insights were not only dependent on personal connections but many concepts were socially constructed; dependent on mutual engagement. In a community of practice, the faculty and other stakeholders learned together to solve current, complex problems unique to their population. Sometimes teacher-leaders tapped the resources of experts, consultants, and district specialists for technical assistance, but much of the facilitation of professional development for the school came from a pooling of expertise and experience already existing in the school.
The entire process of school improvement was based on a habit of inquiry. The continuous improvement process was referred to as an action research cycle. All gatherings were designed around collective inquiry and reflection. Questions, such as, "Who are we?" "What do we want our school to be like?" and "What am I teaching and why am I teaching it?" were used to lead discussions in general meetings as well as in professional development activities throughout the five years. This double-loop learning allowed organization members to step outside the realm of their everyday actions, collectively reflect on their progress and make sense of their work. Almost all PowerPoint presentations made over the years began with a recap of current data, decisions that had been made previously, reasons why those decisions had been made, and a quick overview of pertinent research. Likewise, teacher-leaders intentionally used most every gathering as an opportunity to help group members remember why they were doing the things they were doing, always trying to bring coherency to their work, to the point of redundancy.

Degree of Disorder

The comprehensiveness of the approach, system-wide change, as opposed to what Tyack and Cuban (1997) referred to as tinkering around the edges, contributed to the frustration of the process, and, ironically, made the process possible. The degree of disorder felt by the school community influenced the degree to which organization members ventured outside—and how long they stayed outside—their comfort zones, until such time as they were, confused sufficiently as Wheatley (2006) suggested, to allow multiple, long-standing paradigms to be shifted. The likelihood of a change in the mental models of organization members, foundational to reculturation, was dependent on the degree to which group members were forced to face the current realities of their student's and school's current performance; engaged in deep discourse with colleagues about real instructional dilemmas; engaged in challenging, stimulating and purposeful work, in their core work processes; engaged in work that challenged their underlying
assumptions about student learning; and had experiences that caused them to access a bigger picture (a systemic view of the work of the whole school in order to find their place in it).

System-wide Self-organization

It is ironic that the confusion, uncertainty and disorder felt by organization members during the change process actually worked to create a more stable organization, meaning adaptive and flexible, better able to function on the edge of chaos where growth and learning could thrive. As Reigeluth (2004, p. 9) predicted, “Appropriate behaviors and structures emerged spontaneously through self-organization, without heavy controls,” and in this case, the virtual lack or visible involvement of administrative control. System-wide self-organization evolved in the midst of the following organizational characteristics: (a) openness to disconfirming data, (b) information widely shared throughout the organization through dense networking and critical connections, (c) freedom in choice making, and (d) a habit of self-referencing.

Openness to Disconfirming Data

Hunter Hills was open to information, even disconfirming data. Information about stakeholder perceptions and student performance was actively collected and fed back into the system. Multiple interpretations of this data were pursued. Teacher-leaders provided information and asked various groups at various times, “What do you make of this?” While teachers were curious about the perception data, they were initially defensive about student achievement data. It was difficult being open to information from the environment that threatened their clear sense of who they were. Once they did this, however, they were not the same and could not keep functioning the same as they had previously. Student achievement eventually became accepted as a whole faculty responsibility and accomplishment, increasing ownership among a critical mass by 2004-2005.
Information Actively Sought and Widely Shared

Expertise was gained from outside experts, consultants, district specialists, regional research center personnel and even teachers from other schools. The faculty, were sent to conferences, particularly the Instructional Leadership in the 21st Century conference and Professional Learning Community conferences, and to visit other schools which were facing similar kinds of challenges and finding successes. School visits were considered by interviewees to be some of the most helpful types of supports. Not only did the visits help teachers and administrators with potential solutions to their problems but they also helped the school community get a bigger picture of what was going on around the country, encouraging systems-thinking and resulting in a deep sense of responsibility.

A small room off the central library housed research, data, professional literature and other reference material for easy access to teachers and teams. Information gleaned from these and other sources as well as results of the teacher's own inquiry and action research were not only shared by teachers within their collaborative teams but with the whole faculty at the six formal professional development gatherings held throughout each school year and the annual Summer Leadership Conference. Some of this information was compiled and printed in school-based manuals and distributed among the faculty. Information was gathered and shared with other stakeholders as well in the form of reports, newsletters, presentations and the website.

Freedom of Choice

The whole school improvement movement at Hunter Hills was teacher-driven and teacher-led. The principal, by his absence, allowed the teachers a great amount of autonomy and decision-making authority in this process of change. This allowed those closest to the problems to struggle to find effective solutions. The organization was able to self-organize because members were empowered to act upon the knowledge and information they were learning and creating. Once people knew the situation well they felt responsible for it. Once Scott saw the performance data from his school, for example, became aware of the research regarding smaller schools, visited
schools like his where students were succeeding, and was given freedom to do something about it, he was duty-bound to act. Freedom created in Scott a feeling of responsibility for the success of the effort. That same dynamic was evidenced in the leadership team and ultimately throughout a critical mass of the school community.

Representative Leadership → Participatory/Shared Leadership

With the freedom they had been given the CSIP leadership team began their work operating as a representative decision-making body. They made program decisions based on their school’s data, other successful programs, research and regular input from the faculty. They ultimately were able to shift from this representative process of decision-making to one that was more participatory once the Late Start was in effect in 2003-2004. While the school still used surveys to gather input, the PLC collaboration allowed teachers to talk through issues with their peers and give more informed input and feedback. During this time, shared leadership was highly valued and an increasing number of teachers began facilitating various teams.

Representative Leadership → Participatory/Shared Leadership → Invested Leadership

By the end of 2004-2005 the structure of teacher-leadership was again re-organized, this time around the core beliefs and ideas of the organization: relevance, rigor and relationships. PLC collaborative work had become a part of the culture and teachers had been engaged in curriculum, instruction and assessment work for two years. Decision-making was even more inclusive of the faculty due to a more sophisticated understanding of educational and instructional issues throughout the community, leading to better solutions and much greater ownership. This deeper understanding and the authentic ownership it allowed became the basis of invested leadership at Hunter Hills.

