HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR EFFECTIVENESS IN LEADING DISTRICT INITIATED HIGH SCHOOL REFORM: AN ANALYSIS OF HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS PREVIOUSLY ENGAGED IN HIGH SCHOOL REFORM IN AN URBAN TEXAS SCHOOL DISTRICT

A Record of Study

by

CARLOS HUMBERTO RIOS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 2012

Major Subject: Educational Administration

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ABSTRACT

High School Principals' Perceptions of Their Effectiveness in Leading District Initiated High School Reform: An Analysis of High School Principals Previously Engaged in High School Reform in an Urban Texas School District. (May 2012)

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Current research has described a changed central office perspective that not only includes campus principals as part of the district's leadership team, but also focuses on developing principals' instructional abilities with the purpose of supporting school reform. However, to date, research has not provided examples of a successful relationship between campus principals as a collective group and the district (central office) leadership team attempting to implement district-wide high school reform.

This study was conducted in order to examine the perceptions of high school principals (in an urban school district in Texas) toward district-wide initiated high school reform. Methods used for data collection included semi-structured interviews, review of available artifacts, and case profile development. Questions derived from the researcher's review of the literature and ongoing professional interest were the basis for dialogue during the semi-structured interviews. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and unitized. The data were further organized into categories and subcategories.

The analysis of principals' perceptions provided insight and helped develop an understanding of obstacles that high school principals perceive in implementing district-led high school reform. This study has concluded that the district goals and mission do not define the daily operations of a campus. Instead, the district goals and mission are often reprioritized because principals are insecure, believe they have a better understanding of the local context than does the central office, and are oftentimes frustrated by the central office's political machinations.

Recommendations include suggestions on how to eliminate these obstacles, improve the ability of principals to implement district-led high school reform, and how to suggest actions for the improvement of the high school reform process at the central office level.

DEDICATION

Reverend Richard Guerra, Oblate of Mary Immaculate

The time, effort, and passion employed in the completion of this work are dedicated to my friend, mentor, and father figure – Fr. Richard Guerra, O.M.I.

The time you spent with me doing high school homework, the books you encouraged me to read, and the conversations that made me believe a college education was possible have combined to create in me the passion for lifelong learning and the courage to become my mother's first college graduate. It is my sincerest hope that I can share with others the love you have shared with me.

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I am especially grateful and indebted to my doctoral committee who continuously guided and challenged me toward scholarly work. My committee chair, Dr. Linda Skrla, and my committee members, Dr. Lynn Burlbaw, Dr. Kathryn McKenzie, and Dr. James Scheurich, are all deserving of much more gratitude than what is expressed in these few lines. I also want to extend my deepest appreciation for the enduring support of Ms. Joyce Nelson, who always returned telephone calls, e-mails, and provided clear guidance and direction.

My most sincere expression of gratitude for the principals who participated in this study and offered their personal thoughts and emotions about their important and difficult work.

I wrote the following acknowledgments, as a motivational strategy for me, approximately one year before I finished my dissertation. It is mostly because of these contributions to my life and a strong desire to validate them, that I have completed this work.

My mentor and friend, Charles Garabedian, was a true partner in this endeavor. He spent countless hours reading and editing my proposal and eventual dissertation. Without his help and encouragement, the completion of this project may have been delayed beyond this point of completion.

I am indebted to my dearest and lifelong friends, Juan Jose Aguirre and Robert Luna, for helping to establish my relationship with Texas A&M University. I transferred to Texas A&M as an undergraduate student from Angelo State University as a result of

the encouragement and support given to me by Juan and Robert. Juan and Robert's exciting letters about college life and sincere belief in my unrealized potential provided me the courage to sign the college transfer application that Juan filled out for me. Your true friendship, love, and charting of my educational course will forever be appreciated.

A most special and heartfelt expression of love to my friends who by their love have helped to mold me: Jesse Adams, Jose Alvarez, Roland Cantu, Rafael Castillo, Carlos Cruz, Nemesio Diez, Ramiro Frausto, Jorge Garza, Jesse Gomez, Arnoldo Gutierrez, Rudy Hernandez, Rene Hernandez, Carlos Martinez, Marcos Martinez, Tomas Martinez, Patrick Patterson, Freddy Perales, Gilbert Polanco, Fiacro Ramirez, Oscar Sierra, David Torres, Andres Zapata, and Agustin Zaragoza. Only God's hand could have created such a tremendous support group.

The educators in the San Felipe Del Rio Consolidated Independent School District loved and mentored me as a student and/or colleague. Each of you taught me by example that the most important element for successful teaching and learning is a loving and supportive teacher-to-student relationship: Roberto De Leon (fifth grade teacher), Linda Fernandez (sixth grade teacher), Roberto Fernandez (superintendent),Yolanda Fernandez (English III teacher), Raul Hernandez (fourth grade teacher), Cathy Leghman (Algebra I & II teacher), Gloria McGuirre (first grade teacher), Dolores Ortiz (second grade teacher), Manuel Polanco (basketball coach), Debbie Salinas (English II teacher), and Maria Scott (kindergarten teacher).

My great-uncle Maximiano and great-aunt Santos and great-uncle Jesus and great-aunt Elvira, along with their children and grandchildren, accepted me in their

homes during my early childhood. They provided for me and loved me as one of their own. Their love and constant presence in my life created a sense of protection and work ethic that has helped form me into the educator that I am today.

My mother’s children, Vicky, Jesse, and Ricardo; cousins, Blanca, Cesar, and Jesse; my mother’s brother, Jesus Lopez and his wife, Francisca; my grandmother, Leandra Lopez; and my great-aunt, Petrita Lopez, transformed a childhood filled with poverty into the richest of settings. Their love is one of the most important possessions in my life.

The care and compassion that my sister-in-law has given to my brother in his time of need has modeled for me a true Christian life and motivated me to focus my talents on this work. She will forever be my sister.

My wife, Ana Maria, continuously provided love and support to our children (Corina Leah, Carlos Orlando, Victoria Iliana, and Emma Irene) while I was away at work, classes, or the library. Knowing that my children had Ana’s undivided attention and endless love allowed me to concentrate on this work. Her unremitting gifts of kindness, compassion, and love endured and combined to make me a complete and better person.

My wife’s parents, Rene and Enedelia Arredondo, not only gave to me a wife who has loved and supported me, they also provided their encouragement and supported us in every way possible.

I must above all else acknowledge the unconditional love of my mother, Virginia Esperanza Rios, and the sacrifice she made to ensure her children lived in and loved the

United States of America. As a child, she ensured that I embraced God and the English language. She demanded that I speak, think, and even pray in English. My mother, by example, taught us to love prayer, the pledge of allegiance, the national anthem, public schooling, and all our American institutions. I know of no one wiser or harder working than my mother.

Finally, I know that nothing is possible without our Almighty God. I give honor and praise to my Lord Jesus Christ who has provided much more than I have needed and deserved.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Education scholars, business leaders, and public school educators increasingly argue that the size of the modern high school is a major obstacle to safe, efficient, and productive schools. Because of this research-based criticism, school district leaders across the United States have sought to redesign their large high schools into smaller schools. Redesign efforts have been increasing, encouraged and supported by prominent philanthropist organizations including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, and the Open Society Foundation. The advocacy for school redesign has been further spurred by the need to demonstrate increased student achievement in standardized test scores as required by state and federal legislation (Anagnostopoulos, 2003; Antrop-Gonzalez, 2006; Cuban, 2005, 2007; Neild & Balfanz, 2006; Oxley & Kassissieh, 2008; Raynor, 2006).

The advocates present many reasons in support of high school redesign. A few of the reasons include:

1. Bringing intimacy and safety to large, unsafe, impersonal schools.
2. Providing a more relevant curriculum that will make high school graduates instant contributors to the organization that employs them.
3. Preparing students for a rigorous post high school education (Cohen, 2001; Cuban, 2010; Salinas & Reidel, 2007).

This record of study follows the style of *Educational Administration Quarterly*.

The driving force of the dialogue surrounding high school reform and redesign does not include an impetus rooted in local desire to reduce achievement gaps between minority and non-minority groups, improve graduation rates, or better prepare local graduates for college success. More often than not, the impetus is a collection of unrelated desires expressed by legislators, practitioners, business professionals, and civic leaders. Many conferences, workshops, seminars, consultants, and some professional literature have addressed the issue of high school reform as a major element of high stakes and high standards issues (Anagnostopoulos, 2003; Vander Ark, 2002). For example, Cohen (2001) explained that standards-based accountability as an impetus for reform is usually driven by outside agents such as legislators. However, other researchers such as Anagnostopoulos (2003) found that improving standardized test results often drive the urgency for high school redesign plans. Cuban (2005, 2007) and Cohen (2001) both indicated that reform as an effort to meet standards based accountability is usually encouraged in a complimentary way by business and civic leaders. However, Cohen (2001) and Hochreiter (2007) stressed that reform is most effective when it is openly entered into by the most common community stakeholders, which are often comprised primarily of teachers, administrators, students, and parents.

The debate surrounding high school reform has been rich in participation but limited in results. This fact is most obvious when considering the academic achievement of the economically disadvantaged and minority students. Therefore, this study sought to expand on the high school reform debate by analyzing the obstacles experienced by practitioners implementing reform.

Framing the debate is Cuban (2010) who indicated that at one end of the spectrum, school reform is driven by those who believe that changing merely the size of a school makes a major difference in student learning. The other end of the school reform debate spectrum is driven by business leaders and legislators who believe accountability will improve student learning significantly. Researchers (Anagnostopoulos & Rutledge, 2007; Cohen, 2001; Cuban, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 1997) outside of the direct high school redesign/reform debate warn that regardless of the strategies used to support reform, improving the instructional practices of the teachers in the classroom is the most important key to ultimately increasing student learning.

It must be stated that the high school principal, who was the focus of this study, is often referred to by researchers as the instructional leader in the campus organization (Cohen, 2001; Marks & Nance, 2007). As the instructional leader, the principal is ultimately responsible for all instructional and non-academic management aspects of a high school. However, principals are often distracted from their instructional and supervisory leadership roles by those who also have a role to play in the leadership of the campus organization. Marks and Nance (2007) elaborate on these internal and external factors affecting principals in their instructional and supervisory leadership. Internally, principals deal with professional teaching staffs. This aforementioned fact is constantly complicated by external forces. For example, Marks and Nance (2007) pointed out that “Externally, multiple accountability contexts – states, school districts, local boards, school councils, and parent associations – have the ability to support or constrain the influence of school principals" (p. 4).

More recent literature does not dismiss the existence of internal and external distractions to the school principal's focus on instructional leadership. However, this research does offer the perspective that school districts should be viewed as internal partners in school reform.

Rorrer, Skrla, and Scheurich (2008) clearly put forth the idea that research in educational reform has all but dismissed the impact of the school district as a collective unit in educational reform. They propose a "theory of districts as institutional actors in systemic educational reform, including reform that results in increasing achievement and advancing equity" (p. 308). Furthermore, Marzano and Waters' (2009) meta-analysis of school district leadership also found a statistically significant correlation between district leadership and student achievement.

A careful consideration of the previously mentioned research topics showed that the problem posited by a reform agenda encouraged by outside agents (federal and state government) and mandated by official and unofficial authority (superintendents, business leaders, and civic leaders) is a lack of clarity on what leadership role, within the context of reform and school district influence, the high school principal should occupy. Since principals are without question the instructional leaders of their schools, a clear defining of a principal's role is crucial in order to help understand how to transform a comprehensive high school into a place where students will rededicate themselves to academic achievement.

This study was designed to address the lack of deep and practical understanding of high school reform implementation. The study also analyzed how individuals who served as high school principals in a selected urban district that experienced a district-led redesign perceived their leadership role in that initiative. Moreover, the research demonstrated the complex and central relationship of the principal to high school redesign reform efforts initiated and led by the central office level administrators of the district. The research was important and original because of recent published literature that points to similar deficits in the scholarship of school redesign. For example, the absence of coordination in the aims of the proponents of outside-in and inside-out reform creates what Firestone and Shipps (2003) labeled a “systemic dilemma.” This dilemma “may reduce, if not completely frustrate, the influence of school principals. Moreover, local policy actors may advance other agendas that could deflect the principal’s ability to exercise influence in the ways that they best see fit” (Marks & Nance, 2007, p. 4). The aforementioned published research also showed that “most principals’ training has not prepared them to interpret policy or to process and reconcile conflicting policy initiatives” (Marks & Nance, 2007, p. 9). This study, coupled with the available published research regarding the context of the problem, furthers the knowledge base in the area of campus based-central office led school redesign reform.

Statement of Problem

Because of the availability of millions of dollars of support from government agencies and philanthropic foundations for the creation of new small schools, the transforming of large high schools through the schools-within-a-school model, or for creating school communities within larger schools, districts have increasingly attempted to redesign their aging high schools into smaller schools (Allen & Steinberg, 2004; Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Feldman, Lopez, & Simon, 2006; Vander Ark, 2002). There is a significant amount of advocacy literature (Cohen, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Fine & Powell, 2001; Lawrence et al., 2002; Lee & Smith, 1994; Meier, 1995; Poplin & Weeres, 1992; Raywid, 1998, 1999; Vander Ark, 2002; Wasley et al., 2000; Wasley & Lear, 2001) that reports success stories of small school reform. The success stories often cited decreased discipline problems, increased sense of belonging, intimacy, and higher achievement levels within a more relevant and rigorous curriculum. Testimonials of students who attended these schools were abundant. However, this literature focused on the lived experiences of students who had chosen to attend small schools and lacked case studies of comprehensive high schools that had successfully implemented district-led reform for all students.

Current research (Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, 2010) has described a changed central office perspective that focuses on developing principal instructional abilities with the purpose of supporting school reform. However, no research to date provides examples of a successful relationship between campus principals as a collective group and the district (central office) leadership team attempting to implement high school reform. Earlier researchers were blunter when stating that

> Districts' dismal track record in carrying out or sustaining school reform leads some policymakers and reformers to conclude that while the district is part of the reform problem it should not be part of the solution. Major school reform initiatives such as the Coalition of Essential Schools, the Annenberg Challenge,

> and Goals 2000 cut districts out of the action in the view that central office incompetence was incurable and that school reforms were bound to fail at the district door. (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003, p. 5)

Research by Barber and Mourshed (2007) also indicated that “despite substantial increases in spending and many well-intentioned reform efforts, performance in a large number of school systems has barely improved in decades” (p. 10). High school reform is not only complicated, it is also terribly illusive in larger urban school district reform efforts. In 2008, the Chancellor of New York City schools observed:

> We don’t have … an entire urban school district – one that’s predominantly made up of minority kids, with lots of English-language learners and lots of poverty – that really works, that works in a way that people say, “OK, I want to replicate that district.” To get there, you’re going to need a combination of circumstance and individuals…Despite our progress, we haven’t achieved yet in New York … a school district that people from other cities can come to and say: “This works.” (Cuban, 2010, p. 16)

Rorrer et al. (2008) and Marzano and Waters (2009) conducted studies involving district leadership and presented the campus principal as part of, or as an extension to, the district’s administrative team. Rorrer et al. (2008) believed that principals “collectively serve as a network and critical link to uniting the district and the schools in ways to both develop and implement solutions to identified problems” (p. 311). Marzano and Waters (2009) added that “it is the larger system – the district – that establishes the common work of schools within the district, and it is the common work that becomes the glue holding the district together” (p. 90).

In an effort to foster better understanding of each individual’s role within school improvement efforts, Rorrer et al. (2008) proposed a “different conceptualization of the district: an organized collective constituted by the superintendent; the board; the central office-level administration; and principals, who collectively serve as critical links between the district and the school for developing and implementing solutions to identified problems" (p. 333). Marzano and Waters (2009) also described the critical role of the campus principal in the success of the district. Introducing a concept known as defined autonomy, Marzano and Waters (2009) explained that the "superintendent expects building principals and all other administrators in the district to lead within the boundaries defined by the district goals" (p. 8). This approach to campus leadership requires that principals carry out their leadership tasks not simply with the success of the school in mind but also guiding the success of the school via a path that implements district goals.

Based on the previously mentioned literature review, it is obvious that further research is needed to understand the complexities of this relationship between the district administration and the principal. Further research is especially needed to better understand how principals perceive themselves and the obstacles they face in this role. It appears that in the midst of all the excitement to implement reform and/or redesign high schools, few researchers have placed value in researching the understanding that high school principals have of their role within the school district to implement reform. Finally, there is a lack of research that clearly identifies the skills that campus leaders need to successfully balance a district reform agenda with campus obstacles and carry out successful high school reform as a district-led initiative.

Because of the limited success of high school reform, teachers, students, and parents begin to question the need for reform and even doubt the abilities of the principal and district to lead reform efforts. It is not fully known by researchers and practitioners what obstacles to a successful principal and district relationship must be overcome to make high school reform successful. Understanding the experiences of in-service and out-of-service high school principals within the context of district-led high school redesign has the potential to dramatically improve future district-led reform efforts. Understanding the everyday experiences of high school principals engaged in district-led high school redesign must occur first in order to increase the benefits gained from future district-led reform.

Purpose of Study

This study focused on high school principals from an urban school district in Texas that engaged in district-wide high school reform. The objective of the study was to develop an understanding of high school principals' perceptions of and attitudes toward district-led high school reform. This study did not intend to make generalizations regarding the limitations of high school redesign. It did, however, intend to generate deep campus level understanding of the obstacles that high school principals may perceive in implementing district-led high school reform. The information gained from this study will be used to offer suggestions for improving the ability of principals to implement district-led high school reform within the context of campus level efforts. The study also addressed the main obstacles encountered in high school reform and practical ways to eliminate these obstacles. Finally, the study provided immediate recommendations for the improvement of the high school reform process at the district level.

Research Questions

Themes throughout the literature of high school reform, such as student achievement, academic rigor, academic relevance, campus governance, and teacher professionalism were used as the basis for inquiry and analysis to answer two inter-related primary questions.

1. How do principals perceive their relationship to the district leadership team as they attempted to initiate action to secure the changes in teacher behavior that promotes rigorous and meaningful instructional practice within the context of district-led high school reform efforts?
2. What are the aforementioned principals' attitudes toward the obstacles experienced when attempting to improve teacher behavior as they push district-led high school reform efforts?

Methodology

Site and Participant Selection

The school district that provided the setting for the district initiated high school reform research employs 11 comprehensive high school principals. Although at different performance levels, all of these high school principals were directed to redesign their schools. Five high schools, with historically low achievement and serving predominantly high minority and high poverty students, were directed to engage in immediate and full scale redesign efforts. Two other schools, serving students from different but balanced levels of ethnic and economic diversity, were directed to engage in high school redesign but were given latitude as to the level of implementation. Finally, four schools who served a primarily affluent population with pockets of at-risk students were directed to engage in high school redesign but only had mandates to show evidence of improved teaching practices. The researcher of this study was the principal at Central High School during the first three years of the district's redesign efforts. However, the researcher did not participate as a respondent. Instead the principal who succeeded the researcher was the respondent for this study.