The school slogan, “Learning is not a spectator sport” had a special application to leadership at Hunter Hills. Leadership was considered a behavior as well as a position and there had become an expectation that everyone be involved as a leader of something. By the beginning of 2005-2006, an increased number of faculty had become fully invested in the transformation at Hunter
Hills due to numerous meaning-making experiences and the authentic ownership they created. Authentic ownership, more than just general buy-in, refers to a sophisticated understanding of the group’s core values, ideas and beliefs. This level of ownership was developed through partnering in the struggle for solution finding. It is this authentic ownership that separates invested leadership from shared leadership, which is a term usually used to denote the distribution of leadership responsibilities among organization members but does not convey the weight of the responsibility felt by leaders toward the success of their assignments. Invested leadership involves deeper understanding, more personal engagement and greater emotional attachment or risk. The meaning-making which is foundational to authentic ownership and invested leadership was clarified and reinforced through a process of self-referencing.

Self-referencing

The Hunter Hills school community engaged in self-referencing regularly. Self-referencing, according to Wheatly (1999, p.85), refers to a process in which the organization “checks itself against its core ideas, values and beliefs.” She explained, “When the environment shifts and the system notices that it needs to change, it always changes in such a way that it remains consistent with itself.” Like an airplane that is typically off course 98% percent of the time but through a system of self-checking, rights itself to stay on target, so does the organization that self-references often. In light of this, the numerous and seemingly redundant efforts made by the school community at Hunter Hills to know themselves were some of the most significant activities in their change process.

Know thyself—Identity and Intent

From the earliest days of this movement, the Hunter Hills school community made a concerted effort to determine the current realities of the school community. The most current perception data and student achievement data was a part of virtually every faculty gathering throughout the years for various purposes. The school community was constantly reassessing “Who are we?” and “What do we want to become?” These discussions helped the organization
see more clearly who they were, clarify what it was trying to accomplish, clearly recognize its strength and weaknesses; in other words, develop a clear identity and clarify its intent over time.

*Identity and Intent → Meaning-making → Ownership*

With a clear identity and intent, constructed by the school community, the whole system developed greater coherence, and with that coherence, greater meaning. With greater meaning and the ownership it generated, it could respond intelligently to changes in its environment. Decisions could then be based on this identity and intent as opposed to trends and unquestioned mandates. At Hunter Hills, this shift was evident as the organization began to respectfully challenge district procedures which conflicted with its intent. Paradoxically, the greater meaning and ownership and the clearer the identity and intent, the more diversified departments and teams could be in their various approaches to problem-solving, and the more professional development could be differentiated. The system was then able to benefit from multiple approaches, capitalizing on people's strengths which were all naturally targeted toward group success.

*Identity and Intent → Meaning-making → Ownership → Energy*

This greater meaning also generated great amounts of energy needed to make and sustain difficult changes in individual and collective behavior. Nate, for example, shared how when things clicked for him, when he “got it,” the result was life changing. He now approaches his curriculum and instruction differently and has even created a new teaching tool that he is preparing to market. In this teacher's case his deep understanding or meaning-making generated the energy needed to make tough changes and has sustained him in his work since. He shared that although he was to the point of quitting, he now has new energy, and he has noticed the same dynamic in his classroom among his students. “It brought energy into the classroom,” he explained. “When you walk into my classroom now on any given day, you will see focused energy. [Students] are interacting with a purpose because they have these things that they’re initiating, that they’re developing, that they’re learning.” When information is meaningful, it is a force for change and provides access to creative potential.
Purposeful work, and collective reflection, helped members within the organization uncover the underlying assumptions that formed their mental models and controlled their views, creating a deep center with increasingly more clarity about who they were and what they needed. The clarity of this identity and intent provided greater understanding, illuminating their purpose which then brought meaning to their work. The hope it provided was motivating. Teachers want their hard efforts to mean something. As Nate said, “I wanted to be of value.” The last perception survey of this study showed that teachers felt their work was challenging, but they also said their work was stimulating. Work that is challenging, but meaningful, stimulates. It not only generates the energy needed to make changes, but also sustains efforts.

Identity and Intent → Meaning-making → Ownership → Energy → Sustainability

When asked if there were any surprises in the change process at Hunter Hills, each of the district-level interviewees answered that they were surprised the change efforts at Hunter Hills continued beyond the initial push for school improvement, which is more often the case in their experience. At Hunter Hills, the school community agreed that they would do whatever it took to bring about student success. When they met with disappointment, such as when multiple federal grant proposals were denied, or when the district rescinded its approval of the trimester system, they determined that they would find a way to carry out their innovation even if it meant that their plans would take longer than they had originally planned. Clearly, the financial resources and federal and district mandates were not the sustaining factors at Hunter Hills. Rather, the energy produced from meaning-making allowed Hunter Hills to stay the course, solid in their reasons for doing so. Literacy, for example, remained a focus for all five years of the study, ultimately leading to several major breakthroughs.

Energy Potentials and Energy Channels

Quantum physics can be used to conceptualize the flow of energy involved in the change process. At Hunter Hills, energy was created at places where members joined forces to work on
temporary tasks. What became important then was the availability of places for these exchanges.

Energy was also generated when new understanding came upon a critical mass of the organization. The highly personalized professional development experience awaiting teachers when they came back to school in 2005-2006 changed perspectives and re-focused attention to purpose and meaning. For those involved, it had an energizing effect, enough to actually change classroom practice. This energy was spread through overlapping networks of interactions due to multiple teaming through what scientists term reaction channels, having a renewing affect on the organization. At Hunter Hills, energy potential was also formed anywhere these reaction channels overlapped. Parents and community became energized after better understanding their own current reality—that there were many families in their area who lacked experience with higher education. New energy was also generated when the counseling department redefined its roles and responsibilities. The overlapping of these two energy channels resulted in a very successful, well-attended and well-supported College Prep Night, generating even more energy which has since supported new relationships and subsequent positive actions.

*Networks of Interactions—Relationships*

Just as scientists have been unable to pinpoint a single element as a basic building block of life, at Hunter Hills there was no causative agent. Each member of each subgroup was a change agent; they each had the capacity to interact with one another, facilitating energy flows through what Fullan (2005) called progressive interactions: interactions which propel the movement forward. This was evident as departments worked together in new ways, supporting each other and creating better learning opportunities for students. Teachers who visited schools and then returned to share their insights passed on energy as well. The auto mechanics teacher who assigned writing in his classes and found that students performed better on tests became energized and shared this knowledge and energy school-wide.

Teacher-leaders became information brokers, facilitating energy flows, as they supported relationships and networks. The name of the CSIP committee was changed for the 2005-2006
school year from the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) committee to the Comprehensive School Improvement Facilitation Team (CSIFT) reflecting this shift of thinking. Rather than working as a team to facilitate school improvement, they would facilitate the networking of numerous teams each facilitating school improvement. When the new principal, Barbara, began her work at Hunter Hills in February 2006, her involvement with and progressive interactions among students, teachers, administrators and parents developed energy potential at every intercrossing, creating new energy and sending it along numerous energy channels. This energy was clearly evident upon observation and during interviews conducted in the spring of 2006-2007. Researcher field notes of March 13, 2007 read:

There is an exuberance in this school. I’ve felt it every day that I’ve been here this week. It’s on the faces of the kids and in the tone of teacher’s voices, even when they are talking to one another. It’s even in the office. The spiritedness of the kids is not high emotionality. It seems much more grounded. There is a confidence in it. It’s an inner energy.

Energy Fields

Network upon network an energy field, like a magnetic field, invisible, but exerting a definite force, was created. Within this energy field, the school’s core beliefs had a powerful influence on the school community. Instead of a picture or dream of the future, the shared vision, collaboratively constructed, acted as a powerful message, a shared longing that was communicated through dense networks filling up the spaces throughout this field, influencing everything and everyone. Everyone in the organization picked up on the messages, these unseen influences, because they were strong and congruent with shared beliefs.

Shaping the Culture through Self-similarity—Fractals

Once certain core beliefs became the mental models of a critical mass they had a powerful influence on the features of the organization. The things that the school truly valued, not those things that “should” be valued, were evidenced in the behavior of its teachers and administrators.
Due to the density of overlapping networks and the energy fields they created, the influence of these shared values was evident in the iteration of its simple but compelling principles, throughout the organization shaping its culture through self-similarity.

Fractal geometry can help illuminate the phenomenon of organizational self-similarity exhibited in these iterations. A fractal is created from a simple formula which is fed back on itself resulting in a complex shape which is then repeated on many levels through a process of continual self-referencing to a simple initial equation. In a quantum, relational world, small simple truths are amplified many times throughout an organization. In this case, as Wheatly (2006) suggested, what the organization wanted to accomplish and how the members wanted to behave acted as the initial equation, which provided a lens to interpret information. At Hunter Hills, the school community's true values and beliefs, their authentic desires, and their real intent were amplified. An orderly pattern emerged and was then iterated throughout the various subgroups in the system: a fractal arrangement of self-similarity. While talking about Barbara’s high expectations, involvement and her sincere caring about students and teachers, Ferrol, a counselor observed, “It’s interesting that it starts up there and then it just trickles down and then trickles out to the kids.” The following is a discussion of some of these recursive patterns evidenced at Hunter Hills.

**Participation, Involvement and Collaboration**

Involvement levels, once a challenge at Hunter Hills, have changed. As teachers have become more collaborative and participatory, so have administrators. Ferrol was impressed with the level of involvement of the principal, Barbara, who she sees as equally involved. “She’s at our meetings...she’s got a PAWS class. She’s right in there, and she expects her [assistant] administrators too, where before it was kind of a *them* kind of thing, and now it is an *our* thing.” As administrators have become more involved, so have students. Students, for example, saw a need for more peer collaboration and combined their student councils. Interestingly, as teachers have expanded their networks by teaming in various ways, the school has seen a noticeable
decrease in student group cliques. Also, where, previously, student and parent attendance at school activities was disappointing, participation in extracurricular activities has risen. Parents are also attending parent workshops and both students and parents are collaborating with school personnel on various short term focus groups, teams and committees.

Relevance, Rigor, and Relationships

As the teachers worked to increase the relevance, assure rigor, and develop relationships in their classrooms for students, they experienced the same effects for themselves. As teachers worked to differentiate instruction to increase the relevancy of their students’ work, they found their own professional development experiences becoming increasingly differentiated and more relevant. As teachers established a standard-based instructional approach to assure rigor for their students, they too found themselves engaged in the rigorous and challenging task of determining power standards, creating common assessments and designing meaningful instructional experiences. As teachers worked to personalize the schooling experience for their students by establishing smaller learning communities where relationships could form, they ended up personalizing their own work environment, forming new relationships and strengthening others through their collaboration on the design of the Smaller Learning Communities structures.

Empowerment, Efficacy and Proactivity

Teachers shifted from feeling powerless in their ability to influence students, fearful in the face of new expectations, uncertain due to new accountability, discouraged with the lack of public support, and tired of “unreasonable” demands to feeling empowered and exhibiting greater efficacy and increased proactivity. Teachers felt more confident in their ability to find solutions. They began to challenge rules and old assumptions, and take more risks. Students followed suit, showing the same proactivity. For example, students asked for approval to update the school’s dress code and then followed through. Parents, as well, became involved in proactive ways. Barbara explained it as, “The community having found its voice,” and was evidenced in the active parental support in helping students prepare for college.
Responsibility for Own Learning

Through her work to develop smaller-learning communities throughout the district, Nadine modeled for Scott a professional development setting that fostered ownership: her district-level study group participants pursued learning they determined to be critical to their work. Nadine supported the participants by finding the resources they felt they needed and being an advocate for them in support of decisions they made. Nadine viewed study group participants as capable, and had full confidence in their abilities to produce quality work, finding solutions to their complex educational issues. She said, “I’m pretty sure that people have the ability to solve the problems if they understand the nature of the problem. So I’m very intrigued at putting it out there and letting the team find the solution to make it work.” A deep level of ownership and invested leadership was the result of this approach for Scott.

Scott and the CSIP committee approached professional development at Hunter Hills the same way, with confidence in teachers, as well as high expectations. This has resulted in similar levels of ownership and invested leadership amongst the teachers. In turn, teachers have begun to interact with students similarly, by respecting the students’ responsibility for their own learning. Teachers have identified the standards of their curriculum and have communicated those standards to students, allowing them to become agents of their own learning. For example, students are now allowed to use one assignment for two classes. The students, however, are responsible to determine how the assignment meets standards for both classes and to approach the teachers with their proposals. As such, students are designing learning experiences for themselves. This may not be the way the faculty envisioned what “responsibility for their education” would look like, when it was first articulated in their mission statement in 2002. But the concept was so important to them, that once clearly understood and articulated, it became a powerful and energizing message, an unseen force, which was then channeled through dense, interlapping networks, feeding back on itself, amplifying its effects, and transforming the way
teachers and students perceive their work and their own capabilities and responsibilities towards it.