Five principals were asked to participate in the study and all five first experienced high school reform in the district that is the setting for this study. Three of the five principals were male: two Hispanic American and one African American. The remaining two participants were female. Both of the female participants were Hispanic American. The campus administrative experience of the participants ranged from 4-16 years. One of the principals was in her second assignment as a campus principal and has been an assistant principal at various campuses within the same district. Of the five principals:

1. Only one remains as an in-service principal within the school district that is the setting for this study.
2. The second remaining principal has moved to a different school district and continues to serve as a high school principal.
3. The third principal accepted a lateral position within the district and then left the district in the final year of this study.
4. The fourth principal has been promoted to a central office position at another district.

5. The fifth principal has retired.

Data Collection

Each of the five participants readily agreed to participate in this study. Prior to the collection of any data, a face-to-face meeting was held with each participant who received and signed a participant consent form. The signed consent forms are in the possession of and the custodial responsibility of the researcher.

In order to gain further insight into the relevant issues, each of the five participants completed audio-recorded interviews. Throughout the course of this study, the researcher communicated with the participants via e-mail and telephone. Following review and classification of the transcribed interviews, five case profiles were prepared. A cross-case analysis was conducted to formulate the final findings of the study. According to Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993), the case study methodology raises the reader’s level of understanding and the focus of the study. Additionally, following the methodology of Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Erlandson et al., 1993) provides for the following advantages:

- The case study is better suited for emic inquiry (a reconstruction of the respondent’s constructions);
- The case study builds the reader’s tacit knowledge by presenting holistic and lifelike descriptions that allow the reader to experience the context vicariously;
- The case study, more than the conventional report, allows for the demonstration of the interplay between inquirer and respondents;
- The case study provides the “thick description” necessary for judgments of transferability between the sending and receiving contexts;

- The case study provides a grounded assessment of context by communicating contextual information that is grounded in the particular setting being studied. (p. 164)

This study was designed and conducted by a novice researcher with a high degree of experience in the field of education and school leadership. Methods used for data collection were semi-structured interviews and case studies. The questions used during the initial interview consisted of the following:

1. Describe instances when you made the teachers aware of decisions being made at the district level regarding non-negotiable goals for district-wide reform?
2. Describe the responses teachers gave, formally and informally, about their concerns regarding the non-negotiable goals for district-wide reform?
3. Describe methods and instances when teachers were led to develop ideals and beliefs surrounding the implementation of high school redesign?
4. How did you ensure that ideals and beliefs developed by the teachers regarding high school redesign were supportive of the district level goals for district-wide reform?
5. Describe the systems or routines that the campus level leadership implemented to ensure that redesign efforts could be accomplished?
6. How did the systems or routines implemented incorporate the latest research and theory on high school redesign?

7. Describe your level of knowledge regarding high school redesign as it relates to your ability to coach teachers and inform them about how implementing high school redesign will improve their daily lives?
8. What feedback do you believe the principals as a whole provided the central office regarding the implementation of high school redesign and how do you believe the district altered its course regarding the implementation of high school redesign from that feedback?
9. Describe instances when you felt the responsibility to continue to advocate for district-led reform in spite of teachers focusing on the negative aspects of high school redesign?

All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded in accordance with valid educational research guidelines (Erlandson et al., 1993). The names of the participants were not divulged. Instead pseudonyms were used for the participants and the schools that provide the setting for this study. All information obtained via these interviews was reviewed utilizing member checks with the participants (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Data Analysis

Qualitative descriptive data retrieved from the interactive interviews during each stage of the research (case study development and cross-case analysis) were analyzed and interpreted according to the principles outlined in *Doing Naturalistic Inquiry: A Guide to Methods* (Erlandson et al., 1993). The data collected from the interviews were unitized on an Excel worksheet by placing smaller bits of stand-alone data in individual cells. Unitizing the data helped the researcher begin to identify emerging categories.

During the review process, additional categories emerged and data were attributed to different categories or included in more than one category according to a consistent process.

After the data were unitized and categorized, resulting data were again divided by respondent. The process used to identify general themes was used again to identify themes within the respondent interviews. The researcher identified group themes before identifying individual themes in order to prevent one respondent from dominating the formation of the themes.

In order to ensure that the information provided by the respondents was accurately recorded and interpreted by the researcher, member checks and peer review methods, as outlined by Merriam (2002), for ensuring internal validity were employed. The researcher and participants engaged in member checks throughout the data analysis by discussing the tentative findings. Additionally, two individuals with expert knowledge in the field of education were solicited to serve as members of peer debriefing sessions. Each member added richness to the context description, served as additional sources of information, and highlighted the existence of gaps in the research. These suggestions provided guidance for improving the overall design of the research.

The researcher established trustworthiness by employing journaling and triangulation methods also discussed by Merriam (2002). In Chapter III of this study, the researcher provides detailed descriptions of how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry. The researcher maintained a research journal where reflections, questions, and emerging solutions to research obstacles were recorded. Finally, the Campus Improvement Plan endorsed by the schools' site councils and submitted to the district, Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) reports published by the Texas Education Agency (TEA), artifacts provided by the participants, and various participants' accounts were used to triangulate findings with information gathered during the interviews.

Significance of Study

The study focused on the experiences of in-service and out-of-service high school principals who engaged in or are currently engaged in an urban district initiated high school reform. School districts across the country are increasingly looking to high school reform as a way of improving the performance of their districts as a whole. It is important, therefore, to ensure that the individuals tasked with carrying out the reform efforts at the campus level are prepared and well equipped to transform their schools.

Although school districts often hire consultants to render technical assistance to the redesign process, it is the high school principal who must implement, in concert with his/her leadership team, the reform process based on a clear understanding of what the district goals are and what the campus can and cannot do. While much attention has been given to the reasons for reform and the models that potentially guide reform, very little attention, if any, has been given to the relationship between district leadership and campus leadership. It is this top-down/down-up leadership interaction and relationship that advances or hinders the improvement of classroom practices within the context of high school reform.

This study was intended to discover what could be learned from the experiences of in-service and out-of-service principals who had been engaged or are currently engaged in an urban high school redesign process. The added knowledge base derived from this study will provide practical recommendations for principals and others engaged in the high school redesign process.

Chapter Summary

The reduction of the size of the high school as a type of reform is endorsed by prominent organizations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Vander Ark, 2002). However, this type of high school reform, as well as other reforms, has not been a strong enough catalyst to spur increased student achievement (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Cuban, 2010). Obstacles to increased student achievement, within the context of school reform, include the school leader’s limited instructional skills (Honig et al., 2010); internal and external distractions (Marks & Nance, 2007); and the educational system’s failure to embrace the district as an institutional actor (Rorrer et al., 2008).

By exploring the lived experiences of five high school principals who had implemented high school reform, this study intended to provide insight into the perception high school principals have of their role within a reform agenda driven by a central office organization. Finally, this study intended to identify the principal leadership skills needed when balancing the management of a district-led reform agenda amid campus level distractions from internal and external forces.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

While numerous and drastically different reform efforts have been attempted throughout the history of American public schools, school reform has not been capricious. Over the decades, school reform has been the primary vehicle by which policymakers have sought to continuously transform the social and economic role of the United States population. Over the decades, the purpose of this policy-driven transformation has been to create, enhance, or sustain an internationally competitive United States. Moreover, the policy-driven transformation consistently reflects the policymakers (who are mostly U.S. society's elite) paradigm–meritocracy (Salinas & Reidel, 2007). Because of this fact, the following chapter first presents an historical discussion of American school reform movements before delving into a review of the literature that describes the context and current need for reform.

The Legacy of Big Business in the American School Reform Movements

Throughout much of U.S. history (beginning in the mid-19th century), elementary schools and particularly high schools have continuously been used as agents to help promote changes desired by policy elites. For example, in the late-1800s, the Bureau of Indian Affairs used boarding schools in an attempt to "civilize" Native Americans. These schools sought to acculturate Native Americans by replacing their traditional clothing and forbidding them to speak their languages. In the early-1900s, urban schools were tasked with ensuring that non-White Anglo Saxon Protestant (WASP) immigrants from European countries (mainly Italian, Irish, and Polish immigrants) were acculturated into a modern, urban, and fast-paced American way of life (Whitman, 2008). When the Soviet Union launched Sputnik in 1957, national politicians charged schools with promoting math and science mastery to increase the number of American engineers needed to sustain the U.S. defense superiority (Howes, 2002). The aforementioned are generational examples of American societal transformation facilitated through public school reform. The next section discusses and presents a description of the perceived need for efficiency that helped transform the one-room schoolhouse into a large urban school program that includes increasingly complex management systems.

The Transformation of the American High School

By the early 1900s, schooling in the United States was becoming almost universal. Tyack (1974) informed that "Attendance in high schools increased during that period from 202,963 to 1,645,171, an increase of 711 percent while the total population increased only 68 percent" (p. 183). The Progressive reformers of the era wanted to ensure that the growing school systems conformed to a corporate model of efficiency. To this end, they were supported by education professors such as Strayer, Judd, and Cubberley who were training superintendents at Columbia University, the University of Chicago, and Stanford University (Tyack, 1974).

In 1916, Cubberley (as quoted in Ross, 2008) summed up the scientific management thoughts of Progressive reformers who demanded efficiency in the educational system and ultimately in the new American industrial society:

> Our schools are, in a sense, factories in which the raw products (children) are to be shaped and fashioned into products to meet the various demands of life. The specifications for manufacturing come from the demands of the twentieth century civilization, and it is the business of the school to build its pupils to the

> continuous measurement of production to see if it is according to specifications, the elimination of waste in manufacture, and a large variety in the output. (p. 7)

Folly (2007) clearly showed that the perceived purpose of a high school education in the United States has undergone various intentionally changed historical stages since the one-room school house era. Over the course of the last half of the 19th century, what was once an education reserved for the privileged and semi-privileged, became the primary means to produce skilled workers necessary to sustain the Industrial Revolution and assimilate large immigrant populations who possessed little or no industrial/urban background.

Darling-Hammond (1997) described in detail how “the image of a moving conveyor belt on which students were placed while teachers performed a pre-determined series of operations on them was a powerful metaphor for order and efficiency” (p. 38). Darling-Hammond, Alexander, and Price (2002) also stressed that this management system concept continues to exist today in public education and that it presents often insurmountable obstacles to reformers who seek to create an educational system where teachers are able to practice their craft. The management system concept also creates obstacles for providing students with a rigorous and relevant curriculum.

According to Darling-Hammond (1997), the emergence of the industrial era’s large urban schools also necessitated a management system with planning departments to design tasks, managers to monitor those tasks, and the support staff that tracked ensuing paperwork. Moreover, Lutz (1990) wrote that the management practices that accompanied the larger system included:

> standardized tests as measures of teaching efficiency; score cards for school buildings; cost analysis of instruction; questioning of small class size as useful to instruction; [and] use of terms such as school plan, effective products, investment per pupil, cost per pupil recitation, platoon school, and education balance sheet. (p. 116)

The increasing manifestation of the industrial-urban-scientific management processes and their functions in public education is conclusive evidence of the symbiotic relationship that bonded policy elites and educational reformers at the dawn of Modern America.

Since the 1950s, secondary education reform has been impacted and directed by legislation that has promoted accountability measures via standardized tests. Salinas and Reidel (2007) argued that

> Nowhere is this more apparent in a contemporary context than in the educational accountability reform in Texas and in the national institutionalization of this reform agenda in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as reauthorized in the form of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). (p. 42)

Furthermore, Cuban (2010) maintained that “the application of business-crafted solutions to public schools has become so thoroughly embedded in policymakers’ thinking about improving schools that these policies are taken for granted and often seen as common sense” (p. 23).

In order to extend the discussion of the influence exerted by policymaker elites on school reform, the next section of this chapter reviews the relevant discussions related to the national reform agenda. At the center of the discussions are the emergence of high-stakes exams and the effect of these exams on the American public school students’ development.

Legislative Educational Reform

By the 1950s, the focus of education reform, and most importantly secondary education reform, shifted in an attempt to address apparent science and math gaps between the United States and economic rivals (Cuban, 2010). The shift saw increased involvement by business leaders and was directed through federal legislation such as the National Education Defense Act of 1958 and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Cuban, 2010).

The study of the most recent era of reform is divided into three waves by Marks and Nance (2007). The first wave of recent school reform was initiated with the publication of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform* in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. As described by education scholars the “Reforms included increasing high school graduation requirements, particularly in math and science; instituting statewide testing programs; offering more Advanced Placement (AP) courses; promoting the use of technology in the classroom; and instituting new teacher evaluation programs” (Tirrozzi & Uro, 1997, p. 241). While this first wave of recent reform was characterized by increased state and federal activity, the reform did not cause conflict or frustration because local school districts were also active participants in creating the policy that facilitated the changes (Marks & Nance, 2007).

The second wave of recent reform came in the late 1980s and continued through the 1990s. This recent reform stage stressed “a newly conceptualized view” (Marks & Nance, 2007, p. 8). The principal was now expected to lead a localized and participatory decision-making process in order to achieve heightened student performance outcomes outlined in the first wave of reform. The heightened student performance outcomes were codified into six national education goals at the 1989 Charlottesville Education Summit convened by President George Bush and the nation's governors. The governors and state level advocates were led by then Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton (Tirrozzi & Uro, 1997; Phelps & Addonizio, 2006).

Marks and Nance (2007) believed the third and current wave of recent reform, which began in the 1990s, reflected deep frustration with the limited gains recorded in top-down efforts of the first wave and bottom-up efforts of the second wave. The initial stages of this wave of reform were facilitated by funds provided through legislation such as the Goals 2000 Act (signed into law on March 31, 1994) and the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), also known as the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) of 1994 (Tirrozzi & Uro, 1997).

Increasing concern about accountability within U.S. core institutions impacted the dynamics of the most profound changes. For example, some scholars have pointed out that "Driving the system in the third wave is accountability for results, with states ranking, classifying, and sometimes sanctioning districts on their performance" (Marks & Nance, 2007, p. 8). This wave of reform sought also to improve the different components of the school system (curriculum and performance standards, professional development, policies, and programs affecting schools) by integrating and coordinating their existence and interaction (Marks & Nance, 2007). Tirrozzi and Uro (1997) pointed to the expansion of the six national goals established at the 1989 Charlottesville Education Summit into eight goals enacted as the Goals 2000 Act as evidence of the serious efforts to include and integrate different educational components to facilitate change.

Sustaining the reform efforts and standards based accountability into the 21st century was the reauthorization of the ESEA. The reauthorization is known more generally as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (Phelps & Addonizio, 2006; Raynor, 2006). Standards-based accountability intends to achieve academic success for all students, especially those from historically disadvantaged groups, by employing scientific management principles. The approach is based on the belief that real and consistently applied efficiency produces performance. As part of this, reform effort mandated by NCLB states have developed accountability systems that provide various sanctions intended to place schools on a fast track to improve student achievement as measured by test scores (Anagnostopoulos, 2003; Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Diaz, 2004; Salinas & Reidel, 2007).

Barber and Mourshed (2007) have indicated that the available evidence suggests that the various reform efforts employed through state and federal legislation (structural reforms, decentralization of powers, smaller schools, increased autonomy, and increased accountability) have not delivered the improved student outcomes desired. Literature reviews by Nelson, Leffler and Hansen (2009) suggested that the lack of success has in large part been shaped by the complex political and organizational contexts in which legislators work. Referring specifically to this lack of coordination, Nelson et al. (2009) said:

> In general they are constrained by short time frames in which to deal with complex issues; the need to respond to constituents and keep election promises;

> the power of decisions left to the hierarchy and ideology of their parties; and the lack of institutional memory in states with term limits. (p. 9)

The overall limited success of legislative reform has been chronicled in various scholarly articles, as have the negative effects of the same reform. The next section reviews the particular effects that legislative reform has had on schools, particularly urban schools.

Effects of Legislative Educational Reform

Cohen (2001) echoed the sentiments of numerous educational researchers who believed that the continued use of standards-based accountability for schools and school systems is a necessary component for reforming the American high school. Cohen’s research supports the belief that high-stakes testing for high school graduation, if done the right way, has the potential for generating enough pressure on school systems and schools to produce action for improvement where little or no action may have occurred before. On the other extreme, Raynor (2006) maintained that “NCLB has also fueled an unhealthy emphasis on standardized testing as the primary benchmark of progress and has set into motion a complete reliance on statistics to determine how well a school or district is doing” (p. 52). Woolworth (2007) added that the standards-based accountability policies in education driving testing and test preparation, overly scripted curricula, and intensive teacher regulation, have reduced the schooling process to the lowest common denominator; the mere acquisition of competency-based skills. Not surprisingly, Anagnostopoulos and Rutledge (2007) found that “principals in sanctioned high schools succeeded in enacting school and classroom change to the extent that they were able to mobilize teachers' cooperation around schemas of school failure and improvement that enhanced their instructional authority" (p. 1294).

Recent studies indicate that standards-based accountability, and the sanctioning policies that accompany the accountability system, compel principals and teachers to alter school and classroom practices in ways that target resources toward efforts to improve school-wide test scores. This means that principals take resources from those students who need them most and place them where immediate impact in terms of increased student achievement outcomes can be realized (Anagnostopoulos & Rutledge, 2007). Carnoy (2005) also indicated other school principal practices that have a cumulative negative effect on high school progress and graduation rates. Carnoy pointed out that

> According to this argument, the negative effect occurs in part because high school administrators are more likely to hold lower-performing students in the 9th grade so that they will not take the exit test in 10th or 11th grade until they have had special test preparation classes. (p. 20)

Exaggerating the problem is the fact that even if the allocating and reallocating actions of the principals could potentially increase the outcomes expected in the standards-based reform movement, the actions of the teachers have not complimented the principals' actions. Many teachers continue to use the same instructional practices used when they themselves were taught (Anagnostopoulos & Rutledge, 2007; Cohen, 2001; Cuban, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 1997).

While the discourse on standards-based accountability and high-stakes testing is healthy, the effect it has had on the school principal and the teachers is often unhealthy for the success of students. An often-cited study by Carnoy (2005) found evidence of a negative relationship between accountability and progress rates for Black and Hispanic students. Lopez (2003), using what is called Critical Race Theory, argued that the accountability policies are more concerned with tangible and identifiable outcomes and simply ignore the challenges of equity, race, class, and gender. This theory is part of the framing of the chapter's next section, which examines the urban school setting that now serves almost entirely students of color with consistently limited resources.