**Academic Climate**

From his first interactions with the faculty in 2001-2002, Scott emphasized his role as a learner, excited about learning new ways to think about school systems, and wanting to share his new understandings. He continued this way throughout his experience at Hunter Hills, open and transparent about his own learning process. His Co-Chair, Sandy conducted herself in this manner as well. They both modeled ongoing, collaborative learning and leading. Teacher-leaders on the CSIP leadership team have exhibited this same tendency. Pam, teacher-leader, described keeping "just one step ahead" of the colleagues she works with establishing herself as a co-learner with her group.

As the focus of a professional learning community has become prevalent at Hunter Hills, a strong message of academic excellence has emerged. Pam noticed, for example, that while previous assistant principals' interactions with teachers often centered on student behavior, interaction is now more often about academic matters. Attention to academia has evidenced itself at every level, from students' achievement on end-of-level testing, to several teachers pursuing advanced degrees. Students have noticed their teachers' attention to excellence: unlike previous years, the students included a four-page spread in the 2005-2006 yearbook articulating their teachers' educational philosophies.

**Culture of Success**

High expectations are fast replacing a satisfaction with mediocrity at Hunter Hills. Developing a culture of success and instilling student pride in themselves and their school has been important to the faculty throughout this process. Dana says, "It comes back to pride in the school." A new tradition of winning is being established as evidenced by the increase of various forms of student achievement reported in the school's newsletters and evidenced in the trophy case. Students aren't the only ones achieving. The school's newsletters for 2006-2007 contain
long lists the accomplishments of students, teachers, and administrators. As the school has repeatedly met their goals and objectives, the surrounding community has taken notice of the success of their efforts and the difference they have been making in the lives of their students. Thus the image of the school is changing. The district webpage introducing Hunter Hills has also changed to include accolades to Hunter Hills for leading the district in a school-community focus. Other schools recognize Hunter Hills as a leader and mentor for their own school improvement efforts as well. A desire articulated in Hunter Hills's vision statement that the school become a source of pride for the community and reflect a culture of success is becoming a reality.

Leadership

Building leadership is another core value that has been iterated throughout the organization. Leadership was a central theme of the work that has been going on there: a high percentage of faculty shared leadership responsibility for the forward progress of the school and an increasing level of invested leadership sustained it.

When asked if there was anything in the process at Hunter Hills that intrigued her, Nadine responded, “The capacity for developing the leadership.” Reflecting on the Local Site Facilitators who were part of the original study group, Nadine noted that several members had gone on to pursue other leadership opportunities including administrative credentials and positions. Another athletic coach has now stepped into Scott’s position at the district-level helping with school improvement.

Referring to the turnover of leadership at Hunter Hills during this process, Nadine said, “Scott’s gone, but Sandy has taken up the lead. The assistant principals leave and [the school improvement movement] continues. Dean leaves. Barbara’s a totally different leader and it continues.” Nadine believes that this was possible, because, as she said, “They were in on something that meant something to them to begin with.” Nadine reflected, “That just builds my confidence in the whole thing.”
Leadership to Support Two Phases of Change

There were two distinct phases to the change process at Hunter Hills and two very different leadership configurations supporting the primary task of each.

Phase I—Transformation

In Phase I, conditions conducive to change were established and the school experienced a reculturation and a transformation. The school community experienced a shift in culture from one of isolation to one of communication and then collaboration. The school community developed new ways of perceiving their purpose, their work and ways of working together. During Phase I, all of the organization's major subsystems were involved in a dramatic upheaval. Stakeholder beliefs about teaching and learning and their underlying assumptions were challenged as they grappled with disconfirming data and new information. Mental models were changed as a result. Confusion, uncertainty, vulnerability, role ambiguity, a feeling of disorder, a lack of clarity, issues of power and status and a lack of relational trust were evident as the organization went through extreme morphing. Then through a process of emergence the group experienced self-organization (Jantsch, 1980). Wheatley, in an interview with Sternberger (1995, p.1), described the discomfort typically associated with this process:

On a personal level, it's a process of going from a clear sense of who I am, to letting in information that threatens me, to realizing the information is so important and so big that I can't stay the same and deal with it. It means going through a period of falling apart and letting go so that I can recreate myself to work better and fit better into the environment that has pressured me to change.

For the organization, Wheatley offered:

I think what may be helpful to school administrators is the realization that all living systems try to resist change at the beginning in that they tune out information about the necessity to change. After that information gets inside the system and people start playing with it, expanding it, and deciding that something here is very important, then the system has to be...
willing to let go of its present sense of itself. It must dissolve to recreate itself so that it fits in
the environment that required it to change. (Sternberger, 1995, p. 1)

The formal leadership during this phase at Hunter Hills included a principal who was willing
to step back completely and let the faculty redefine themselves. He did not interfere with the
process. The lack of this administrative involvement in Phase I was balanced by consistency in
emergent teacher-leadership. Two teacher-leaders became primary change facilitators. They did
this, however, without position power, in fact, in spite of many conditions, events and actions
which normally would negate power among peers. Their power came instead from the
congruency and integrity of their actions, the consistency of their focus on students as the true
center. The more centered their actions, the more compelling was the strange attractor: the belief
among the school community that together they could actually make a difference in a student’s
life.

Athletic coaches as change facilitators.

The teacher-leaders, during Phase I, the years of the school’s greatest upheaval, were athletic
coaches as well as classroom teachers. Their experiences as athletic coaches may have
contributed in a large way to their ability to facilitate the movement through this difficult phase
and is worth further study for its important implications for future school change initiatives. As
successful athletic coaches, they each had certain skills and abilities, tendencies and inclinations
that worked together to further the change process in Phase I. The following is a discussion of
some of the tendencies that were attributed to the teacher-leaders by interviewees at Hunter Hills.

Good coaches are big picture people, system-thinkers. They regularly work towards a long-
term vision while attending to short-term goals. They are skilled at clarifying a vision for the
team, getting others to see and buy into that vision and checking performance against that vision
often. Athletic coaches are skilled in the process of continuous improvement. It is the foundation
of their work. They are goal-oriented and skilled at keeping the focus of the group on the team’s
goals. They are practically obsessed with results. They assess performance daily, review results of
assessments continuously, and make necessary changes immediately.

Athletic coaches are skilled at the facilitation of teams and team building; it's what their job
is all about. Good coaches are program builders. They build capacity over time. They are skilled
in recruitment, and can spot talent, seeing where certain people can contribute to and benefit from
their programs.

Coaches use their intuition and don’t ignore hunches. Coaches are observant, watchful and
aware of little things that could escalate into big problems. Good coaches have a capacity to
notice more and as such have what Fullan (2005) called a receptive alertness as opposed to stand
back analysis. Athletic coaches are used to making difficult decisions under a lot of pressure.
They often put everything on the line and are used to taking risks.