The effect of big business in education can be observed both in the increased scope of the educational system and in the bureaucratic systems that have evolved in districts. Arguably, the growth of the educational system has failed to ensure that schools serving economically disadvantaged students, particularly those in urban schools, keep pace with other more affluent schools. The next section discusses the current need for reform in the urban educational setting.

Urban Schools and the Need for Reform

Researchers have examined the urban school setting when attempting to understand the current state of affairs and thereby prescribe remediation techniques. Woolworth (2007), for example, believed that "deindustrialization, white flight, and the political isolation of low-income communities of color, the withdrawal of federal and state investment from job development, infrastructural improvement, health care, and affordable housing have contributed to the plight of urban schools" (p. 284). Anagnostopoulos and Rutledge (2007) and Cuban (2010) believed that all of these same elements have combined to render the urban high school as the almost exclusive provider of education to low-income, minority, and special-needs teenagers.

The currently well-documented poor performance of the urban high school, when seen in its totality, cannot be simply understood in terms of the present socio-economic plight. Because of this fact, some researchers have sought to understand the plight of the urban high school by framing a clearer historical context and perspective.

McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) may not disagree with what has contributed to the plight of urban schools, but their research indicated the extreme view that the current urban school dilemma, can be traced to

> slavery and Jim Crow, the Japanese internment camps, the genocide of the Native Americans, the theft of the Latino lands in the Southwest, the exclusion from schooling of many groups not considered legitimate citizens at the time, the violence toward unions, the exclusion of those with disabilities from public education, the denial of women's participation in democracy, and the instrumental pedagogy and curriculum of the 1940s and 1950s that was intended to prepare 'good' workers. (p. 438)

The emerging nuanced historical perspective of the plight of the urban schools widens the scope of understanding and describes a systemic disregard of historically underrepresented groups. This context for reform is therefore not only generational within families and communities but historically cyclical among all non-WASP student groups.

The Context for Reform

Whether reformers agree that the current state of affairs in the urban school has its origins in the historical context as provided by McKenzie and Scheurich (2004), or whether they agree with Anagnostopoulos and Rutledge (2007), Woolworth (2007), and Cuban (2010) in that economic factors have contributed to the plight of the urban schools, all school reformers must still accept and address the wide range of current inequities faced by students in urban schools. Stated more elaborately, McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) found that

> Children of color and those living in poverty are performing at lower achievement levels than their white counterparts, are overrepresented in special education and lower level classes, are dropping out of school in higher numbers, frequently have teachers who do not believe they can learn or are actively negative in their attitude toward these students, are underrepresented in gifted and talented classes, are oftentimes educated in schools with fewer resources and the least experienced teachers, and are more likely to be suspended or expelled. (p. 438)

Verdugo (2010) provided that 61% of urban schools contained freshman classes whose students had less than a 50% chance of graduating from high school. Furthermore, research has established that lower self-esteem, behavioral problems, decreased participation in the whole school program, and low academic achievement are results of poor instruction (prevalent in urban schools) and combine to increase the likelihood of students dropping out of school (Oakes, 2005).

Accordingly, academic deficiencies are not only rooted in underdeveloped skills of students, but also further perpetuated by a deficit thinking model in those charged with leading their improvement. The concerns over academic deficiencies articulated above constitute only part of the plight of the urban school. For example, other needs such as safety in the urban school are more frequently articulated and addressed by policymakers and practitioners.

Fine and Powell (2001) explained that anonymity, invisibility, uniforms, metal detectors, fights, and a concentration on safety and order usually take precedence in urban schools over personalization and academic achievement. Although the attention brought to impoverished schools and neighborhoods has facilitated some progress in urban settings, maintaining progress is extremely difficult due to a steady flow of immigrants. The social dynamics of these immigrant groups continually reconstitute the often complex cultural policies of race, class, power, and identity in the neighborhoods supplying the urban schools' student population (Woolworth, 2007).

The remainder of this section will describe one particular reform movement – smaller schools – that seeks to improve the academic achievement of students enrolled in the larger urban schools primarily by decreasing the size of the school. Some researchers believe that merely the size of a school make it impossible for teachers to focus on instructional improvements. Cohen (2001) stressed that small high schools have a more appropriate student load for teachers and that the simpler daily operations inherent in small schools create conditions for success because they facilitate more personal relationships between adults and students. Additionally, small schools provide more student-centered instruction, active learning, greater collegiality, and shared accountability among teachers. Addressing the obvious paradox, one scholar has said:

> Ironically, those kids who need the kind of personalized attention that characterizes small schools usually end up in big schools. Urban high school students, who are disproportionately poor and of a minority sub-group, are 25 percent more likely than their non-urban counterparts to attend schools of more than 900 students. (Wolk, 2002, p. 35)

Extending on Wolk's contributions, Verdugo (2010) also addressed the effects of school size on academic achievement by stating:

> Structural features appear to be linked to lower academic attainment. First, there is the issue of school size: the greater the school size, the greater the likelihood of lower achievement, especially large schools that are also low socioeconomic schools. A second structural feature that has a significant impact on achievement concerns large, urban, low-income schools, where the academic achievement of students is considerably lower. (p. 189)

After considering the vast inequities that combine to create the plight of the urban schools and hinder academic achievement, two researchers concluded that

> For these urban high schools reform efforts to succeed, however, they will need to be of sufficient intensity to address the educational challenges that result from the concentration of large numbers of students with multiple risk factors for school failure in neighborhood high schools. (Neild & Balfanz, 2006, p. 124)

If considered in isolation, practitioners may focus on the academic deficiencies expressed by Verdugo (2010), the safety concerns expressed by Fine and Powell (2001), and/or the school size concerns expressed by Cohen (2001), Wolk (2002), and Verdugo (2010). However, these concerns do not exist in isolation. They have been systematically perpetuated by a historic disregard for minority groups (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004).

Obstacles to Implementing Successful Reform

Even if reform efforts meet Neild and Balfanz's (2006) intensity standard, the success of reform is still dependent on the school organization's ability to overcome organizational and systemic obstacles, as well as those obstacles created by well-intentioned legislative efforts. The following section addresses obstacles that must be managed if a school organization will be able to successfully implement effective reform.

Researchers have studied cases where accountability systems have had an adverse effect on schools serving low-performing students by making them even less able to retain teachers – especially effective teachers (Anagnostopoulos & Rutledge, 2007; Weiner & Hall, 2004). As required by NCLB, state, district, and school report cards publicize information about student achievement disaggregated by race and ethnicity, as well as low-income status, limited English proficiency status, and other factors (Weiner & Hall, 2004). This public accountability system serves those employed in affluent schools well but deters experienced teachers from serving disadvantaged students for fear of being identified as failing (Clotfelter et al., 2004). Therefore, it is important to note that these statistics are not only applicable to isolated cases. Across the United States, a third of the secondary courses taught in high-poverty schools are taught by a teacher lacking a major or a minor in that field, while low-poverty schools enjoy approximately 80% qualified teacher staff levels (Weiner & Hall, 2004). Additionally, this same policy promotes hiring teachers who may have content knowledge but lack the skills necessary to provide disadvantaged high school students reading support across curriculum areas (Neild & Balfanz, 2006).

Research by Nelson et al. (2009) has indicated numerous other factors that can frustrate reform efforts:

1. Continually shifting district and state priorities and policies;
2. Pressure from local and state systems and parents to do “something” quickly;
3. Turnover in leadership;
4. A lack of administrative support;
5. Compartmentalized departments with limited mechanisms for communication and collaboration;
6. Entrenched mind-sets and beliefs incompatible with reform efforts;
7. Fear of reprisals when trying out new strategies and distrust of new data and how they might be used;
8. Negative community perceptions. (p. 9)

Fullan (1993) theorized that implementing reform in public education is particularly difficult because education by its very design and nature is a conservative enterprise highly resistant to change. Additionally, the continuous, disjointed, and unsuccessful change efforts have “resulted in a system that tends to retain, rather than challenge the status quo” (p. 3). Elmore and Burney (1997) added that the “story of educational reform in the United States is, for the most part, a story of nervous movement from one fad to another with little enduring effect on teaching practice” (p. 32).

Implementing Reform

As school reform efforts evolved throughout time and by legislation, the school principal, the district leadership team, and the larger community consisting of parents and community leaders have been at the center of implementing reform efforts. The following section considers three important agents of school reform (the principal, the district level leadership, and the larger school community). The section also explores the complexities of the respective roles of the aforementioned as they pertain to the larger school system.

Principalship

Crow, Hausman, and Scribner (2002) stressed that principals are the pivotal point of all school reform efforts. Research by Marks and Printy (2003) emphasized that instructional leadership should be the central focus of the principal. Blase and Blase (2000) showed that regular components of instructional leadership consist of the principal spending many hours promoting improved instruction by observing teachers and providing feedback in a manner that is engaging and causes them to be reflective and move towards improvement.

David Spence, President of the Southern Region Education Board (as cited in Gray, Fry, Bottoms, & O'Neil, 2007) echoed the belief of most educational researchers by stating:

> School success critically begins with the school principal who – day in and day out – has prime responsibility for ensuring that all students meet challenging grade level and college and career readiness standards. More often than not, the principal's leadership skill determines whether a school becomes a dynamic learning organization or a failed experience. (p. 5)

A recent dissertation by Hardoin (2009) also found that principals create conditions for organizational learning. The research also showed that through their acts of instructional leadership, principals are able to sustain academic achievement.

While many researchers have described the importance of the principal's leadership role to the success of the school campus, still others, though not disagreeing, also point to obstacles encountered by the campus principal. McNeil (2005) indicated that the principal is held accountable for producing improved scores on state tests while only being able to provide teachers with limited classroom resources and their schools with limited collections in the library. In addition, the principal is often unable to do anything about the fact that the school has an overall work environment that is sometimes dangerous. Despite the aforementioned obstacles, "States view principals as central agents of change in the system for improving school performance" (Marks & Nance, 2007, p. 8). Complicating this fact is that states hold them ultimately accountable for the success or failure of the school without regard to the challenges of equity, race, class, or gender (Salinas & Reidel, 2007). Furthermore, principals are held accountable for implementing true models to effect successful change, while simultaneously managing input from a diverse group of stakeholders (teachers, teacher unions, and parents) who may be suspicious and generally opposed to new ideas, but necessary participants in the successful adoption process (Folly, 2007).

Finally, principals are tasked with managing the state and federal accountability programs on their campus. Under NCLB, if schools do not meet their state's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals as measured by gains in student test scores, they face increasingly punitive actions that can culminate in school restructuring and state takeover, potentially leading to job loss for teachers and principals (Anagnostopoulos & Rutledge, 2007; Robelen, 2002). Anagnostopoulos and Rutledge (2007) also indicate that "several studies have documented how principals alter school improvement and professional development agendas, reallocate managerial task and programs, and increase oversight of teacher work to comply with school sanctioning policies" (p. 1263). The principal's role of leadership becomes increasingly challenging when placed in the context of an urban setting. Neild and Balfanz (2006) believed that there is an "extreme concentration of educational need in urban schools and that these schools are often overlooked by policymakers, school reform programs, and even district personnel when considering redesign initiatives" (p. 123).

The effect of the school principal on the success or failure of a school has almost entirely dominated exigent research. However, some recent research has explored and shed light on the school district's ability to effect school reform. This next section discusses the effect of the school district as a catalyst for school reform.

District Level Leadership

The role that district level leadership should play in implementing reform is advocated from two opposing points. Darling-Hammond and Friedlaender (2008), McLaughlin and Talbert (2003), and Elmore (1993) pointed to research that supports the notion that schools should be freed from the bureaucratic structures that doom school reform to failure. However, researchers like Nelson et al. (2009) indicated that "school district leaders play an especially important role in the impact of school improvement initiatives. Their interpretations of policy and the commitment level of support for reform affect how principals and teachers understand reform initiatives" (p. 7).

In their research, Darling-Hammond and Friedlaender (2008) discounted the need for district-led reform at the neediest urban school in favor of emphasizing the lived experiences of students who have chosen to attend small schools. In stark contradiction of Darling-Hammond and Friedlaender's (2008) notion that school should be freed from bureaucratic structures, Rorrer et al. (2008) explained the reality of the existence of a larger educational system (the school district) that needs to provide flexibility to the schools while simultaneously increasing their accountability for success. Research by Honig et al. (2010) supported this notion and indicated that

> Decades of experience and research show that when central office staff do not exercise central leadership in teaching and learning improvement efforts, such initiatives at best produce improvements at a small handful of schools but hardly district-wide or in a sustainable way. (p. 1)

Rorrer et al. (2008) believed that the school districts have four essential roles in educational reform:

1. Providing instructional leadership;
2. Reorienting the organization;
3. Establishing policy coherence;
4. Maintaining an equity focus.

In order to provide instructional leadership, the school district should seek to generate will and build capacity. Specifically, Rorrer et al. (2008) commented that

> From research on districts to date, then, we can conclude that district instructional leadership build capacity by coordinating and aligning work of others through communication, planning, and collaboration; monitoring goals, instruction, and efforts to improve instruction, including increasing data accessibility, availability, and transparency and accountability; and acquiring and targeting support for instruction, including securing human and fiscal resources. (p. 318)

Honig et al. (2010) further studied three urban districts' central office organizations (Atlanta Public Schools, The Empowerment Schools Organization in the New York City Department of Education, and the Oakland Unified School District) and determined five distinct central office transformational practices that clearly improved the teaching and learning practices in schools. The transformational practices are:

1. Engagement with school principals in learning-focused partnerships to deepen principals' instructional leadership or their ability to support teaching and learning improvement at their schools.
2. Direct, intentional support to the central office – principal partnerships.
3. Reorganization and restructuring of each central office unit to support teaching and learning improvement.
4. Stewardship of the overall central office transformation process.

5. Use of evidence throughout the central office to support continual improvement of these lines of work. (p. 3)

Research by Elmore and Burney (1997) indicated similar findings. While studying district-led initiatives in New York City's Community School District 2 under the leadership of then Superintendent Tony Alvarado, Elmore and Burney (1997) discovered a strategy of district reform that had elements of decentralization and centralization:

> On the decentralization side, the strategy has a heavy focus on school-site decision-making related to specific decisions about which teachers will receive training and support, which content areas will receive attention and which consultants will be employed over a specific period, and on orchestrating professional networks around specific school issues. On the centralization side, the strategy places major responsibility with central staff for deciding which instructional areas will receive priority attention, on maintaining the focus on these areas, on forming and maintaining relationships with consultants who deliver training and support in these priority areas, and on keeping school-site decisions focused on district wide priorities. (p. 28)

The second essential goal for districts outlined by Rorrer et al. (2008) has to do with reorienting the organization. In this capacity, districts "define organizational structures and processes and alter district culture to align with their educational reform goals" (p. 318). Earlier research by McLaughlin and Talbert (2003) indicated that

> Reforming districts develop and sustain shared reform goals and focused efforts through system-wide planning processes. They bring together people from all levels and parts of the district system to deliberate over reform goals and outcomes, to share knowledge of successful practices, and design strategies for change. (p. 12)

However, Honig et al. (2010) reflected on the failed efforts by the San Diego School District in the 1990s to reorganize and restructure their central office and warned that "high-performance depends not only on formal structures but also fundamentally on the practice of people—how central office administrators understand and go about their work day-to-day in leading for teaching and learning improvement" (p. 2).

Establishing policy coherence is the third essential goal districts must meet if they are to be successful in reform (Rorrer et al., 2008). Districts wishing to be successful in this venture must be mindful that "district leadership should mold policies into district-specific derivatives, which represent an amalgam of external policy and internal goals and strategies" (p. 323). According to Nelson et al. (2009), the district staff has relations with professional organizations who understand local needs and can therefore assist in mediating between policy and local needs. Spillane (1994, 1998, 2000) also explained that instructional policy and reform initiatives are implemented by campus principals and teachers according to how district administrators interpret these policies.

Rorrer et al. (2008) indicated that the fourth essential role for districts in reform is "maintaining an equity focus" (p. 328). To effectively promote an equity focus, districts must be able to own past inequity, and disclose, through data, current inequities. Earlier research by McLaughlin and Talbert (2003) supported the importance of maintaining an equity focus. According to McLaughlin and Talbert "the equity agenda for school reform sits squarely on the district's plate. Just about everything a district does could be assumed by another agent or agency – except monitoring and managing equity of student resources and outcomes across schools" (p. 5).

School principals and the central office of a school district, acting as local agents, negotiate how school reform is prioritized and implemented. However, the larger local communities often promote and often demand the implementation of reform. This next section explores the impact of the local school community on the implementation of reform.

School Community

Parents expect that the schools serving their children are a psychological and physical danger-free zone that consistently and continuously guards the psychological, social, and moral safety that is conducive to high levels of learning (Bloom, 1995). Accordingly, principals deal with pressure that can sometimes deter reform efforts ranging from the community, parents, politicians, business leaders, teachers, students, and educational researchers. These pressures are either directly given from teaching staff or indirectly from parent associations, site-base management councils, politicians, and business leaders (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Marks & Nance, 2007).

Politicians and business leaders contend that high school graduates lack the basic skills needed to be successful in the workplace and the academic skills to help them succeed in rigorous college work (Cohen, 2001; Weiner & Hall, 2004). Teachers believe that they are the instructional experts but are often subordinated to the policies and whims of administrators (oftentimes outside of the school) who are disconnected from the student needs and detached from the learning setting (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Poplin & Weeres, 1992). Students say that schools are too large, not caring, and even boring (Cohen, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 1997). On the other side of the reform discussion are the fundamentalists. Darling-Hammond (2007) described this group as those who cherish traditions and believe that if schools would just go back to the basics, all would be well. Adding to this continuum are those who insist that schools are failing and that standards should be raised. However, when discussing standards, fundamentalists usually refer to discipline and core subjects. Darling-Hammond (2007) added that these groups are not “mean spirited, they just can’t see beyond a stagnant and tremendously large organization” (p. 14). However, it would appear that the strongest influence on education comes from the proponents of academic accountability. For more than two decades, efforts to improve American schools have centered on standards-based reform (Cuban, 2007).

The larger school community continues to argue for a reformed educational system, while the local school organization (principal and central office) attempts to negotiate how school reform is implemented. However, the models for reform are often arrived at by researchers and consultants who attempt to reflect on the agendas of the entire school community. The next section explores the small schools movement as a hybrid type of educational reform.

Arguments for High School Redesign

Darling-Hammond and Friedlaender (2008) stated that “attaining substantially different results in our schools will require more than just teachers trying harder within traditional bureaucratic constraints. Such a shift typically requires new organizational structures” (p. 14). Darling-Hammond and Friedlaender (2008) extended that when schools are freed from the bureaucratic structures of the larger educational system, they are able to provide highly personalized instruction, a strong advisory system, and a college bound curriculum with high academic support. Additionally, they are able to encourage their students to become engaged in social justice and civic engagement. In addition to this “Equally, important, these schools engage students in intellectually stimulating, relevant, and personalized learning that empowers them to contribute to their communities and learn throughout their lives” (Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008, p. 15).

The rhetoric espoused by researchers such as Poplin and Weeres (1992) promoted the implementation of smaller schools and eventually supported legislation that gave way to the small schools movement. The next section reviews a brief history of the small schools movement, a more in depth review of the need for small schools, and a clear description of what constitutes a small school.

Small Schools Movement

The large schools that began to emerge in the 1950s served their purpose through the end of the century. However, as the turn of the century approached, the “percentage of secondary schools enrolling more than 1,000 students grew from 7 to 25 percent” (Wolk, 2002, p. 3). Partly because of this fact, many started to question the wisdom of large schools. Cohen (2001) suggested that growing empirical evidence proved “that small high schools generally have higher achievement levels, higher graduation and lower dropout rates, and are safer than larger high schools” (p. 5).

Starting in 1985, urban school districts (e.g., those in New York City, Philadelphia, and Chicago) began to reorganize their large schools into smaller units in the form of schools-within-schools, charter schools, or a ‘house system’ such as the ones in New York City. By the year 2000, the small schools’ movement had not only spread across the country (Atlanta, Boston, San Diego, Los Angeles, Oakland, and Nashville), but had also become a national reform movement (Oxley & Kassissieh, 2008). Beginning with the Clinton Administration and continuing through today, the U.S. Department of Education has provided millions of dollars to develop and scale up school reform models with small unit size as a required feature (Kilby, 2006; Oxley & Kassissieh, 2008). “Beginning in 1999, the U.S. Department of Education launched the Small Learning Community (SLC) Program to support schools with more than 1,000 students to implement small learning community structures” (Oxley & Kassissieh, 2008, p. 200). SLCs were created with the purpose of promoting service learning, goal setting, character education, team building, and friendship among those who otherwise might not have bonded (Kilby, 2006).

This SLC federal venture, however, has given way to a more elaborate reform movement, known to many as the small schools movement. Oxley and Kassissieh (2008) are encouraged by the commitment of school districts to support this venture but warn that the small schools movement has only been “driven by the failure of the former to achieve complete implementation within a reasonable period of time” (p. 201).

As the small schools movement gained momentum, so did the research that supported the movement. Next, a review of research that developed from the movement and how it continues to provide intellectual support for the small schools movement is discussed.

The Need for Small Schools

The research of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (as cited in Feldman et al., 2006), supported the creation of new small autonomous schools and offers five reasons why large comprehensive high schools fall short in meeting the needs of all students:

1. Incoherence: High schools offer a dizzying array of disconnected courses with little guidance;

2. Isolation: Many teachers see more than 150 students daily. Both teachers and students have little adult contact;

3. Anonymity: High schools have doubled in size in the last generation, resulting in overcrowding and reduced student and teacher interaction;

4. Low expectations: Only one of the four to six tracks in most high schools prepares students for college;

5. Inertia: High schools are slow to change due to large and isolated staffs, restrictive state and district policies and employment agreements, over-precise higher education entrance requirements, and an array of interest groups dictating much of school policy. (p. 7)

In contrast to the recommendations of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, "many of today's high schools have enrollments of 2,000, 3,000, even 4,000 students and most high school teachers face 125 to 150 students every day and work in virtual isolation from other adults" (Vander Ark, 2002, p. 1). Darling-Hammond (1997) agreed that secondary school teachers work directly with 150 students or more per day and because of that fact find it impossible to know individual students or families in a manner that is conducive to learning. Sizer (1997) concurred with Darling-Hammond and noted that in his visits to large high schools teachers usually have loads of over 120 or 130 students, a fact that prevents them from having any real conversations. More importantly Sizer advised that the large classloads prevent teachers from providing students with constructive feedback on how to improve their academic work.

Cohen's (2001) research informed readers that cities tend to have the largest concentrations of poverty, the most ethnically and linguistically diverse student populations, and many large impersonal high schools with high dropout rates and low achievement. Addressing this reality directly, other researchers maintained that

> The poorer and, in some cities, the more African American the student body, the larger the school, the greater the percent of long-term substitutes, uncertified teachers, teachers teaching out of their certification areas, teachers who have been dismissed from one school and "bumped" to another. (Fine & Powell, 2001, p. 46)

Lee and Smith (1994) agreed that minority students, particularly those who are economically disadvantaged, do not do as well in larger schools. Economically disadvantaged students are usually stratified with lower achieving students and are enrolled in less rigorous courses. Over time, this differentiation increases the educational difference between groups of students (Lee & Smith, 1994).

In an effort to educate the educational community to understand that creating small schools was simply not enough, researchers such as Darling-Hammond and Feldman listed the components that an effective small school should contain. The next section describes what constitutes a successful small school.

Small Schools Defined

Linda Darling-Hammond and Jay Feldman conducted extensive research that advocated for small schools. Moreover, their research defines what a small school should look like. Feldman et al. (2006) defined a comprehensive small school design as having the following characteristics:

1. Autonomous governance, budgets, structures, and staffing;
2. Flexible use of resources;
3. Distributed leadership;
4. Open access and choice for students;
5. Identification of and release time for principal in first year of implementation;
6. Professional development that clearly links changes in teaching practice to improved student achievement;
7. A clearly defined system of central office support of small school design and implementation;
8. A curriculum clearly aligned with state standards and focused on helping students use their minds well;
9. Nontraditional scheduling that promotes deep student learning and meaningful relationships with teachers;
10. Clearly demonstrated use of technology and advanced communications resources;
11. Clearly stated benchmarks for improved student achievement;
12. Performance assessment for students;
13. Authentic community engagement that connects with and influences official decisions;
14. Clear community involvement in the daily life of the school;
15. Individual teacher advisors for each student;
16. Maximum population of four hundred students. (p. 21)

If applied in the context of school reform, and specifically high school redesign, the 15 characteristics such as autonomous budgeting, time for planning, community involvement, relationships between teachers and adults, and small targeted populations described by Feldman et al. (2006) should create a climate that will combat the problems (incoherence, isolation, anonymity, low expectations, and inertia) that according to the research of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation permeate the American educational system.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2002) provided 10 design features of small schools that encompass organizational structures, relationships, and instructional practices. Many think that if employed in earnest, the 10 design features will result in increased parent involvement, increased student achievement, and a more democratic school overall. The 10 design features include:

1. Personalization: Personalization is achieved when class sizes have between 20 and 25 students and teachers have significantly reduced pupil loads of no more than 40 to 80. To increase the personalization aspect, teachers should teach students in blocks of time longer than the traditional 50 minute blocks.
2. Continuous Relationships: Continuous relationships are often realized when teachers stay with the same students over multiple years through “looping.” Sustained relationships foster improved motivation, maximize engagement in meaningful teaching and learning, and minimize the “getting to know you” phase that teachers experience every year.

3. High Standards and Performance-Based Assessment: Assessments reflect what the school wants the student to know and be able to do by the time they graduate. Evidence of the attainment of the knowledge is based on meaningful review of student work (portfolios and demonstrations) via discussion and analysis.
4. Authentic Curriculum: Authentic curriculum helps schools avoid the trap of superficial content coverage. They provide intellectually challenging work that will prepare the students for independent work and a successful college experience.
5. Adaptive Pedagogy: Adaptive pedagogy takes into account individual student differences and recognizes that students have different pathways and approaches to learning. Multiple instructional strategies range from whole class lecture and independent work to guided inquiry, small group work, and internet research.
6. Multicultural and Anti-Racist Teaching: Multicultural and anti-racist teaching promotes an individual context within each student so that their cross-cultural experiences can be understood. All students need opportunities to see their own experiences reflected in the life and work of the school and to learn about other individuals, cultures, and communities.
7. Knowledgeable and Skilled Teachers: Knowledgeable and skilled teachers are a strong determinant of student achievement. To be highly effective, teachers must not only possess the knowledge, but also the requisite skills to

create and deliver meaningful learning to their students. Successful schools recruit well prepared teachers, facilitate their development, and work to retain them.

8. Collaborative Planning and Professional Development: Collaborative planning and professional development provide a process for the developing, sharing, and reflecting on the implementation of new ideas as well as ensuring the overall development of knowledgeable and skilled teachers. Furthermore, this process provides for the development of a coherent curriculum and builds a campus-wide culture of high professional expectations.
9. Family and Community Connections: Family and community connections recognize that schools do not operate in isolation. Instead, schools forge connections with the students' families and greater community in a way that support and enhance student learning.
10. Democratic Decision-Making: Democratic decision-making is achieved when students, teachers, and parents are engaged in a shared decision-making process about critical school issues. Democratic decision-making can promote the community's coherence around the entire school program and lead to positive outcomes that further support all of the design features.

Chapter Summary

Understanding the American educational system from a historical perspective clearly shows an ever-changing perspective of the scope and need for public education.

The need for an education has ranged from acculturation to an American way of life, to providing for an industrial workforce, to providing for the national defense needs of America, and to sustaining national quality of life levels. Moreover, the historical perspective shows how the trends that molded the policy and practices that shaped our educational system are really a perspective of a select few – business and policy elites.

Unfortunately, many Americans, particularly the poor and ethnic minority children who primarily reside in urban cities and attend large urban schools, have in large part not been able to fully enjoy the benefits of a public education as evidenced by high dropout rates and high economic marginalization rates. This concentration of unsuccessful participants in our urban school systems has caused many well-intentioned reformers to look for methods of improving our schools, particularly high schools.

A growing body of research continues to show that in spite of legislative agendas intended to not leave any child behind and the millions of dollars spent from government agencies and philanthropic organizations in support of the reform efforts, these reform efforts have been at best minimally successful and at worst detrimental to their own cause.

In an attempt to understand and improve school reform efforts, research has continuously pointed to the primacy of the principal's role, as well as the importance of incorporating the community at large, in all reform efforts. However, the most recent research has also established the district leadership team as having a vital role in leading and implementing school reform.

As of late, the largest reform that has attempted to create increased student achievement at the high school level is the small schools movement. The remaining chapters of this study will seek to further understand, provide insight, and elaborate on practical methods for improving the school reform process by exploring the small schools movement in the context of a Texas urban school setting.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

To further elaborate on the purpose of this study, this chapter presents a detailed description of the research questions. After describing the research questions, the methods used during the course of the study are outlined, with particular attention given to the procedures utilized in obtaining and processing the data employed to answer the questions. Finally, this chapter aims at establishing the researcher's credibility by elaborating on the extensive process used to arrive at the findings.

Statement of Problem

The majority of the practitioners attempting to reform unsuccessful urban schools receive guidance from the scholarly community and financial support from philanthropic organizations. The research produced to guide the school reform process has ranged from monographs that encourage districts to build the instructional skills of principals (Honig et al., 2010) to research that describes processes where the central office organization is excluded from the reform (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003). There are, however, some researchers who encourage the total inclusion of the central office (Rorrer et al., 2008). The scholarly guidance and subsequent philanthropic support has thus far resulted in less than complete urban school reform results (Barber & Mourshed, 2007).

The varying and often disjointed scholarly advice has not produced a reformed large urban school system that can be held as a model for other large struggling districts to follow (Cuban, 2010). Consequently, urban schools continue to struggle with high dropout rates, high course failure rates, and discipline problems (Oakes, 2005). Further exasperating the urban school dilemma is the fact that students who attend the schools are often taught by teachers who do not believe the students served have the aptitude necessary for academic achievement (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004).

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of the relationship established between key central office personnel and the high school leadership team during the development and implementation of district-led high school reform. During the course of this study, the researcher developed a particular interest in determining if the principals perceived autonomy from central office or interdependency between the campus and the central office to be more relevant to the success of high school reform. Additionally, this study sought to provide insight into the obstacles faced by principals when attempting to implement district-led high school reform.

Because of the numerous failed attempts to reform comprehensive large urban high schools throughout the United States, there is an urgency to provide insight into mistakes in planning and implementing district-led high school reform. Because of the qualitative nature of this study, the purpose of the research was not to generalize the existence of the obstacles faced during implementation of reform, but rather to acknowledge the potential existence of such obstacles in similar reform ventures.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do principals perceive their relationship to the district leadership team as they attempted to initiate action to secure the changes in teacher behavior that promotes rigorous and meaningful instructional practice within the context of district-led high school reform efforts?
2. What are the aforementioned principals' attitudes toward the obstacles experienced when attempting to improve teacher behavior as they push district-led high school reform efforts?

Participants and Site Selection

In June 2004, the school district that provided the setting for this study received the findings from two independent audits they had requested from two different entities. The audits enumerated the most prevalent deficiencies of each of the district's 11 comprehensive high schools. The deficiencies included the following needs:

1. Give all students access to a rigorous academic core curriculum and a focused area of in-depth study;
2. Improve transitions from middle grades to high school and from high school to college and careers;
3. Improve the quality of instruction and raise classroom standards/ expectations;
4. Expand career/technical education offerings aligned to post-secondary programs, industry standards and labor market demands, and enroll more students in these programs;

5. Create a strengthened education and career advisement program through a teacher advisement system;
6. Strengthen the support system to help struggling students;
7. Develop strong building-level leadership teams involving principals, assistant principals, and teacher leaders;
8. Redefine leadership roles;
9. Provide targeted support for English Language Learners and other students with special needs;
10. Relieve tension at the school level resulting from attempting to accommodate the unique needs of students while adhering to district policies and mandates;
11. Improve communication and relationships (Pecheone, Tytler, & Ross, 2006).

Based on the findings of the audits, the school district decided to implement district-led high school redesign and formed three tiers for redesign. Tier I consisted of the five lowest achieving high schools and these were tasked with implementing immediate “wall-to-wall” high school redesign. Tier II was made up of two schools that were considered average schools, when compared to other public schools, and had to implement some form of redesign. However, the redesign did not have to be as drastic as the Tier I schools. Tier III schools, which consisted of the four highest performing high schools, only needed to show evidence that they were implementing strategies to close the achievement gap within their own schools.

The five principals, whose schools were mandated to implement “wall-to-wall” high school redesign, were asked to participate in the study. Three of the five principals were male: two Hispanic American and one African American. The remaining two participants were female. Both female participants were Hispanic American.

The campus administrative experience of the participants ranged from 4-14 years. The first participant was in her first assignment as a campus principal but had been an assistant principal at various campuses within the same district. Of the five participants, participants one and two remain as in-service principals. However, participant number two has taken a principal position in a suburban district. Participant number three accepted a lateral position within the district before resigning. Participant number four has been promoted to a central office position, and participant number five has retired. All five participants in this study first experienced district-led high school reform in the district that was the setting for this study.

Positionality

Insider's View

In an effort to comply with the tenets of qualitative research, it was necessary to disclose my positionality within the immediate context of this study. I served the school district that provided the setting for this study for three consecutive years as one of the high school principals leading the development of the high school redesign plans. However, I did not participate in the implementation of the any of the redesign plans. Additionally, I consider one of the participants in this study a very close friend and have had extensive conversations with him concerning the day-to-day activities of the high school redesign.

My “insider” view has provided an open door from which to delve deeper into the realities of my subjects. However, it has also created the potential to limit my objectivity and influence the design and outcomes of this study.

Subjectivity

Heeding the advice of Patton (2002), I understand that my own experience, within the district that provided the setting for this study, defined me as a researcher operating from a “reality-oriented stance.” Also, I have come to accept that a research design free of my values and preconceptions was nearly impossible to attain. Therefore, I have heeded Patton’s advice and taken steps to mitigate the influence of my own values and preconceptions by establishing an “audit trail” to verify the data collected (p. 93).

Reflexivity

To provide for reflexivity, Patton (2002) encouraged the qualitative researcher to be “attentive to and conscious of the cultural, political, social, linguistic, and ideological origins of one’s own perspective and voice as well as the perspective and voices of those one interviews and those to whom one reports” (p. 65). Because my formation as a public school administrator occurred substantially within the district that provided the setting for this study, I was cognizant that the origins of my perspective in relation to this study must be addressed.

To address and balance my own perspective with a realistic expression of what was being studied, I sought to answer the following questions presented by Patton (2002). It was my hope that the sincere efforts to answer these questions had established legitimacy to the findings uncovered during the study.

1. What do I know?
2. How do I know what I know?
3. What shapes and has shaped my perspective?
4. With what voice do I share my perspective?
5. What do I do with what I have found?

Data Collection Procedures

Each of the five participants were contacted in person during an administrators' conference three months prior to the collection of data and formally asked for their willingness to participate in the study. After a brief explanation of the process, each participant agreed to participate in a semi-structured interview and be audio-recorded. Each participant was also advised that additional contact in the form of telephone conversations and e-mails, after the initial two-hour interview, would be necessary.

Participant numbers one and two selected their campus office as the location for the interview; participant numbers three, four, and five chose the privacy of their home as the location for the initial interview. With the exception of minor interruptions, each participant was able to relate to the topic at hand and speak fluidly without the need of the researcher to ask questions.

Because I had to travel approximately four hours to conduct the face-to-face interview, all five interviews were conducted during the span of three consecutive days. During the first day allocated for interviews, I only conducted the interview of participant number three. On the following day, I was able to interview participant number five, followed by participant number two. Finally, on the third day, I interviewed participant numbers one and four.

The time span allotted for interviews did not provide adequate time to transcribe each interview prior to conducting the next interview. However, enough time between interviews was available to discern the adequacy of the responses in relation to the scripted questions provided in Chapter I. Each audio-recorded interview was reviewed prior to the subsequent interviews and notes identifying gaps in the answers were prepared. The use of the notes helped make each subsequent interview more complete than the previous.

A transcript of each interview was provided to the respective respondent before any analysis of the collected data was conducted. Each respondent was asked to verify the accuracy of the transcription and provided an opportunity to delete or add any comments they deemed necessary. Finally, the findings were compiled in a case study format. As suggested by Erlandson et al. (1993), each respondent was provided a copy of the case study and asked for feedback that might improve the presentation of the case study. The sharing of the case study also provided a means to verify the accuracy of the data.

Data Analysis

Unitizing Data

The data collected from the interviews were unitized on an Excel worksheet by placing smaller bits of “stand alone” data on individual cells. Being an experienced user of Excel software, the researcher was able to: (a) assign multiple codes to any bit of data,

(b) attribute the data to the respondent, (c) sort the data using any type or combination of identifiers such as respondent, category, sequence of statement, and (d) quantify the frequency of each category.