Coaches have a different kind of relationship with students and parents than most other
teachers due to the emotional, physical and social aspects of the job they do. They often have a
good pulse on the community. Coaches are used to being loved and hated by many at the same
time. Good coaches must deal with people who are experiencing extreme emotions, and though
they themselves can be hurt and disappointed, they have acquired communication and resiliency
skills for this type of difficult interaction.

Coaches work with the truth and are honest about strengths and weaknesses. They don’t sugar
clove things, but at the same time are skilled at progressive interactions, interactions that move
people and programs forward. Coaches are mentors; as such they are skilled at encouraging
people to meet their personal goals and sometimes reach beyond their own goals to be the best
that they can be. Coaches inspire and motivate. They build leaders.

The best coaches are humble leaders who recognize and applaud strengths of other people
and teams. They are character builders, usually emphasizing honor and respect on the field,
integrity, persistence, and determination. They don’t give up. They typically hold high standards
for themselves as well. The coaches in this case were hard workers with little egos who pushed
themselves to meet the same rigorous expectations as everyone else. This led to trust among the faculty and other subgroups. Coaches instill trust and depend on it, so trust is never taken lightly.

Coaches are also action-oriented and this was critical to the change process at Hunter Hills. It is sometimes hard for leaders to know where to start in a process as complex as organizational change, and sometimes school leaders avoid or water-down the most difficult tasks of school improvement in fear of almost certain resistance. These teacher-leaders jumped in where it seemed sensible to them and tackled the difficult times head-on.

Professional dialogue.

These teacher-leaders learned that there would never be a best time or a best entry point for the change process in a large organization, because people come to understandings at different times depending on their own personal connections. The assistant principal, for example, shared that the beginning of the movement toward change at Hunter Hills was due to issues surrounding Channel One. A parent, however, remembered preparation for accreditation as being the catalyst for change. For one teacher, the start of the transformation was the CSIP mandate and for another the catalyst was the federal SLC grant. These four factors were important to the process, but occurred in four different years. The organization, the professional learning community, it appears did not exist for individual members until the point at which the professional conversation began to make sense to them.

Conversation, professional dialogue was at the hub of change at Hunter Hills. The most consistent factor working to further change among interviewees was the talking that teachers did on a regular basis. As expressed by Sandy, “Without that nothing would have happened, nothing!” Scott was just as adamant, “Talking is the thing that made everything else possible.” Just how integral dialogue has been to this process was evident when observing how difficult it was for interviewees to even recall how the school functioned before the mechanism for on-going dialogue was in place. This is not surprising to Sandy who says that before a culture of collaboration was established, teachers, herself included, viewed their teaching roles as
"independent contractors." The professional dialogue that became integral to the organization member’s new ways of working together continued to be just as vital in Phase II.

Phase II—Culture of Collaboration → Culture of Continuous Improvement

In the second phase of the change process, a culture of collaboration was fairly established and habits of continuous improvement became institutionalized. Collaboration at Hunter Hills was very much focused on teacher’s core work processes for the purpose of increased student success. Results, better assessments and more accurate and timely data were constant concerns. “A quality teacher in each classroom” was practically a mantra among teacher-leaders. There was also a dramatic and sudden expansion of shared and invested teacher-leadership representing nearly 75% of the faculty: a manifestation of the onset of initial conditions, a tenet of chaos theory. The context of the school was then conducive to change: more adaptive and flexible, and better able to cope with fluctuations, which were a natural part of their unpredictable and complex interdependent relationship with the environment. Change in this phase focused on further implementation of structural components, modifications for improvements and self-renewal.

Hunter Hills, in Phase II, benefited from a very involved, relationship-oriented instructional leader as principal. Barbara was curriculum oriented and understood well the value of the work being done by the faculty with curriculum, instruction and assessment and so was able to give added support to that effort. Hunter Hills also benefited from the wisdom of Barbara as a critical friend, illuminating for the school community things they were perhaps too close to see, such as the need to slow the pace to conserve, recoup and refocus energy while they engaged in some important preparatory work.

When Barbara came to the school she immediately saw a need for recognition and celebration of the school community’s efforts and began acting on that need despite the fact that the teacher-leaders at the school were not attention seekers. In addition to making people feel good and boosting morale, celebrating helped raise expectations, helped members see connections better,
and helped increase motivation. Celebrating also offered opportunities for others to self-check, keeping the chaotic movement centered.

The new principal was also helpful in extending awareness of Hunter Hills's change process beyond the school's boundaries, impacting conditions surrounding the school, helping to institutionalize the process throughout the district, thereby providing their efforts added protection. Her unquestionable commitment to the transformation and the congruency of her daily actions with the school's mission, "Students will graduate with the skills to be successful" was perhaps her greatest contribution, as it helped to strengthen the organization's identity and intent, deepening its sense of purpose and meaning, thereby creating a surge of energy which increased the influence of that powerful message and fortified the compelling draw of that strange attractor—the hope of making a difference in student success.

Recommendations

Chaos theory as a theory of action and self-organization as a strategy for change could be disconcerting propositions for educational leaders; however, findings from this study make the proposal worth considering. Leading the school organization as if it were a machine, pretending that it functions in mechanistic ways has not worked. Leading the school organization as if it is a complex living system by not ignoring its unpredictable, non-linear characteristics seems a much more viable proposition. Findings from this study suggest that the organization as a living system will self-organize effectively if open to disconfirming data, provided with information that is shared widely, empowered with freedom to act on new information and engaged in frequent self-referencing against its clear identity and true intent. The crucial and influential task for the school leader then becomes facilitating the organization in collectively determining its identity and intent around student achievement and helping members focus on that identity and intent. The freedom called for in the self-organization process precludes heavy controls. Control was not correlated with order and functionality in the change process at Hunter Hills; rather, meaning-making was.
According to the findings of this study, the education leader interested in reculturation, which is at the heart of second-order change, or transformation, must become a facilitator of teacher-led, collective meaning-making.

The change process, based on chaos theory and the sciences of complexity, when applied to open social systems operating in a quantum world are full of paradoxes. One of the most intriguing, as found in this study, was that the change process leading to the school's positive transformation or reculturation, in spite of its unpredictable and nonlinear complexity, is ultimately based on simplicity and natural human tendencies. The change process at Hunter Hills involved deep human emotion and an unrelenting attention to relationships and coherency: purpose and meaningfulness. This stands in sharp contrast to the century old mechanistic model of the American high school that has emphasized isolation of people and fragmentation of ideas. The result of this organic process has been an adaptive and flexible organization, better able to co-evolve with its environment, better able to meet the changing needs of its children.