Emergent Category Designation

Once the data were transcribed and unitized, the researcher aggregated the data of all five participants and reviewed it with the purpose of developing general themes within the responses. Transcribing the interviews and unitizing the transcribed interviews was cumbersome and time intensive. However, the process allowed for the emergence of general themes. After the general themes were developed, the unitized data were attributed to a general theme. Continued analysis of the unitized data, within the specified themes, helped the researcher begin to identify and finalize emerging categories.

Once the unitized data were assigned the finalized category, the data were once again separated by respondent and used to prepare a case study for each respondent. Erlandson et al. (1993) recommended that the researcher "communicate a setting with its complex interrelationships and multiple realities to the intended audience in a way that enables and requires that audiences interact cognitively and emotionally with the setting" (p. 163). Therefore, each case study contained (a) a description of the participant's background and how he or she came into the position of principal at a school undergoing redesign; (b) a detailed historical perspective of the school that provided the setting for the study; and most importantly, (c) each case study contained the findings discovered during the analysis of the data, particularly as it related to the decisions made by the school principal regarding district-led reform. To allow for further analysis, each case study was organized and presented in the same format.

Credibility

The researcher engaged the participants in member checks throughout the entire process. Each participant received the transcripts from their interview, was asked to review the transcript, and then provide written confirmation that the content of the interview was accurate. Each participant submitted confirmation via email. The transcripts and the participants' communications confirming the accuracy of the transcripts are in the sole custody of the researcher.

After the data were unitized and analyzed, the researcher organized case profiles for each participant. The participants were once again asked to review their profiles and make suggestions and corrections. The corrections were minimal and mainly included clarifications for names of activities and other minor details. For example, one participant insisted on his pseudonym being changed from Sean to Malcolm.

Finally, the findings were shared with all five participants, and each was asked to provide suggestions and feedback. Two participants provided feedback. Their feedback indicated agreement with the findings and did not offer suggestions for improvement.

The researcher held peer debriefing sessions with two individuals who had expert knowledge in the field of education. The first individual was a higher education administrator whose responsibility in that capacity included overseeing the curriculum and instructional aspects of dual credit courses at 21 high schools in the southwest Texas region. Furthermore, he oversaw all the assessment processes for the aforementioned institution of higher education. Additionally, he worked as a high school teacher, college professor, and administrator for federally funded programs. The second individual who participated in the peer debriefing sessions was a retired educator who had over 10 years of distinguished high school principal experience in large high schools. This individual currently serves as a technical assistance provider for high schools who have failed to meet federal accountability standards.

Each peer read the entire study and offered suggestions that called for reflecting further on the tone and content of study. The directed reflection focused especially on areas that indicated a personal position rather than a researched-based position. Other suggestions from the peer debriefing members included the addition of scholarly articles that broadened the literature review. Finally, a significant contribution to the scope and depth of the study was their near constant question: “What did you mean to say in this paragraph/section?” The researcher’s further reflection upon this question allowed for a clearer, richer, and more concise record of study.

Trustworthiness

Throughout the course of the five interviews, the respondents offered a wealth of information. In order to maintain the trustworthiness of the interview information, the researcher made entries into an electronic research journal that later reminded him to further study or confirm statements made by the respondents. For example, the respondents often made broad statements such as “our science scores plummeted” or “our TAKS scores went through the roof.” Rather than interrupt the fluidity of the information provided, the researcher simply made a note to later clarify the actual increase or decrease of student achievement scores as reflected on AEIS reports.

Entries in the research journal also served to remind the researcher to ask follow-up questions of the respondents or to ask questions that served to triangulate information provided by several respondents. This method provided significant assurance to the researcher, especially when the information obtained seemed exaggerated or tainted by personal opinions. For example, one respondent often described an outside consultant as “unwilling or unable to deviate from their ‘canned program.’” Because of the aforementioned descriptive statement, subsequent respondents were guided to discuss interactions with the same consultant, thus allowing the researcher to weigh the trustworthiness of the initial respondent’s statement.

The artifacts provided by the participants included program budgets, teacher planning templates, community engagement PowerPoint presentations, and reports from independent audits. Additionally, Campus Improvement Plans were obtained from the campus websites. The artifacts provided significant guidance in formulating timelines of campus activities, as well as greater understanding of the contributions that each outside agent sought to provide. The audit reports provided by two independent agencies greatly substantiated information provided by the respondents and contributed to formulating a more nuanced understanding of the schools’ need for improvement.

Cross-Case Analysis

The findings of this study were derived by a process involving a cross-case analysis. This process was previously used with a high degree of success by Duncan

(2006). To successfully complete this task, the researcher reviewed the findings of each emerging category across all five cases and coded similar experiences within each case. Finally, the researcher verified these findings by combining the quotes used in each of the emerging categories across all five cases.

Significance of the Study

In an effort to understand why high school reform has been an elusive venture, the findings of this study provide deeper insight into the key but fragmented relationship between outside agents (central office and consultants) and campus leadership. This study determined that a chasm between the outside agents' knowledge of improvement methodologies and the campus principals' perception of the relevance and/or timeliness of these improvement efforts derailed the implementation and/or long-term sustainability of improvement efforts. For example, the principals did not support teachers developing engaging and relevant lessons, unless they incorporated learning expectations that were part of the state's assessed curriculum. Moreover, because the instructional coaching was provided by outside agents unfamiliar with the state's assessed curriculum, the principals believed that the outside agents were either unwilling or unable to rearrange their instructional coaching plans to support the immediate needs of the campuses.

This study further provides insight into the principals' perception of the leadership team's skills required to implement and sustain an intense and broad reform process. Although the principals recognized that the prescribed reform activities were in the interest of students, the principals also warned that improvement activities could not be implemented or sustained unless the instructional leadership of the staff (administrators and teachers) was first developed. For example, the principals described the frustration of novice teachers that was rooted in their inability to present an outside agent's prescribed lessons, primarily because of the teachers' inability to manage a classroom. The principals also perceived that the instructional coaching of outside agents should be balanced in a way that included classroom management with classroom instruction.

Finally, this study provides insight into the moments of excellence that brought about bright spots in the central office-campus principal relationship within the context of high school reform. For example, this study documents and elaborates on the coaching provided by certain central office administrators whom the principals perceived as formative and of great benefit to the advancement of reform the initiatives.

Chapter Summary

The qualitative research methods employed in this study gave the researcher a vehicle by which to navigate through the wealth of information provided by each respondent. Each respondent's contributions were carefully scrutinized for credibility and trustworthiness as well as for potential sources that broadened the scope of the investigation. The ability to cross reference each respondent's contributions with other respondent's contributions not only validated the contributions but formulated a more complete depiction of the principals' lived experiences. It is the hope of this researcher that the amalgamation of these lived experiences has added valid research to exigent research within the scholarly community.

CHAPTER IV

CASE PROFILES

During the 2003/2004 school year, the district's superintendent had advised the associate superintendent for high schools that there was growing concern in the community about the lack of standards and lack of opportunity being afforded to the economically disadvantaged high school students. In an effort to be transparent about the realities of the economically disadvantaged students, the superintendent and associate superintendent decided to contract with the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) to conduct an audit of the district's high school effectiveness. In a separate contract, the school district also asked The University of Texas to conduct a similar but separate audit.

The September 2004 SREB report indicated that there was a need to raise the academic achievement of all students and to specifically close the achievement gap of the district's economically disadvantaged students. More specifically, the report indicated that only 7 out of 10 economically disadvantaged students were graduating from high school within four years, and only 5 out of 10 English Language Learners were completing high school within the four-year time frame.

Moreover, the report indicated that significant disparities between district schools also existed. Also, the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS), which reports the results of the state's mandated assessments and other academic indicators among the state's public schools, reported similar findings. According to the 2003/2004 AEIS report (TEA, 2004) that was published the month following the SREB report (October

2004), 5 out of 11 comprehensive schools within the district were significantly underperforming the other 6 high schools. The five underperforming schools, listed by the pseudonym name assigned to them for the purpose of this study, included Central High School, East Central High School, Eastside High School, North Central High School, and North Side High School. It is important to note that although the scores from Eastside High School do not appear to be among the lowest scores in the district, they in fact were low. However, the state assessment scores from the Language Arts and Science Academy, which was housed at Eastside High School, were high enough to mask the scores of the neighborhood kids.

Table 1 describes, by school, the percentage of students who met the state's mandated assessments standard during the 2003/2004 school year (TEA, 2004). Tier I schools were the lowest performing high schools in the district. Tier II schools were the second best performing group of high schools; and Tier III schools were the highest performing group of high schools in the district.

The SREB report indicated that throughout the 2004/2005 school year, the 11 high school principals, led by the associate superintendent for high schools, began discussing strategies to address the deficiencies noted in the independent audits. However, it was becoming apparent to the superintendent and associate superintendent that the deficiencies noted in the reports were too many to be addressed individually and that they should consider implementing district-wide high school reform. It was then that the principals were first introduced to the idea of *high school redesign*.

Table 1. Student Achievement by High School Campus, 2003/2004

District	State	District	Campus	Af Am	Hisp	W	Na Am	As/PI	Spec Ed	Econ Dis	LEP
Central	68	63	35	31	34	48	*	71	20	32	12
East Central	68	63	25	15	27	50	*	*	11	24	7
Eastside	68	63	64	42	50	93	*	93	11	41	6
North Central	68	63	27	24	28	47	*	*	7	27	12
North Side	68	63	32	30	27	55	*	51	13	30	9
Tier III - A	68	63	83	56	67	89	60	88	55	54	25
Tier III - B	68	63	70	42	47	84	83	94	36	37	29
Tier III - C	68	63	81	69	72	84	70	83	38	65	7
Tier III - D	68	63	68	44	48	83	*	92	41	40	9
Tier II - A	68	63	44	28	40	60	33	62	12	37	7
Tier II - B	68	63	45	31	35	62	*	64	12	36	11

*Indicates results are masked due to small numbers to protect student confidentiality.
Source. TEA (2004).

In June 2005, the associate superintendent for high schools took her 11 comprehensive high school principals on an administrative retreat to a central Texas retreat center. The purpose of the administrative retreat was to continue to develop team building among the high school principals and most importantly to discuss high school redesign. The high school principals were encouraged to think “out of the box” and through collaboration with their own communities, develop plans that would restructure the existing high school. The idea that achieving increased academic standards with a challenging population would bring national notoriety was heavily promoted. Principals were being encouraged to become “cutting edge” administrators. While the plan was vague, it seemed enticing enough for principals.

By the fall of 2005, the idea for high school redesign was made more enticing by the awarding of a $1.5 million public engagement and planning grant by the Bill and

Melinda Gates Foundation to the school district. Using this money throughout the 2005/2006 school year, the high schools developed significant redesign plans with the hopes that the Gates Foundation would award an additional $16 million to implement these plans (Pecheone et al., 2006). The Gates Foundation eventually awarded the additional $16 million implementation grant.

In order to provide the guidance needed to develop the redesign plans, the district's superintendent contracted with the School Redesign Network (SRN) from Stanford University and instructed SRN to provide the following.

1. Wall-to-wall redesign of the district's 11 comprehensive high schools into interdependent small learning communities (SLCs) or small schools.

2. Preliminary examination of the district central office to create an organization that meets the implementation needs of the redesigned schools.

3. Creation of a portfolio of unique schools that offers parents, students, teachers, and staff educational choice(s).

4. Development of an inclusive redesign process with a strong community engagement component.

5. Creation of a multi-year redesign plan that is approved and adopted by the Board of Trustees. (Pechone et al., 2006, p. 2)

The following sections present a case profile for each of the five Tier I high school principals engaged in high school redesign. The principals participating in this study, along with the schools they were assigned to, have been assigned pseudonyms and are listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Participant Pseudonyms

Participant Identification	Principal Pseudonym	High School Pseudonym
One	Judy	North Central High School
Two	Margie	East Central High School
Three	Ronald	Central High School
Four	Michael	North Side High School
Five	Malcolm	Eastside High School

Participant Number One – Judy

Judy is a Mexican American middle-aged female who is in her first assignment as a high school principal. Prior to her current assignment, she claimed 11 years of combined experience as a middle school assistant principal and a director of an English language learner program. North Central High School, where Judy began her assignment as high school principal, received an Academically Unacceptable state rating immediately prior to Judy's assignment. After a second and third similar rating, the state's accountability sanctions required that the school immediately begin reconstitution procedures and school closure procedures. Additionally, North Central High School has struggled with meeting the federal government's accountability system (Adequately Yearly Progress) as it relates to student achievement, carrying with it a handful of sanctions.

The community that North Central High School serves had gone through various transformations within the last 20 years. Thirty years ago, the neighborhood residents and the students who attended the high school were predominantly White and middle class. As the neighborhood became an inner city neighborhood, it experienced the "White flight" that similar neighborhoods experienced throughout the nation. While the neighborhood continued to have a mixed racial resident population, the students had increasingly become children of color, and primarily African American.

As a high school serving predominantly African American students, North Central High School and its programs had provided engaging opportunities for students and created a source of pride for the local community. The high school's band program distinguished itself as Southwest Athletic Conference (SWAC), a performance style band. Also, highly celebrated were the athletic programs, accumulating several state titles of their own.

Within the last 10 years, the ethnic makeup of the students had undergone another transformation. This time, the majority of the students attending North Central High School had shifted from being predominantly African American to being predominantly Hispanic. The neighborhood, however, continued to have an established and large African American population. The neighborhood's African American population had consistently been guided, at least politically, by a council of ministers opposing any outward indication that the leadership roles within the immediate community, and specifically the high school, are handed over to Hispanics.

Prior to Judy's principal assignment, two other Hispanic principals were removed from their positions in response to community pressure led by the same council of ministers. They intended to remove Judy successfully from her new assignment. Judy not only received visits to her office and letters from the council of ministers challenging decisions she had made during her early weeks as principal, the letters were also sent to district offices, state agencies, and the local media. Judy recalled a reverend, whose name remains anonymous in this report, “who was a big activist in this neighborhood.”

> He and the ministers were upset because I was the wrong color to start out with and then the wrong person. They marched themselves up here. They did not set up any appointment. “We want to see you, and we want to see what is going on.”

Judy recalled one of the first letters sent to her from the council of ministers and copied to the district office. The letter erroneously indicated she had demoted one of the African American assistant principals. According to the letter, the assistant principal was prevented from being the highest ranking assistant principal on the pecking order. Judy, with a sense of relief and continued disbelief, recalled the time when she discussed the letter with the assistant principal in question.

> He had to laugh when he read it, because it said that I had moved him from, I don’t know, he was fourth on the totem pole, well that’s his number of the radio. Like when they use the radio around here they call Lobo 1, Lobo 2, Lobo 3, or Lobo 4. Well, he was number 4, but that I had moved him down to that position, and that I had moved his office.

On another occasion, the ministers called Judy to the council and said, “We don’t think you are the right person young lady, and when your people came into this neighborhood, it started to go down.”

Judy’s appointment as high school principal was a surprise; her assignment also unwelcome by the entrenched employees, as well as to the African American community. Upon her introduction as principal of North Central High School, Judy’s first goal was to establish a sense of order against the wishes of some self-serving employees and community members who in large part had taken over the school.

Judy best described the support she found among the staff as “passive aggressive.” While no one clearly came up to her and defied her leadership and management, few people immediately rallied around her to improve the school. Judy described her initial assessment of the employees with the following statement.

> The classified personnel had kind of taken over this school because of a lack of guidance. It was kind of a “survival of the fittest.” And they had been here the longest, I can only imagine…. They were the only steady thing here and they took control of situations.

As part of the district-led reform, each school had been able to hire additional personnel. Of the additional personnel, the school improvement facilitator (SIF) was perceived as having a high level of authority and influence because of their consistent communication with central office. In the absence of a principal, the SIF had established herself as a de facto principal and had been running the school. Judy recalls that

> The school improvement facilitator was sabotaging everything because she had been in charge of this school. If I would say something, then she would counter it by saying “she’s not real, so don’t do that.” That was a war the whole first year that I had with the SIF who had taken the job of principal and all the classified that were like running the show.

In addition to responding to an overpowering community and a self-serving staff, Judy was also tasked with implementing a high school redesign plan under the direction of First-Things-First (FTF), a nationally known consultant group for high school reform. At the time of Judy’s arrival, First-Things-First had been working with three of the five high schools engaged in district-led reform. The impression Judy had about First-Things-First was that they were more concerned with the structure of reform and had done little to generate immediate results in relation to academic achievement.

> Now, there were some very serious conversations about us not being able to lift FTF up from this campus because politically they were here. Now, what that meant for whom, I don't know. If we were to pull them out from here, then the district would have to say, "Hey we were wrong in bringing FTF, and now that we have spent all this money, we are going to have to pull them out."

It was clear to Judy that FTF had established their presence within the district-led reform process and that she would not be able to ignore their presence.

The following sections present the findings discovered during the analysis of the data, particularly as it relates to the decisions made by Judy regarding district-led reform. Through careful data analysis, Judy determined that while she saw a need for reform, current reform practices were not the style of reform that the district leadership had begun to implement years prior to her arrival as principal. Summarized in her own words, Judy explained her decision to abandon the current district-led reform:

> The thing with FTF was that, I think, I believe in a lot of the things that they have, but if you are in an emergency, you can't slap that on over ugly, and it was really ugly underneath. It was like not fighting the infection, just like slapping topical on it and not fighting what is underneath, and that's what was happening.

The findings, which emerged during the analysis of the data, are separated into categories: (a) the need to build capacity, (b) the need for focused leadership, (c) the need for structure, (d) time as a limited resource, (e) absence of trust, and (f) positive support.

To further support an understanding of the positive and negative effects that high school redesign had on the campus during the high school redesign years (2004-2010), a data table (Table 3) describing changes in the student achievement is provided. Because the passing standards changed on the state assessment during the course of high school redesign, a simple year-to-year passing rate comparison will not adequately describe the campus progressing or decreasing in their achievement levels. Therefore, the data are presented in terms of changes in the achievement gaps between the campus achievement level and that of the state and the campus group.

Table 3. Changes in Student Achievement Gaps Between North Central High School and the State/Campus Group (2004-2010)

District	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
State	-41	-33	-39	-43	-45	-40	-23
Campus Group	-15	-8	-8	-15	-21	-17	-6

Source. TEA (2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010).

Focused Instructional Leadership

Judy surmised that to lead the school toward productive and worthwhile successes she would have to make sense of every distraction and dysfunction within the school community. Simultaneously, she would have to provide instructional leadership to a school that had not experienced any successful leadership within the previous three administrations.