The purpose of this study was to better understand the organizational change process in the American high school. Rather than a surface-level investigation of events and actions involved in this change process, the single case study design allowed a deeper exploration of the thinking behind those actions. The study's longitudinal aspects revealed order in the seemingly chaotic and disorderly change process at Hunter Hills in which the culture at Hunter Hills shifted from one of isolation, to collaboration and ultimately to a culture of continuous improvement.

Several aspects of leadership at the participant school suggest the need for further study regarding leadership in second-order change or transformation. With much research on organizational change today pointing to the significant role of the principal in the transformation of schools, it is intriguing that for a time the absence or invisibility of this albeit well-experienced and progressive principal was a definite factor in the reculturation of Hunter Hills. The untrained element of leadership exhibited by the emerging teacher-leaders in this case, as well as the role of these teacher-leaders in the school before and after the movement began also raises questions.
about the types of training necessary for this type of work, as well as who we are training for
these types of tasks. The subtle differences between shared leadership necessary to the
functioning of school-level Professional Learning Communities, and invested leadership which
suggests a greater sense of duty, responsibility and ownership—a key factor in the school
community’s comprehensive, school-wide, self-organization at Hunter Hills—also warrants
further study.
# APPENDIX A

## DATA LIST

### 1. Documents

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II. Interviews

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APPENDIX B

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWS

Guiding Questions for Administrative and Teacher-Leader Interviews

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this study about your school. Your school was chosen for this study because of the change efforts you have experienced the past several years. I will be asking you questions about how things are done at your school and how they have changed over the years. This interview will be recorded so that I can focus on our discussion without taking detailed notes. You are free to stop the tape recorder at any time, and whatever is said will remain confidential.

1. Tell me about yourself.
   a. What is your position here at this school?
   b. What other leadership experience do you have?
   c. How long have you been at this school? What brought you here?
   d. What has been your training and/or previous experience with leading and/or participating in planned organizational change?

2. Tell me about this school.
   a. How would you describe this school?
   b. What are some of its unique characteristics?
   c. What special challenges does it face?
   d. How is this school like and/or unlike other schools you have worked at?
   e. How would you describe the culture and climate at this school?
   f. What would stand out about this school to a visitor? What about this school might not be so obvious?

3. How has this school changed over the past five years? (purpose, educational program, culture, climate, leadership, community-building, professional development)

4. What factors have influenced the change process here at this school?
   a. What factors have played a role in change at this school (events, actions, procedures, relationships, conditions, resources, decisions, skills, attitudes, goals)?
   b. Which factors have inhibited change here at this school?
   c. Why were changes needed at this school? How were these needs ascertained?
   d. What are the most important factors that drive the day to day decisions at this school?
5. Tell me about change leadership at this school.
   a. Who has had the most influence on change at this school?
   b. Who are the formal teacher/leaders of change here at this school? What is their role?
   c. How were they selected?
   d. Who are the informal leaders at this school? How do they influence the process?
   e. To what extent have the students, parents and administration influenced change at this school? How have they done this?
   f. Describe the role of outside change agents and/or evaluators in the change process.

6. Tell me about consensus and shared vision at this school.
   a. What is your vision for this school?
   b. To what extent has this faculty understood and embraced the vision and mission of this school? How do these ideas get decided? How are these ideas passed on to new teachers?
   c. To what extent does everyone agree on the specific outcomes your school is pursuing?
   d. How does the school get buy-in beyond enthusiasts?
   e. To what extent has there been resistance to change at this school? What happens when someone at this school disagrees or resists a change?

7. Discuss the process of change at this school.
   a. What was the order of change at this school? What happened first? Later?
   b. What has surprised you about the process? What are some of the unplanned changes which have occurred during the past few years?
   c. What factors influencing this process do you feel have been out of your control?
   d. To what extent has the pace of change been what you expected?
   e. What has gone smoothly? What has been difficult?
   f. What has been the least effective strategy for going about change at this school? What has been the most effective strategy?
   g. If you were going to lead the change process again at this school what would you do differently?

8. What sustains the change efforts at this school?
   a. What changes have been sustained? What factors or forces have contributed to this?
   b. What changes have been dropped? What factors or forces have played a role in this?
   c. To what extent is this school committed to change? What are the indicators of this commitment? How did this commitment develop?
   d. What provides the faculty and staff continuing motivation to change?
   e. What support have you received from outside sources (district, state, community)?
Guiding Questions for Teacher Interviews

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this study about your school. Your school was chosen for this study because of the change efforts your school has experienced the past several years. I will be asking you questions about how things are done at your school and how they have changed over the years. This interview will be recorded so that I can focus on our discussion without taking detailed notes. You are free to stop the tape recorder at any time, and whatever is said will remain confidential.

1. Tell me about yourself.
   a. What is your assignment? What other teaching experience do you have?
   b. How long have you been at this school?
   c. Have you taught at any other school? If so, what brought you to this school?

2. Tell me about this school.
   a. How would you describe this school?
   b. What are some of its unique characteristics?
   c. What special challenges does it face?
   d. How is this school like and/or unlike other schools you have worked at?
   e. How would you describe the culture and climate at this school?
   f. What would stand out about this school to a visitor? What about this school might not be so obvious?

3. How has this school changed over the past five years? (purpose, educational program, culture, climate, community-building, professional development, leadership)

4. What factors have influenced change here at this school?
   a. Why were changes needed at this school? How was that determined?
   b. What factors have played a role in change at this school (events, actions, procedures, resources, decisions, skills, attitudes, goals)?
   c. Which factors have inhibited change here at this school?
   d. What are the most important factors that drive the day to day decisions at this school?

5. Tell me about change leadership at this school.
   a. Who is in charge of the change effort at this school?
   b. Who has had the most influence on change at this school?
   c. Who are the formal teacher/leaders of change here at this school? What is their role?
   d. How were they selected?
   e. Who are the informal leaders at this school? How do they influence the process?
   f. To what extent have the students, parents and administration influenced change at this school? How have they done this?
6. Tell me about consensus and shared vision at this school.
   a. To what extent has this faculty understood and embraced the vision and mission of this school? How do these ideas get decided? How are these ideas passed on to new teachers?
   b. To what extent does everyone agree on the specific outcomes your school is pursuing?
   c. How does the school get buy-in beyond enthusiasts?
   d. To what extent has there been resistance to change at this school? What happens when someone at this school disagrees or resists a change?