The instability in leadership over the three previous years, the district-led efforts to redesign the high school, and the instructional interventions provided by the school district's support staff combined to create a disjointed and incoherent instructional plan. Judy recalled that upon examining the school's purchase orders, she discovered large expenses made without any instructional purpose. Judy shared her experience:

> Just for example, the School Improvement Facilitator that was here had also taken over the school. She had taken every kid in the school to Six Flags, during the school day, at the end of the year. Every single kid! No educational connection. Not even a bother with the lesson plan, or even an attempt to justify.

> Just "get on the bus, we are going." The whole school! She had also bought everyone a jump drive for every student. Just money wasted on crazy stuff.

The instructional support staff at the district level was helpful. However, according to Judy, it had not established itself as a credible and effective group. In her opinion, the lack of standards and inability to produce academic results at her school had consistently escalated under the "watch" of the district.

Judy's consistent theme throughout the data analysis determined that Judy believed in "instructional coaching." Unfortunately, the executive director for high school redesign and the associate high school superintendent were more interested in having her produce reports and constantly made visits in her office, omitting personal visits in the classroom to make determinations of what was lacking in the instructional improvement plan. Therefore, Judy took a strong stance and did not allow anyone from the district to manage any instructional improvement plans without first having complete awareness of how these plans supported the work the campus was already doing. She explained:

> We didn't need anyone from the district, because they were all going to come try to help....We said, "No, no, no, no. You can't come here unless you are totally trained in how we want you to work with the teachers." Well, it was like breaking a horse, because they thought they had the answers and they were coming. No, you don't have the answers; otherwise, it wouldn't have been in this condition. So we made the district people come in and get trained, and that was bad. I mean that was hard to do because they were the ones that knew it all…. And so we broke away from the district, and that was hard to do, but we didn't let them come in.

Distancing themselves from the district's instructional processes and establishing instructional autonomy required headstrong consistency on Judy's behalf. However, the effort to break free from central office paled in comparison to the effort required to break away from the connection to First-Things-First.

According to the data analysis, Judy also believed in developing instructional improvement plans and implementing interventions arrived through a locally developed process. As she reflected on her experience with First-Things-First, Judy recalled how aggressive and unwilling they were to deviate from the way they wanted things done.

> They had great pathways, and communities, and it was kind of torture if you were getting out. You had to write this 500 word essay. Well, kids here couldn't even write. Nobody had looked at the writing scores, but they could not write. There was no data management.

First-Things-First and the office of high school redesign were operating under the forgone conclusion the financial investment made by the district necessitated full scale implementation and adherence to the model provided by First-Things-First. However, in Judy's assessment, First-Things-First was not the program required for the "emergency room." It was a program to implement once a school had become operational in its most basic sense.

> So, their systems are good, I think now, looking back at it, if you are a school that just wants change and you are already functioning pretty well, it works just fine. But, it wasn't going to work to revive something here. I think that the second year, they disappeared into the night half way.

With First-Things-First out of the way, an entity who she perceived as a distraction, Judy was able to more clearly focus on the immediate needs of the campus. One of the more pressing and immediate needs was the need to build capacity among the teaching and administrative staff.

The Need To Build Capacity

Upon arriving at the school, Judy turned her immediate attention toward assessing the instructional capacity of the campus and determined its readiness to meet the academic needs of the students during the upcoming year. This initial assessment was crucial and immediately necessary because the Texas Education Agency (TEA) had rated this campus as Academically Unacceptable the previous three years. An analysis of the data determined that Judy saw an immediate need to build instructional capacity in both her administrative team and her teaching staff.

In describing her administrative team, Judy recalled that the campus previously reconstituted and the assistant principals from a leadership cohort were placed at the campus. The assistant principals' only prior experience was equal to a classroom teacher. The collective group of assistant principals did not have the skill-set necessary to provide instructional guidance or coaching to new teachers. Additionally, the necessary, fast-paced and consistent long work hours of an assistant principal in an inner city high school had completely escaped the team.

> The assistant principals on the first day of school almost ran over the kids leaving, and that was their normal thing…they left at 4:30 P.M. They couldn't stay because either they had a child, or whatever. Oh my gosh! We went through the "come to Jesus" talk, like you are going to work here and not even have a family for a while because this is bad and so you are going to have to do this, that, and the other. And even at that, they are new, and they think, "Well, 4:30 PM is when teachers get off, that's when we are getting off also." I had to get rid of, off of that original team….It really is not the same team, and all but two are left. Two stayed, the rest were replaced with somebody because they could not hang with the pace.

Judy found herself asking experienced in-service and out-of-service principals to help provide mentoring for assistant principals who wanted to improve themselves and enable them to influence and create a better student and teacher learning environment at school. She also had the assistant principals schedule meetings with their mentors after normal school hours. Judy was happy to report that one of the assistant principals from the original team had become an exceptional leader.

The abilities of the instructional staff were assessed and found that most of the teachers were relatively new, determining that it was their limited instructional experience that had quickly developed into fear of failure. The immediate need to impact student academic growth necessitated an instructional framework that addressed the student's academic needs but was easy for teachers to implement.

> We were going to keep it simple. First, we were going to align our instruction based on the student's needs. Next, we were going to do a backwards design. Finally, we were going to do common formative assessments. That was just plain and simple. We were going to get the data, align the instruction, and have check points. That was it! But, the teachers had never been trained on that.

It was discovered during the implementation of the instructional framework that some of the teachers would not support its implementation and were beginning to have a negative and counter effect on the new teachers.

> There was a big need to target teachers who did not want to contribute. That was a killer because I had to document. Didn't have help. It wasn't "hey, we are going to move so and so out." It was a full fledge documentation we had to do with everyone. It was a struggle, like pulling teeth, to move some people who were not good for kids and not good teachers. That was the goal the first year.

After the first year of assessing and working to improve the instructional capacity of the administrative team, Judy decided that the campus had established enough sense of unity to bring in outside help. Because the school district is a large urban district, it already employed enough staff members in the Curriculum and Instruction department who could easily provide assistance to Judy’s administrative and teaching staff. Additionally, because of the district-led reform to redesign the high schools, First-Things-First was also under contract, and they too were ready and willing to provide assistance. However, because of Judy’s experience in the district, she was well aware that the district’s instructional coaches based their coaching on an instructional framework predetermined by the school district and would be unable to support the ‘Backwards Design” instructional framework model they had already put in place.

Judy also decided to place First-Things-First “on the sidelines,” because their training and coaching favored a literacy initiative, which Judy felt would not have an immediate impact on teachers. Judy discussed the need to associate herself with a critical ally that would provide coaching to teachers based on their locally designed instructional model. She found this critical ally in a professional development group named Quality Teaching for English Learners (QTEL).

> We needed to bring in QTEL, because QTEL doesn’t tell you what to teach, it teaches you how to teach it. The “what to teach” we were responsible for it ourselves. So, QTEL came in and trained everybody on the pedagogy, as much of it took as was possible. It was a quick and fast. This is our second year with QTEL and as best as we can do in a big school, and I say a big school, but it’s not a big school. It’s big in that we are 43% mobile.

In addition to providing instructional development opportunities to her teaching and administrative staff, Judy had the equally pressing and concurrent problem of providing for the sound management of the school’s administrative programs.

The Need for Structure

Beyond the instructional needs of the campus, Judy was extremely concerned with soundness of the management programs (operations, budget, safety and security) that were supposed to ensure the school was functional. After reviewing historical files, Judy was able to determine that it had been approximately three years since the school leadership had attempted to bring order and efficiency to the system.

> I came here and it was a really, really, really, a dysfunctional school, more so that I have ever seen in my entire life. There was no process for anything. When you come into the school, there is normally a “this is the way that we do.” There was not “this is the way that we do.”

The absence of order and the need for a systematic approach to managing the school had resulted in the budget for supplies and materials being more than $100,000.00 overdrawn. This budget, however, was overdrawn because of self-serving classified employees who recognized the existence of an unlimited and unchecked way of receiving more pay – overtime hours. According to Judy, the abuse of the unmanaged systems extended beyond the classified personnel. She found teachers who had grown accustomed to leaving the classroom during the instructional day, while students enjoyed the free time afforded to them as a result of the teachers’ extended break.

> I found out that the teachers would say, “Hey Carlos, I am going to the mall today. I am going to take my class over to your class, and I am going to go to the mall, and sometime this week, you pick a day and you can go.” That was like crazy.

Judy also expressed how the absence of systems had led to the mismanagement of the schools’ most basic legal duties. Throughout the interview, Judy recalled various instances when school personnel had failed to maintain what should have been clear and well-known procedures:

> They had shredded all of the cumulative folders; I guess they emptied cabinets that they needed, so they just shredded the cumulative folders or put them up somewhere. People had graduated and had not met graduation standards. We had to recover from that year.

The lack of adherence to policies and procedures also presented an opportunity for those immediately outside of the school to take advantage of the chaos that consistently increased. Community members, primarily members who belong to congregations led by members of the council of ministers, had keys to the school.

Also, numerous students enrolled in this school resided outside the school's attendance zone. Student addresses never verified enabled them to attend classes at a campus that was not within their residential school zone. “This was the place to come, to have a good time,” Judy says. “So, you left the school you were enrolled at, and claimed that you were living wherever. Nobody checked it out. You just came in.”

Time as a Limited Resource

Developing an instructional framework, coaching teachers and administrators, and defending the campus instructional plans to the different entities that exerted governance over the school was constantly consuming the most limited of Judy's resources – time.

Before being able to move forward with any reform efforts, Judy had to first make sense of the upper levels of district administration as well as the state-directed improvement officers that, while established to support schools, collectively had the potential to consume most of her time and stifle her efforts at leading academic improvements. Provided below is a list of state officers and central office administrators in the district's organizational chart that fell below the Chief of Schools, but who Judy was responsible for communicating and coordinating school improvement efforts.

1. The Associate High School Superintendent – evaluated Judy's overall performance.
2. The executive director for high school redesign – directed the district's high school redesign efforts and controlled the $16,000,000 Gates Grant as well as the annual $6,000,000 allotted by the state for college readiness.
3. The District's Instructional Offices – directed the overall implementation of the district's curriculum and related staff development.
4. The Executive Principal – was an extension of the associate superintendent for high schools and responsible for coaching and mentoring principals assigned to focus schools.
5. Technical Assistance Provider (TAP) – an officer of the state's School Improvement Resource Center (SIRC) responsible for ensuring the school and district had an improvement plan in place to meet the federal government's accountability standards as they related to student achievement.
6. External Campus Improvement Team Member – an officer of the Texas Education Agency (TEA) responsible for ensuring the school and district had an improvement plan in place to meet the state's accountability standards as they related to student achievement.

The officers listed had independent insight into organizational structures, curriculum, and instructional methodologies that the campus should utilize for improvement. With their expertise, Judy had the responsibility of coordinating, and because of limited time, even prioritizing whose direction she should follow.

As an administrator at her previous campus, Judy witnessed time ineffectively consumed by district officials. Unfortunately, they were not listening to what improvement efforts the campus engaged in, instead, only driven by a plan they wanted to implement.

> They were not listening. Had I…I had the pleasure and the horror of being at East Central High School when Margie was the principal. And although I was there, I was not living that. But what I saw was exasperation of trying to say this is whatever, and nobody listening at the other end, and instead saying, "We are going to come in with the plan."

Considering that Judy already had a preconceived notion about the time and effort required in fulfilling what she perceived to be futile tasks assigned by central office, it came as no surprise that her frustrations further exacerbated by continually explaining what she and her leadership team were attempting to implement. Judy had her explanation:

> But a lot of the time was spent entertaining people, because they all needed to know the same thing, but they all couldn't come at the same time. So we did the show…I could have put out a "Show Playing at this time, this time, and this time." And it went all year long. And, so it takes energy to do that and it takes energy away from being where I needed to be…in the 'nitty-gritty.' So, to satisfy those people, the whole time was taken up with stuff that had nothing to do with really helping kids. It was reports, and…

Not only did the Judy spend time defending the campus improvement efforts, time was also consumed with attempting to sort through the different agencies that wanted to be an integral part of the reform efforts. Much like central office, the goal of these agencies was not to help implement the improvement plan established by Judy and her team. Instead, they wanted to promote their own plan.

> The biggest killer was the outside people coming in and jerking. Jerk this way, jerk that way, jerk, jerk, jerk….Now FTF was on us, so I have to go to all these

> trainings and listen to them. And, all I could see was blah, blah, blah….They were coming to give me advice. Not that I didn't need any advice, but I had a focus. And not that I knew everything. I don't know everything, but this was our focus.

While Judy agreed that she needed help, she was consistently frustrated because she felt she had established a focus for the campus, and most individuals that came to visit were not interested in becoming part of the established focus. The perception by Judy that the outside agents, such as First-Things-First and district agents, were not validating the locally developed campus instructional focus quickly developed into distrust.

Absence of Trust

Data analysis revealed Judy was unsure of the school district's actions, or if those actions were well intended. In fact, analysis gave indications that Judy believed the district only documented their actions in an attempt to indicate they did provide assistance. Judy was not able to lock arms with the school district in moving forward with the implementation of the district-led high school redesign, or the implementation of the school district's instructional plans. Judy perceived that they consumed her time with events and dialogue that did not contribute to furthering the improvement focus.

> The associate superintendent for high schools decided that every Friday he would spend the whole day here. Here in the office, when I had to be out doing things in classrooms….So here, we already knew that we were humoring central office. I took the associate superintendent for high schools on Fridays. He knows all about my family, and my life, not so much about instruction, but it was all pleasant. But I was sacrificed on Fridays. The team had to be good on Fridays; they had to work without me. The Executive High School Principal had to take that and go with it, because I was stuck here entertaining. I guess if I was going to switch positions and coming to support a principal in this position, I wouldn't do it in this room, like they did it with me, in this office. I would have done it out there in the classrooms.

Furthermore, Judy felt that the insistence to implement the district plan gave the school district two options for discrediting Judy, should the campus continue to be an Academically Unacceptable campus. First, the school district could claim that despite their insistence, the district instructional plans were not implemented with fidelity. Next, the school district could also claim that the district improvement instructional plans were never implemented. Finally, if the school successfully received an Academically Acceptable status by the Texas Education Agency (TEA), nobody would have to say anything.

> We were threatened many times about “how about if this thing does not make, and you have First-Things-First, saviors of the universe that are here to help you and you’re actually going to shun them away….It was bad, bad, bad. I don’t think any of them would have had my back. Because those days came, when the scores got back, and what are we going to do with Judy when it all goes down? Who cares that we have, whatever kind of training invested in her, or if she did a good job the whole time. There was going to be the big red letter. Where are we going to hide her? What are we going to do with her?

Judy’s distrust of the school district did not begin with her assignment as the school’s principal. Instead, her distrust was rooted while observing the district’s treatment and lack of support for two other principals assigned to one other inner city school.

> Knowing what had happened at East Central, and having watched it happen, not once but twice. Juanita went through it, and Margie went through it. And then since the academy is where I was assigned, I continue to get the scoop right away… I had the pleasure and the horror of being at East Central High School when Margie was the principal. And, although I was there, I was not living that. But, what I saw was exasperation of trying to say “this is our plan” and nobody listening at the other end, and instead saying, “We are going to come in with the plan.” What Margie needed to do over there, she was not able to, just from my perspective, just watching, and it was so unfair.

Finally, Judy expressed distrust over the relationship between the office of high school redesign and the bureaucracy of First-Things-First. Judy believed that the unprecedented expansion of the office of high school redesign and the district's financial investment in First-Things-First had combined to form a co-dependent relationship that had taken precedence above more pressing needs of the campuses. Judy believed that the only reason that she was able to keep First-Things-First "on the sidelines" was because of the negotiating skills of the Executive Principal assigned to her campus – Michael.

> When he got here, he was the negotiator with central office, and he was successful in making sure that we were able to take control of the instructional support that was coming our way, to that he did a lot of the meeting with FTF.

In the midst of all the distrust, Judy was able to form a strong alliance with one of the central office agents. The alliance proved beneficial not only to Judy's development as an administrator, but also to the instructional development of the teaching staff.

Positive Support

During the first three years of her principalship, Judy was able to witness a consistent increase in student academic achievement. During her first year as principal, the school was not able to remove the Texas Education Agency (TEA) label of Academically Unacceptable. However, the increase in student achievement as evidenced by the state assessment scores was widely considered as considerable improvement. Thus, Judy was able to continue to operate the school, enabling her to celebrate that success for the last two years, the school receiving the TEA rating of Academically Acceptable. As Judy reflected on the success of the school during her first year, she consistently gave credit to the high school Executive Principal who while not permanently assigned to the campus, spent most of his time assisting her and mentoring her.

> If there had not been two people here that first year, it just would not have happened, because Michael, away from all of the drama, got to work with our instructional people and started to organize that. That was a humongous job. Michael, who to me is central office interface also, because he was the Executive Principal… In my heart, I knew that he was comrade here, and in position, I say that he was my boss. It was not a boss position; I don't think it was intended to be a boss position, but I have always respected him as if he would have been my boss at that time. So he was the one. If I had to give credit to anyone for our success, it would be to him, because he is the one that fended off all of that.

Because of all the time that was consumed with justifying the campus' instructional improvement plan, meeting with external agents, and fending off potential distractions, Judy was relieved that someone from the district office was able to supervise and direct on her behalf all of the instructional improvement plans. Most importantly, Michael, much like Judy, believed in developing instructional improvement plans and implementing interventions that were arrived at through a locally developed process.

> I appreciated the mentoring because I did respect him and because he was no nonsense, because he had fought off other initiatives from the district, even to the point where he had unpopularity, a lot. More so than anybody that I had noticed.

Judy's continued formation as an inner city high school principal consistently reflected the guiding principles learned from Michael. To him she attributed the formation of the backward instructional design model, the alliance with QTEL, and most especially the fending off of First-Things-First.

Case Profile Summary

Forming Judy’s case profile provided the opportunity to understand the duties attributed to an inner city high school principal within the context of a lived experience. Formulating this understanding will hopefully accomplish two goals: (a) prevent outside agents from discounting distractions that prevent immediate implementation of improvement programs and (b) develop an awareness of the skills needed of principals to manage various aspects of their job and eventually implement improvement programs that will bring more rigorous and relevant learning to their students.

Participant Number Two – Margie

Margie is a Mexican American middle-aged female who, at the time of this study, was serving in her second assignment as a high school principal in a school district separate from the district that provided the setting for this study. Margie, much like Judy, was in her first assignment as a high school principal during the time period that encompassed this study.

While serving as a middle school principal, Margie was recruited by the associate superintendent for high schools for the position of principal at East Central High School, a school that had consistently struggled to meet the Texas Education Agency’s (TEA’s) accountability standards. In addition to not meeting state accountability standards, the East Central High School had been plagued by considerable discipline problems. Moreover, the school suffered from limited student participation in extracurricular activities, little parent participation, and high teacher turnover.

The neighborhood students at East Central High School had historically performed below state standards. However, low-performing students' scores had been masked in part by the scores of the students who attended the language and liberal arts academy housed within the school. Ten years prior to this study, the district decided to move the language and liberal arts academy to a different school. Since that change, the school had failed to meet state standards. Moreover, the school did not have a principal who served for more than two consecutive years and, similar to many other inner city schools, had the historically higher performing students transfer to high schools in the more affluent side of the city.

The exit of the language and liberal arts academy and the "White flight" experienced by East Central High School caused the school's enrollment to drop considerably. The student enrollment dropped steadily and resulted in enrollment of about 700 students at the time of the study. The low enrollment, coupled with limited student participation in extracurricular activities, often culminated in student groups disqualified from participating in athletic and fine arts at state-sanctioned competitions. At the beginning of the school year, the resulting "Friday Night Lights" scenario could often be described as having just enough players on the football field, less than 10 band members in the stands, and even fewer fans in attendance. Making matters worse was the fact that after the first grading period, many students were deemed academically ineligible to participate and the student groups could not muster enough participation to complete the competition season.

For two years prior to Margie's appointment as principal, the superintendent attempted to engage the school's community in conversations about closing East Central High School and enrolling the students in other district high schools. However, the school's alumni spoke on behalf of the east side community and garnered enough city-wide support to discourage the superintendent from closing the school. Because of this, the superintendent and his administrative team brainstormed school restructuring ideas that would convince TEA to allow the school to continue operating.

In the year prior to Margie's appointment, the associate superintendent for high schools researched and began to implement a restructuring plan that would help improve student achievement. The first part of the plan included the creation of an international academy for language acquisition. A second and more elaborate part of the plan included applying for the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) Texas High School Initiative Grant that would support the restructuring of the already small high school into three smaller academies. After both plans were fully implemented, each of the three academies could apply for and receive their own Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) number from the Texas Education Agency. The state-approved PEIMS number would provide each of the three academies a means to independently oversee and manage their own finances and academic accountability.

Under the first part of the restructuring plan, limited English proficient high school students who had less than one year experience in a school within the United States would be transferred to the newly established international academy housed at East Central High School. Because the school district had a large number of high school students experiencing U.S. schooling for the first time, it was anticipated that the school's enrollment would drastically increase.

The more elaborate academy plan called for the hiring of a Campus Academic Officer (CAO), as opposed to a high school principal, who would then hire three academy directors, as opposed to assistant principals. According to the first CAO:

> The initial plan was that I as the Campus Academic Officer, would oversee the establishment of these three academies, and then over the course of the next three years, these academies would essentially become three small schools with their own individual PEIMS numbers.

Although each academy would have its own academic focus and be an autonomous school, each of the three schools and the already established international school would share athletics, fine arts, and the UIL academic electives. The sharing of these electives would further consolidate the four academies into one Texas UIL competition school.

By December 2004, implementation of the international academy was well under way. Moreover, the school was informed that they had received the Texas Education Agency's grant to redesign East Central High School into three smaller academies. Unfortunately, the first year of implementation was not a successful year for the campus serving the neighborhood students. The enrollment at the high school continued to decrease at a higher rate than the rate of students who enrolled at the international academy. In addition to this was the fact that the international academy was never fully seen as part of the existing high school. Finally, the student's discipline problems were escalating and the principal was not able to fully energize and motivate the faculty into working for the school's improvement.

The first year's failure caused the associate superintendent for high schools to conclude that the current principal was not the appropriate principal to lead the implementation of the entire redesign plan. Simultaneously, the problems experienced during the first year of redesign implementation also served to encourage the existing principal to resign and not continue with her tenure. It was in the middle of this turmoil that Margie was recruited. After serious consideration, she accepted the job to serve as the principal/academic officer.

During Margie's first few months as principal, everything seemed to be progressing as expected. The associate superintendent encouraged Margie to take multiple trips to Boston and visit schools that had engaged in similar restructuring ventures. Additionally, the associate superintendent also helped Margie hire three academy directors and encouraged them to travel to Nashville, Tennessee, to participate in the High Schools That Work (HSTW) national conference. HSTW had come into the East Central High School scenario because the Texas High School Initiative grant required that schools accepting grant monies secure a Technical Assistance Provider (TAP). Therefore, the school district secured HSTW as the TAP.

Upon returning from the HSTW national conference Margie and the three academy directors began filling vacancies, divided the teaching staff into three academies, and developed plans to begin the school year. Margie remembers that:

> Once we hired the three academy directors, Jesse, Richard, and Virginia, we all took that trip to the HSTW national conference. When we came in that Fall, we divided up the teachers into three academies and each academy director took responsibility for hiring and filling all vacancies because half of the staff had either resigned or retired.

Throughout the Fall 2005 semester, staff from the HSTW team visited the school and provided staff development related to the 10 key practices encouraged by HSTW. However, it was up to the school staff to then implement the 10 key practices into the redesign plan. Margie and her staff were challenged by the expectancies of the HSTW model but were at the same time encouraged by the guidance and the freedom to implement the plan in a way that best suited the needs of the campus.

By the end of Margie's first year (Spring 2006 semester), it appeared that everything was progressing. Even though the school did not meet the Texas Education Agency's academic improvement standards, the students did make significant gains in the state assessment. The curriculum and instruction department from central office provided instructional coaching to the teachers, and the principal was able to make many decisions regarding the tactical implementation of the redesign plan.

More importantly, the campus felt empowered to make decisions. The empowerment was especially apparent in the hiring of consultants that provided staff development. On the aforementioned point Margie recalls:

> That first year it was very seamless and very smooth. Anything that I asked for, I was able to use campus funds. You know, we had Title I funds, we had School Improvement Funds, we had money that had come in from the district. And then there was this massive amount of funds that came in with this TEA grant itself.

Because of this, Margie thought that the school would continue with the implementation of the grant.

Although the campus staff perceived everything to be progressing well, significant disagreements occurred at the central office level that would significantly limit Margie's ability to implement the redesign plan. At the same time that Margie was implementing the redesign plan during her first year, the school district had been studying the possibility of redesigning all of the high schools within the school district. Although these exploratory efforts were originally led by the associate superintendent for high schools, the school district later decided to establish an office of redesign and hire an executive director for high school redesign. The purpose of the redesign office was to secure money from philanthropic organizations, primarily the Gates Foundation, for the implementation of district-led high school redesign. Moreover, the change allowed the district to easily coordinate the redesign activities throughout the district.

However, the newly created office reported directly to the superintendent and not the associate superintendent for high schools. As corroborated by all participants, the executive director for high school redesign immediately asserted his authority over all district redesign efforts. By doing so, the executive director aggressively challenged the authority of the associate superintendent for high schools. In what is retrospectively regarded as fallout akin to a corporate takeover aftermath, the associate superintendent for high schools quietly entered retirement that same year.

Margie believes that the resignation of the associate superintendent for high schools had a limiting effect on the implementation of their redesign plan and eventually led to abandonment of the initial plan. Margie elaborates on this belief by stating that:

> The associate superintendent for high schools left at the end of my first year. That's when things became unraveled, because she left. Apparently, the superintendent had given her this task – take care of this high school. And she did, without really involving other people. I think that even the other high schools were in the dark as to what was happening at East Central High School….So I felt like that entire second year I spent the entire year justifying my plan, and explaining it and re-explaining it, and attending meeting after

> meeting after meeting trying to explain what was happening at our school with the redesign plan.

After the departure of the associate superintendent for high schools, the redesign efforts at East Central High School quickly gravitated away from a reform effort led by a campus team to a reform effort primarily led by the district's central office.

Careful analysis indicated the emergence of categories that provide insight into the obstacles experienced by the principals when implementing district-led reform. Furthermore, a cursory review of the data indicates that the failed reform efforts were directly related to the inability to remain faithful to the implementation of any single plan for more than one year. On this point Margie provided the following summary:

> So I think, that in that reform effort, I can tell you that unless you really stick with a plan with fidelity for three to five years, you're never going to know if it really worked. And looking back at my experience, we changed every year. We never stuck with one plan.

The next section will provide the findings discovered during the analysis of the data, particularly as it relates to the decisions made by Margie regarding district-led reform. The findings are separated into categories that emerged during the analysis. The categories include the need to build capacity, the need for focused leadership, the need for structure, time as a limited resource, absence of trust, and positive support.

To further support an understanding of the positive and negative effects that high school redesign had on the campus during the high school redesign years (2004-2010), a data table (Table 4) describing changes in the student achievement is provided. Because the passing standards changed on the state assessment during the course of high school redesign, a simple year-to-year passing rate comparison will not adequately describe the campus progressing or decreasing in their achievement levels. Therefore, the data are presented in terms of changes in the achievement gaps between the campus achievement level and that of the state and the campus group.

Table 4. Changes in Student Achievement Gaps Between East Central High School and the State/Campus Group (2004-2010)

District	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
State	-43	-40	-40	-52	-41	-38	*
Campus Group	-19	-16	-12	-27	-16	-18	*

*Indicates data not reported due to school closure.
Source. TEA (2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010).

Focused Instructional Leadership

During the first year of redesign, Margie felt that the campus had been able to primarily focus on the instructional aspects of high school reform. With the exception of the time spent during the first summer reorganizing students into academies, dividing the teachers, and hiring related personnel, Margie felt confident that most of the time had been well spent on instructional improvements. According to Margie, the associate superintendent for high schools and the assistant superintendent for instruction made sure that district personnel assisted in the improvement efforts:

> The district instructional specialists were really working with the instructional coaches to make sure that the curriculum was aligned and that we were really following through with the protocols for planning and for examining data every six weeks with the common assessments that we had in place.

The overall effort, while not sufficient to remove the school from the Texas Education Agency's Academically Unacceptable list, significantly improved student academic achievement.

However, the associate superintendent for high schools departure from the school district facilitated a shift in district priorities, including the plans to continue with the redesign efforts at East Central High School. Margie found herself struggling against different entities to maintain a focus on the instructional improvements rather than the structural improvements prescribed by other redesign efforts being emphasized throughout the school district.

By the summer prior to the beginning of the second year, the school district had decided to not continue with the technical assistance provided by High Schools That Work (HSTW). As Margie understood, the Texas High School Initiative grant was about to come to an end, and the school district was pursuing other grant opportunities. Even though Margie was about to begin her second year of redesign implementation without the technical assistance of HSTW, she and the staff were convinced that with continued focus on the instructional coaching provided to the teachers and the continued academic support provided to the students, the campus would continue to make academic improvements.

The district leadership, however, received a $1,000,000.00 Gates Foundation planning grant to investigate the implementation of high school redesign at all five Tier I schools and because of that wanted to improve their chances of receiving the larger $16,000,000 implementation grant from the Gates Foundation. Because Margie's school was one of the Tier I schools and because funding from the Texas High School Initiative grant was about to end, the district leadership was pushing Margie to write a different redesign plan that would qualify her to be part of the larger Gates grant. Margie recalled her reluctance to move away from the redesign plan that had been in place for the first year:

> Well, I didn't want to upset the applecart and have to start all over again because I had remembered the work from HSTW that very first year I came. It was really difficult to keep up with them, and then we never really got off the ground with all the pieces they wanted us to implement. The needs of the campus were just too massive.

Margie's resistance to not deviate from the initial redesign plans was met with equal persistence by the district leadership.

The district leadership was adamant that rewriting a redesign plan would not detract from the existing redesign plan being implemented. The district argued that the new redesign plan would focus on having small academies, student advisories, and a college and career curriculum. Incidentally, the plan that the district prescribed was similar to what was currently implemented. Margie found herself using the same argument to convince her deans that rewriting the plan would not be a distraction or significantly shift from current practices. For example, Margie recalls telling her deans, "Look, what they are asking us to do is pretty much what we already have in place. We may just have to put a different coding on it or a different spin on it."

Margie also recalls that the process of rewriting the plan detracted from the academic focus that had been established during the first year:

> I think it was a huge halt to the progress, because now the academy directors were involved in having to rewrite and resubmit their redesign plans for each of the academies….I can honestly tell you that that process took so much time and effort from the academy directors that they lost ground in being able to be in classrooms and really monitor what was going on with instruction.

Although the rewriting of the plan was a distraction, the school district offered to each campus, as part of the redesign initiative, the flexibility to choose a Technical Assistance Provider (TAP).

Margie believed that the new redesign plan would allow them to continue implementing the initial redesign plan written by the previous high school principal and the now retired associate superintendent for high schools. Because of this, she intended to hire a TAP with a skill set that would help them implement that initial plan. However, the superintendent and executive director for high school redesign had already begun informal relations with First-Things-First and intended to promote them to the principals as a preferred TAP.

First-Things-First assisted had already assisted the school district in completing the application for the $16,000,000 Gates Foundation implementation grant. As Margie recalls, "First-Things-First came into the picture because the Gates Foundation required a working proven model for redesign. First-Things-First was one of those proven models." Additionally, Margie recalls various conversations where she was strongly encouraged to hire First-Things-First as their TAP:

> The spring of that second year, I was in several meetings with the superintendent and executive director for high school redesign, where I was told "Margie, you should really look at this First-Things-First model, and really look at bringing them in."

In addition to being pressured by the central office organization, Margie was also courted by representatives from First-Things-First. Margie met various times with First-Things-First representatives, but they failed to convince her to buy into their model. As Margie recalls:

> I met with them that spring of that second year. I had several meetings with them. At first, we were able, not necessarily to keep them at bay, but not buy completely into them because we had come off the first year and we had made gains. We did not drop anywhere.

However, by the end of Margie's second year, it was evident that the school had not mirrored the academic gains of the first year and she was no longer able to fend off the district's insistence that she contract with First-Things-First. Margie recalls that:

> At the end of the second year, when the scores came in and we did not come off of the Academically Unacceptable list, I remember the executive director for high school redesign coming into the faculty meeting and literally telling the faculty we were going to go with First-Things-First.

The abrupt ending of Margie's autonomy as Chief Academic Officer also ushered in a new and separate phase of high school redesign. The next section will describe what Margie perceived as a conflict with First-Things-First and a detraction to the campus' academic focus.

Although it had been decided by the executive director for high school redesign that First-Things-First would provide the guidance for the new redesign plan, Margie was still hopeful that the academy directors could eventually assume their role as independent principals of the three academies. Unfortunately for Margie, the Texas Education Agency's (TEA's) commissioner denied the petition for the three independent Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) numbers. Margie remembers:

> In the summer of 2007, after the school ratings had come out, the superintendent and I met with TEA. TEA was not going to approve the application for the three PEIMS numbers for the academies. I remember the superintendent saying "Forget that redesign model…you are no longer Campus Academic Officer, you are now the principal."

The commissioner's decision to not grant the three PEIMS numbers provided a pathway for First-Things-First to more fully implement their model.

However, the decision by TEA to not grant the three PEIMS numbers also served to establish Margie's position as the lead decision-maker on the campus. Margie stated that "As the principal, coming in the third year, First-Things-First had to meet with me on everything that they did on the campus."

From the onset of the relationship, Margie and her staff did not believe in First-Things-First's commitment to helping them make improvements. For example, Margie observed:

> And so, that summer of that second year, the teachers had to come in for a period of 10 days. During those 10 days, FTF was going to come in and introduce their model….The trainers that came in through FTF were not even people that we had associated with before. The people that we had interacted with initially and had met face-to-face where not these people. It was almost as if they had brought in a group of these standard trainers that come in and deliver this prepackaged presentation. What was disappointing about that first initial meeting was that the trainers that came in didn't know anything about our school. They had not done their homework about who we were as a campus, the history of its performance, and much less understood the Texas Accountability System. It was disappointing because that first initial meeting is so important to establish why we are taking on this FTF model.

Having First-Things-First's commitment questioned only served to further establish doubt as to whether the methodologies employed by them would eventually provide for increased academic achievement.

Since her first year, Margie had been clear that academic improvement would be achieved only if the staff was coached on the implementation of instructional methodologies. Furthermore, Margie was convinced that teachers needed specific feedback regarding their own instructional deficiencies. However, Margie and her academy deans believed that First-Things-First was more interested in structural organizations (themed academies and establishing connections) rather than instructional improvements. Margie observed that the reform, as dictated by the First-Things-First representatives, was not a valid way to achieve academic improvement. On this point, Margie responded to an open-ended question about the efficacy of First-Things-First with the following commentary:

> No, because unless you redesign the classroom and redesign instruction for kids that come to you two or three years below grade level already, until you address that initial need, then redesigning and putting kids in themed academies, and trying to make connections between the learning so that learning is more relevant, is all for not. You have to have a command of what is happening in that classroom….I think what was missing was the actual credibility behind those models. They never really addressed what teachers encountered in a classroom and what teachers encountered with the kids that they had in their classrooms.

The disagreement between First-Things-First and the campus administration regarding instructional improvement methodologies and overall campus academic needs, further widened by what Margie observed to be an unwillingness to validate the concerns of the teachers. Margie observed that:

> Whenever there was an attempt to talk about the realities of what really happens in the classroom, FTF representatives simply dismissed teacher concerns. Rather than really trying to figure out what their concerns were and figure out a way to help support them, teachers were made to feel that it was just an excuse for you not being able to teach this lesson.

Although numerous attempts to resolve the differences between First-Things-First and the campus administration were made by Margie, it had become clear to Margie that First-Things-First was not willing to compromise at any level.

> There was no flexibility with them. Everything that they asked that we do had to be implemented the way that they said, so if I wanted to alter the schedule in any way, it was frowned upon. And I guess that was part of my conflict with them as

> campus principal. I felt I had to check my every move with someone. So it really affects your ability to make decisions.

By January 2007, First-Things-First had severed their ties with Margie and her campus. Why First-Things-First made this decision is still unknown to Margie. “Maybe they were not up to the challenge, or maybe they too were frustrated.” What is known is that during that same timeframe, First-Things-First established themselves as the Technical Assistance Provider in three other schools in the district.

The perceived debate over who should provide the instructional leadership and the type of instructional leadership consistently detracted from making any type of significant improvements. Margie perceived this unhealthy debate to be a distraction from focusing on building the instructional capacity among the staff. This next section discusses the perceived need to build the staff’s instructional capacity.

The Need To Build Capacity

The magnitude of the district-led reform required a campus-wide approach. Because of this fact, the attention of everyone, especially the principal, was required to orchestrate substantial change. Additionally, the threat of closure by the state for not making academic gains relative to state standards was also ever present in Margie’s mind and also required an intense focus. Margie remembered:

> The only thing that we measured success with was performance in the classroom and whether or not the students could pass a test and graduate in four years. Well, when you are coming into a school system already one or two years behind grade level, you have to make allowances and value the fact that it may take five years to graduate high school. And there is nothing wrong with that.