7. Discuss the process of change at this school.
   a. What was the order of change at this school? What happened first? Later?
   b. What has gone smoothly? What has been difficult?
   c. If you were going to lead the change process at this school what would you have done differently?

8. What sustains the change efforts at this school?
   a. What changes have been sustained? What factors or forces have contributed to this?
   b. What changes have been dropped? What factors or forces have played a role in this?
   c. To what extent is this school committed to change? What are the indicators of this commitment? How did this commitment develop?
   d. What provides the faculty and staff continuing motivation to change?
   c. How does the administration support change? How does the district office support change?
Guiding Questions for Community Interviews

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this study about your school. Your school was chosen for this study because of the change efforts your school has experienced the past several years. I will be asking you questions about how things are done at your school and how they have changed over the years. This interview will be recorded so that I can focus on our discussion without taking detailed notes. You are free to stop the tape recorder at any time, and whatever is said will remain confidential.

1. Tell me about yourself.
   a. What is your relationship with the school?
   b. Do you have children at this school? How many? What grades?
   c. How many years have you been a parent of a student(s) at this school?

2. Tell me about this school.
   a. How would you describe this school?
   b. What are some of its unique characteristics?
   c. What special challenges does it face?
   d. How is this school like and/or unlike other schools you are familiar with?
   e. How would you describe the culture and climate at this school?
   f. What would stand out about this school to a visitor? What about this school might not be so obvious?

3. How has this school changed over the past five years? (purpose, educational program, culture, climate, community-building, professional development, leadership)

4. What factors have influenced change here at this school?
   a. Why were changes needed at this school? How was that determined?
   b. What factors have played a role in change at this school (events, actions, procedures, resources, decisions, skills, attitudes, goals)?
   c. Which factors have inhibited change here at this school?
   d. What are the most important factors that drive the day to day decisions at this school?

5. Tell me about change leadership at this school.
   a. Who is in charge of the change effort at this school?
   b. Who are the formal teacher/leaders of change here at this school? What is their role?
   c. How were they selected?
   d. Who are the informal leaders at this school? How do they influence the process?
   e. To what extent have the students, parents and administration influenced change at this school? How have they done this?

6. Tell me about consensus and shared vision at this school.
   a. To what extent has the students and community members understood and embraced the vision and mission of the school? What are the indicators of this?
b. To what extent do the students and community members agree on the specific outcomes your school is pursuing? What are the indicators of this agreement?
c. How does this school get buy-in among students and community members?
d. To what extent has there been resistance to change at this school? What happens when community members at this school disagree or resist a change?

7. Discuss the process of change at this school.
   a. What was the order of change at this school? What happened first? Later?
   b. What has gone smoothly? What has been difficult?

8. What sustains the change efforts at this school?
   a. What changes have been sustained? What factors or forces have contributed to this?
   b. What changes have been dropped? What factors or forces have played a role in this?
   c. To what extent is this school committed to change? What are the indicators of this commitment? How did this commitment develop?
   d. What provides the faculty and staff continuing motivation to change?
   e. How does the community support change at this school?
APPENDIX C

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM MOCK ACCREDITATION
TEAM VISIT DECEMBER 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Try this…</th>
<th>In order to…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The principal and other administration takes visible leadership of the school improvement process.</td>
<td>Instill confidence and solidarity among the school community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a graphic model showing all school improvement components and their relation to each other.</td>
<td>Enable the school community to better understand the big picture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put in writing a plan for rotation of CSIP team membership and their leadership, clarifying roles and expectations.</td>
<td>Build leadership capacity and maintain friendly, supportive relationships among the faculty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put in writing an ongoing timeline for continuous improvement.</td>
<td>Firmly establish the continuous improvement cycle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinstitute regular Dept Chair meetings with Principal. Clarify roles, responsibility and authority of Department Chairs and distinguish between roles of Department Chairs and the school improvement committee.</td>
<td>Ensure efficiency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement administrative study group to look at student achievement progress on an ongoing basis.</td>
<td>Increase awareness of administration to school improvement processes and Smaller Learning Communities goals and plans. Increase respect and confidence of the faculty in leadership. Model continuous learning. Increase data-driven, decision-making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal and CSIP team to meet with PTA board to discuss school goals and determine together how the PTA can best support school goals.</td>
<td>Establish more effective two-way communication with parents and community. Increase parent involvement. Establish the role of PTA and community councils as partners in education. Increase a laser-like focus on school goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institute a vehicle for ongoing communication with students to provide results of surveys and so forth, to allow discussion, input, feedback, (i.e. 10 min in first period every other week).</td>
<td>Allow students to better understand the big picture and changes that are occurring in the school. Increase two-way communication with students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator or a Staff Developer to serve as full time instructional leader in order to provide high level of instructional support for the school’s collaborative and comprehensive school improvement mechanisms.</td>
<td>Provide ongoing support and supervision of the school’s growing collaborative culture consisting of study teams, peer coaching, ongoing analysis of student work, data collection/analysis, development of common assessments and assessments for DRSLs, classroom application and improvement of best practices, curriculum design, integration and mapping, as well as determining and managing formal professional development needs and activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review ELL program procedures (identification, etc.) Possibly establish an inquiry group for next year to study ELL issues &amp; strategies (District person to give you technical assistance).</td>
<td>Lessen the academic achievement gap between subgroups. Assure an effective identification process. Increase differentiated instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue to improve data collection, disaggregation and analysis.</td>
<td>Meet school goal of a student-centered, data-driven culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determine specific assessments for assessing student progress towards DRSLs.</td>
<td>Assess school’s progress towards preparing students for post-education experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Include explanation of Smaller Learning Communities components and implementation plan in your report and in the graphic model of your school’s approach.</td>
<td>Clarify how all improvements are a part of establishing an effective and continually improving professional learning community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete the Northwest report process (include Media Dept. assessment) to include in report.</td>
<td>Meet accreditation requirements (check to see if this is still needed).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Include the fruits of your labors in your report: Power standards with their enduring understandings and essential questions. If you do not have assessments for these yet explain where you are in the process in your report.</td>
<td>Communicate clear expectations. Validate hard work. Communicate with newcomers. Keep reminding stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make connections for students (in day to day classroom learning activities) between the curriculum/ school processes and DRSL’s. Be explicit about enduring understandings in day to day classroom learning experiences.</td>
<td>Deeper and more sophisticated understanding of core curriculum objectives by students. Bring about school goals &amp; objectives (DRSLs).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D

HUNTER HILLS COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANS 2002-2007

2002-2003 October Version

Comprehensive School Improvement Plan
(drafted October 2002 for the 2002-2003 school year)

Mission
The mission of Hunter Hills is to combine the resources of students, parents, educators, and our community to foster a safe learning environment where mutual respect is evident, students are valued as participants in their own education, and students acquire the desire and skill necessary to become life long learners. With this collective effort, Hunter Hills will continue to be a source of pride and a valued asset to our community.

Desired Results for Student Learning
Responsibility/Character Development
Collaboration
Complex Thinking
Employability
Lifelong Learning
Effective Communication
Mission
The Mission of Hunter Hills High School is to combine the resources of students, parents, educators, and our community to foster a safe learning environment where:

- Mutual respect is evident
- Students are valued participants in their own education
- Students acquire the desire and skills necessary to become lifelong learners

With this collaborative effort, Hunter Hills High School will continue to be a source of pride and a valued asset to our community.

Desired Results for Student Learning
Be responsible citizens with high moral character
Be able to work with others
Be complex thinkers
Be employable
Be life long learners
Be effective communicators

School Goals
Goal 1. Raise academic achievement levels for all students.
Goal 2. Improve student attitudes toward school.
Goal 3. Prepare all students to successfully transition to post-secondary education and careers.
Goal 4. Build HHHS’s capacity to create, support, and sustain personal learning communities for students.
Slogan
Learning is not a spectator sport!

Vision Statement
We believe that Hunter Hills High School is a Professional Learning Community and will be a school chosen as exemplary by students and parents for its safety, academic excellence and school community.
1. Our staff will be respectful, involved and endeavor to develop curriculum that is integrated, relevant and applicable.
2. Our administration will visibly and proactively support teachers, students, and the community.
3. Our students will graduate as good citizens with skills necessary for life long learning.

Mission Statement
The mission of Hunter Hills High School is to combine the resources of students, parents, educators, and our community to foster a safe learning environment where:
- Mutual respect is evident
- Students are valued participants in their own education
- Students acquire the desire and skill necessary to become lifelong learners
With this collaborative effort, Hunter Hills High School will continue to be a source of pride and a valued asset to our community.

Desired Results for Student Learning
Student will graduate with the skills necessary to be successful.
Skills: The Four C’s
1. Communication
2. Collaboration
3. Critical Thinking
4. Citizenship

School Goals
Goal 1. Raise academic achievement levels for all students.
Goal 2. Improve student attitudes toward school.
Goal 3. Prepare all students to successfully transition to post-secondary education and careers.
Goal 4. Build HHHS’s capacity to create, support, and sustain personal learning communities for students.
Vision Slogan
Learning is not a spectator sport!

Vision Statement
We believe that Hunter Hills High School is a Professional Learning Community and will be a school chosen as exemplary by students and parents for its safety, academic excellence and school community.

Mission
The mission of HHHS:
1. Our staff will be respectful, involved and endeavor to develop curriculum that is integrated, relevant and applicable.
2. Our administration will visibly and proactively support teachers, students, and the community.
3. Our students will graduate as good citizens with skills necessary for life long learning.

Desired Results for Student Learning
Student will graduate with the skills necessary to be successful.
Skills: The Four C’s
1. Communication
2. Collaboration
3. Critical Thinking
4. Citizenship

School-wide Goals
Goal 1. Students will write clearly and expressively as measured by a score of three on a six trait writing rubric.

Goal 2. By the time of graduation, 90% of students will increase their reading scores by 10 DRP units as measured by the DRP.

Goal 3. Decisions will be driven by a variety of accurate, adequate and timely data as evidenced by:
   b. Ongoing individual and collaborative analysis of student work.
   c. The development of common assessments within each department during the 2004-2005 school year.

Goal 4. Improved communication between all stakeholders as evidenced by a 5% increase on survey items that address communication.

Goal 5. All stakeholders will feel connected to HHHS as evidenced by increased participation in classes, extra-curricular activities, collaborative teamwork, PTC, and SEOP’s.
Goal 6. 60% of mathematics students will perform at a level of sufficient mastery or greater in Geometry and 50% of mathematics students will perform at a level of sufficient mastery or greater in Algebra.

Smaller Learning Community Goals
Goal 1. Raise academic achievement levels for all students.
Goal 2. Improve student attitudes toward school.
Goal 3. Prepare all students to successfully transition to post-secondary education and careers.
Goal 4. Build HHHS’ capacity to create, support, and sustain personal learning communities for students.
2006-2007

Comprehensive School Improvement Plan
(revised August 2006 for the 2006-2007 school year)

Vision Slogan
Learning in not a spectator sport!

Vision Statement
We believe that HHHS is a Professional Learning Community and will be a school chosen as exemplary by student and parents for its safety, academic excellence, and school community.

Mission
The mission of HHHS:
1. Our students will be active participants in their education and graduate as productive citizens with the skills necessary for life-long learning.
2. Our parents/community will proactively participate in student learning.
3. Our staff will be respectful and involved and endeavor to collaboratively develop a standard based curriculum.
4. Our administration will visibly and proactively support students, teachers and the community.

Desired Results for Student Learning
Student will graduate with the skills necessary to be successful.

Skills: The Four C’s
1. Communication
2. Collaboration
3. Critical Thinking
4. Citizenship

School-wide Goals:
Goal 1. All students will write clearly and expressively as measured by a score of three or better on each of the six traits on a writing rubrics. Focus: Organization and Conventions

Goal 2. Improve reading comprehension of all students with specific focus on increasing the number of students advancing from level one to level two and from level two to level three on criterion referenced tests.

Goal 3. 60% (shifted to 65%) of mathematics students will perform at a level of sufficient mastery or greater in Geometry and 50% of mathematics students will perform at a level of sufficient mastery or greater in Algebra.

Goal 4. The Hunter Hills High community will share ownership in creating and sustaining a culture of success as measured by participation in school related activities, student achievement and stakeholder satisfaction.

Smaller Learning Community Goals:
Goal 1. Raise academic achievement levels for all students.
Goal 2. Improve student attitudes toward school.
Goal 3. Prepare all students to successfully transition to post-secondary education and careers.
Goal 4. Build HHHS's capacity to create, support, and sustain personal learning communities for students.
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