The limited experience of many team members, both administrators and teachers, did not allow them to fully understand the campus’ pressing academic need.

The negative impact that a young teaching staff had on the potential for school closure was compounded by the fact that many of the new teachers taught in the math and science departments. For example, Margie pointed out that:

> We reconstituted half of the math and science department because those were the two low-performing areas for the campus….And the other fact that we were dealing with is that half of our teaching staff had less than five years teaching experience, very, very young teaching faculty. The majority of the teaching staff that we hired had not taught very long.

Margie was responsible for ensuring a team approach towards redesign, while simultaneously developing an instructional focus among all the staff. The next two sections discuss the need to build the instructional capacity among the campus administration and the teaching staff.

Throughout the discussions and interviews conducted with Margie, she frequently referred to her role and interaction with the academy directors. Most of the discussions gravitated toward the need to develop them in their new role. For instance:

> So part of what I did was try to groom the three academy directors so that they could be ready to take over their own schools. And also so they could be ready to function as a quasi-board that would have to make decisions about a shared facility, because there were so many shared programs that they had to learn to work together in that particular situation.

As the Principal/Chief Academic Officer, Margie required herself to guide the academy directors to conduct the duties that a principal would normally conduct. For Margie, having control of the campus operations had to become subordinate to the development of the academy directors. For example, Margie relays that as campus principal she never conducted campus-wide faculty meetings:

> The only time we came together is when we had professional development. That is the only time I addressed the faculty as a whole. Each of the academies held

> weekly meetings. Each of them had a day when they would meet in the mornings….I let them pretty much meet; I would float in and out. I would make appearances. But I was always a member in the audience.

The work for Margie as a principal was made more complex because not only was she responsible for developing three directors, each of the directors was responsible for operating as an independent unit (Academy of Scientific Research and Design, the Global Business and Technology, and the Fine Arts). Margie indicated that:

> The problem came, when things got really muddy. For example, the Academy for Fine Arts had your choir and your band. We had some orchestra there for a while. Well, those kids fell into those academies or programs because they had those electives. But those electives or programs should have been interwoven along all three academies….You got into, not necessarily a tug of war, but you did get into conflict with the kids who really wanted to be in the band, but were also interested in being part of the Scientific Research and Design Academy that had the math and science components.

The focus on developing the academy director's instructional capacities was sometimes secondary to the development of their functionality as a cohesive unit.

In addition to developing the instructional capabilities of the administrators, Margie also prioritized among her varying tasks, the development of the teacher's instructional capacity. This development was made more challenging because it had to be synchronized with the instructional focus the campus was attempting to undertake.

Margie was convinced that instructional improvements and student achievement would occur when the learning was made "personal." Personal for Margie meant several things. First, personal learning meant that the students had to relate to the context of the learning. Second, and more important, personal learning also meant that the learning had to simultaneously address the specific deficiencies of teachers and the students. Personal learning meant learning for the teachers about making lessons engaging and rigorous for students followed by instructional coaching. The instructional coaching should be based on what was and was not observed in the implementation of the lessons previously developed. Specifically, Margie believed: “You know it always works better when you can sit across the table with someone, rather than having them read the feedback from a feedback form. Because there is so much that is not said in between the lines.”

On this note, Margie was quick to praise the contributions made by the oversight principal assigned to her as part of the Texas Education Agency’s sanctions for being an Academically Unacceptable campus. Margie recalled that while she was engaged in addressing all of the distractions from the outside, she was comforted with the knowledge that the oversight principal was providing “the classroom presence and then the feedback to the teachers.”

For the students, “personal” meant the learning had to begin at the student’s level of comprehension and then through the lesson cycle, the teacher would scaffold the learning up to the intended learning objective. However, the teachers again had to first learn how to scaffold a lesson in order to sustain the student’s engagement throughout the learning cycle. Contemplating on this point, Margie observed:

> How do you actually scaffold and build a lesson when kids don’t have foundational skills. Your objective and your curriculum is telling you that you have to get the kids to this level, but if they are missing some foundational skills, how do you build them in so that you get the kids to where you want them with the learning without throwing out the whole lesson.

There were two primary reasons that personalizing the learning was consistently made difficult. First, the teachers were just beginning to create good lessons and become good instructors. Second, when the teachers faced roadblocks to their lesson implementation, representatives from First-Things-First did not validate their concerns.

> It's almost like you went into these sessions and you planned this ideal lesson, and created this Utopia of what the lesson should be, but when you got in there and tried to teach the lesson with the students that you had, it would all fall apart. So that was a disconnect; whenever there was an attempt to talk about the realities of what really happens in the classroom, teachers were made to feel that it was just an excuse for you not being able to teach this lesson, rather than really trying to figure out what their concerns were and figure out a way to help support them.

What Margie believed to be the student's academic needs was dismissed by First-Things-First as an excuse for not complying with their model of instruction.

Compounding the reform implementation was the inability to successfully manage and coordinate all of the resources made available to the campus. Although financial resources secured the needed personnel and staff development consultants, the multitude of resources oftentimes created disjointed efforts. The next section discusses the need to coordinate the multitude of resources made available during the reform process.

The Need for Structure

The principals participating in this study arrived at their campuses at different stages of the district-led reform for high school redesign. Principals like Margie, Michael, and Malcolm were in place as the reform process began. Judy and Ronald arrived after the respective campuses had begun to implement high school redesign. Depending on the time the principals appeared on the redesign scene, they either benefited from previous structures that supported the redesign process or had to create structures to support the redesign process. Margie arrived at her school just as high school redesign was beginning.

Margie simultaneously addressed the daily campus occurrences and the implementation of high school redesign. Unfortunately, the time consumed with the management of the basic operating structures consumed a lot of time, and not enough time was allocated to the organization of high school redesign. As she recalls, “Once the school year started, we were hit with the reality of what needed to be done with regard to discipline and attendance and just some basic operating structures.” In retrospect Margie sees that there existed an immediate need to create structures to manage the redesign process and that the creation of the structures could have prevented some of the failures that eventually occurred.

Because of the money available to Margie, the campus decisions about staffing, staff development, and resources were made without pause or hesitation. While the resources brought to the campus had merit, the magnitude of the reform activities did not allow for a timely coordination of the implementation of each resource. A more appropriate implementation of high school redesign would have included a structure that took into account all of the short-term and long-term needs of the campus and then dictated a sequence for redesign implementation that would not negatively affect the academic health of the campus.

Margie indicated that the campus had Title I funds, School Improvement Funds, money from the district, and a massive amount of money from the Texas High School Initiative grant. According to Margie, the financial support made sure that:

> We were staffed quite nicely….Each academy director had assistants and “team leaders” for each of their areas. There was a lead for math, science, language arts, and social studies in each individual academy. We also hired instructional coaches for all of the core areas.

Margie believed that the disconnect between providing resources for the more immediate needs of the campus and providing resources for long-term solutions was not appropriately managed. Speaking on this point, Margie stated:

> I hired a math consultant that first year because the area of low performing was African American mathematics. He brought in his own way of addressing the issue with mathematics. That first year, things seemed to go well, we didn’t get out of low performing, but we made some gains. But here looking back, here is where it was the beginning of the end. He came in and actually got the math teachers working and planning together and delivering a type of instruction based on the professional teaching model – teaching cycle. But it wasn’t grounded in the district curriculum. He really took the math teachers through, not necessarily in a different curriculum but really looking at different needs, trying to fill in the gaps. Well, in trying to fill in the gaps, we were doing a lot of foundational work, but we were also losing ground in being able to keep track with what they were supposed to learn for that year. So, the first year we made some great gains, but the second year we barely maintained growth.

In addition to not prioritizing the short-term and long-term needs of the campus, Margie believed that an extraordinary amount of time was dedicated to the physical reorganization of the campus and not enough time allocated to the improvement of teaching and learning. On this point, Margie concluded:

> So, I think that a lot of time and energy went into physical layout, when really all of the energy should have gone to what is happening in the classroom and instruction. If I got 90 minutes here, how am I structuring those 90 minutes? Because the kids were double blocked for math and language arts, but they only saw their social studies and science teacher every other day.

Ensuring that academies were geographically defined by ensuring that classrooms within an academy were organized by contiguous spaces was an aspect of high school redesign that often seemed to be a measure of success. However, according to Margie, this measure of redesign success did little to provide for academic success.

The management of resources was certainly made difficult because of the multitude of resources. However, adding to the resource management dilemma was the absence of time. The next section discusses the fast-paced process of the reform implementation timeline.

Time as a Limited Resource

If Margie failed at developing structures by which to manage the implementation of high school redesign, she did not fail for lack of desire or skills required. She did not have the time to process all of the redesign activities that were occurring at the school. In addition to the fast-paced process of reform implementation, Margie and her staff also had to use time to write an additional redesign plan in order to allow them to help facilitate the $16,000,000 Gates Foundation grant. The units of data extracted from the interview that depicts the fast-paced process of high school redesign are listed below:

1. We met very regularly. They brought in another consulting firm that had us create a project management that took our campus plan and break it apart piece-by-piece, and we met monthly to code that plan whether something was in place or something was not in place.
2. The district instructional specialists were really working with the instructional coaches to make sure that the curriculum was aligned and that we were really following through with the protocols for planning and for

examining data every six weeks with the common assessments that we had in place.

3. Because we met in advisory quite a bit, I think we almost met every day there for a while, so those lessons had to be modeled in order for them to be effective, so that the teachers would know how to teach them.
4. I remember the spring of the second year; I spent a great deal of time in meetings with people at central, with the superintendent, FTF people, people from the Gates Foundation. We were asked to rewrite all the redesign plans so that we could be part of the district grant that was being submitted for the Gates money.

Besides the time consumed by the daily campus occurrences, Margie allocated large amounts of time for personnel employed as part of the redesign venture and for agents of the Texas Education Agency. As Margie recalls, “The problem was managing all of the entities that had a role in helping our school. So I spent a great deal of my time in meeting with these folks and trying to coordinate their efforts.” Furthermore, Margie remembers that:

> Every month I had meetings with Bobby, the Technical Assistance Provider (TAP) for the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) School Improvement Program (SIP)….I also met regularly with the Technical Assistance Provider (TAP) required by Texas Education Agency for not meeting state standards….We would also meet with that lady that came in from Harvard to do work with the advisory program….There was a separate and apart consultant that was also part of the First-Things-First package, a consultant that we hired just to work with the teachers on advisory lessons.

The amount of time consumed in meeting with inside (teacher leaders, campus administrators) and outside agents (district employees, state employees, consultants) seemed to absorb most of Margie's time and left little time to actually supervise the work that was being done in the classroom.

Because of the absence of time and the need to manage the large amount of activities related to high school redesign, little time was left to fully debate the redesign course that outside agents wanted to chart for the campus. Unfortunately, this lack of communication facilitated the development of redesign plans that were not supported by the campus and an eventual lack of trust for outside agents. The next section discusses the lack of trust that Margie expressed of the outside agents.

Absence of Trust

Margie, much like Judy, dedicated a lot of time in her interview to discussing her lack of trust with the central office leadership. Margie's distrust of central office was rooted in her observance of the treatment that her immediate supervisor, the associate superintendent for high schools, received from the office of high school redesign.

> I know that my close relationship with the associate superintendent for high schools clearly affected my ability to trust the office of redesign. I can admit that now, after being removed from it, you just could not help it, because she was the entity, the figure head that hired me and gave me a specific task, and after a year it was changed.

Additionally, she clearly indicated that it was the central office's inability to remain loyal to one single plan that prevented the campus from achieving any form of substantial success. According to Margie's analysis:

> Part of the reason that the reform efforts failed at our school: for one, we did not stick to one plan for any substantial length of time. And I am talking we did not stick to one plan for more than a year. It seems like every year that we came back, there was something different they were asking us to do.

Additionally, Margie indicated that she was unwilling to inform teachers of plans discussed between her and the central office because she did not trust the central office to stay loyal to any one set of decisions. The aforementioned conclusion is reflected in the following statement:

> We tried to keep as much away as possible. I only told them what was absolutely necessary. I never exposed them to any of the drama or informed them about any of the plans that were about to change and then didn't change. I tried to shield them from all of the meetings and all of the expectations that were given to me; just because I knew that their focus had to be in the classroom and what had to be done with the kids.

Although Margie expressed an absence of trust for most outside agents, she did find a true partner in the instructional reform activities the campus was engaged in. Much like Judy, Margie found a true partner in an ex-high school principal who was serving as oversight principal assigned by TEA. The next section explains the details of the relation.

Positive Support

During the first year of her tenure at East Central High School, Margie was able to witness an increase in the students' academic achievement. However, the school was not able to remove the TEA label of Academically Unacceptable. The increase in student achievement, as evidenced by the state assessment scores, was widely considered significant improvement. According to the 2005-2006 Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) report published by the Texas Education Agency; Margie's school posted at least a 10-point gain in the areas of Reading, Science, and Social Studies. Math remained relatively steady–increasing two percentage points. Unfortunately, during the second year (2006/2007), the scores in the same areas decreased by as many points as they had increased the previous year.

By the third year (2007/2008), however, the scores again increased by over 10 percentage points in all tested areas (Reading, Math, Science, & Social Studies). Margie recalled that during her third year, TEA assigned an oversight principal who Margie had tremendous trust in and from whom she found overwhelming support. The oversight principal was a well-respected retired principal who had served as a high school principal in the same district just two years earlier. When Margie was asked if she developed any systems or processes that helped her manage the school and the redesign process during the third year, Margie fondly remembered Madison:

> That's where Madison was a huge help to me, because Madison, when I had to be at meetings with different technical assistance providers, or when I had to be off campus with any reason, Madison was the presence there and so her task was to work with, you know there were four instructional coaches, and someone had to keep a tab on what was happening with instruction in the classroom. So she worked very closely with the instructional coaches and did a lot of the campus walks, the classroom presence, and then the feedback to the teachers.

Having Madison ensure the instructional specialist stayed focused on improving classroom instruction, while Margie was distracted with other administrative duties, was of tremendous help to improving the academic achievement of the campus.

Case Profile Summary

Margie's case profile, much like Judy's case profile, highlighted the numerous distractions that prevented immediate implementation of improvement programs and also highlighted the management skills needed of principals to manage various aspects of duties. More importantly, this case profile painfully highlighted the absence of similar skills from central office agents who failed to manage and stay dedicated to a coherent high school redesign plan. The inability or unwillingness to remain dedicated to a single redesign plan quickly engendered lack of trust for central office agents and sustained the culture of mediocrity, if not hopelessness, at East Central High School.

Participant Number Three – Ronald

Ronald is a Mexican American middle-aged male who at the completion of this study was serving in a school district separate from the district that provided the setting for this study. Ronald, like Judy and Margie, was in his first assignment as a high school principal during the time period that encompassed this study.

In June 2006, while serving as a middle school principal in a suburban district, Ronald applied for and attained the job of high school principal in the central Texas urban district that was the setting for this study. Central High School, the school that Ronald was about to become principal of, served a population of approximately 1500 students and had a diverse population (80% Hispanic, 14% African American, and 6% Anglo American). Although Central High School was not rated as an Academically Recognized campus, or known for strong academic programs, the school had enjoyed three years of steady academic growth as measured by the state's accountability system. While Central High School was not among the district's strongest campuses academically, it distinguished itself as the strongest of all the district's schools serving mostly economically disadvantaged students.

When Central High School was built in the late-1950s, it was considered the district's flagship school in the southern part of the city. At that time, the school served primarily a middle-class population. By the mid-1980s, the city's economic development in the northwestern part of the city changed the formerly college students' apartments within the school's attendance zone to low-income housing for low-income families. Although the city's economic development had siphoned financial resources from the school's attendance zone and encouraged the "White flight" typical of urban neighborhoods, enough middle-class homes and families remained in the 1980s and early 1990s to support the school and help redefine its purpose.

It was during the 1980s and early 1990s that Central High School became known for the various programs offered to the students. Because of the success of the Fine Arts and athletic programs, the school continued to boast the historic pride that it once enjoyed as the district's flagship school in the southern part of the city. Most notable among the Fine Arts programs was an award-winning marching band and a Mariachi band that was known throughout the city. In the area of athletics, various school teams qualified for state playoff competition, thus drawing sustained support from the parents and booster organizations.

The Career and Technology programs provided a source of pride and active engagement for the students. Because of community partnerships, Central High School enjoyed a state of the art Career and Technology wing that included course offerings in culinary arts, hotel management, and film industry. The students in the culinary arts and hotel management programs enjoyed internships with five-star hotels in the downtown area, while the film industry students routinely participated in competitions.

Although the school's economically disadvantaged population had grown to 80%, various state and federal grants awarded to the school provided funding for academic support programs. Grants such as Gear Up and Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) provided funding for additional personnel whose primary focus was to provide pathways for greater academic achievement. Other grants such as the 21st Century Grant provided after-school tutoring as well as enrichment activities.

Most notable among these grants was the federal government's Small Learning Communities (SLC) grant awarded to the school in 2002. The SLC grant was provided with the purpose of helping create a small learning environment of no more than 500 students. This smaller learning environment would be able to focus more intensely on providing a relevant and rigorous curriculum. During the three years prior to Ronald's arrival, the school had implemented structures to support the full implementation of SLC. The three most notable structures implemented under the SLC grant were:

1. Dividing the staff into three distinct smaller learning communities and providing contiguous classrooms to teachers within each community;
2. Student advisories that provided college and career counseling;
3. Staff development designed to make the lessons more engaging.

By June 2005, the school district had begun talking about developing plans that would restructure each existing high school. The principal at that time and the community of Central High School saw the district's plans as an opportunity to expand on what was already established under the SLC project. During the 2005/2006 school year, the school's administration and teaching staff visited various schools throughout the country and attended conferences to learn more about redesigning their high school. The school staff also worked with the district's Career and Technology Department to define career pathways for each Smaller Learning Community. The staff also began considering alternate scheduling options to provide students with extended time for learning.

Although all aspects of high school redesign were progressing as planned at the school, the principal was making plans to resign from the district for personal reasons. After three years of working diligently to maintain a good academic standing with the state, managing various grants, overseeing a bond construction project, and skillfully handling the influx of students from New Orleans, Louisiana, as a result of Hurricane Katrina, the principal had become exhausted. Moreover, the principal had fought numerous battles with central office on behalf of the school and felt that those struggles only created more challenges to his progressive vision for the campus.

The previous principal resigned in May 2006 and Ronald was appointed principal in June of the same year. During the semi-structured interview, Ronald described his encounter with the outgoing principal.

> We spent a little bit of time talking about what had been done to date and he shared a binder with me of a significant amount of foundational work that had been done in determining what the redesign at the high school would look like. Primarily, it did have some facets like Smaller Learning Communities. For instance, there was evidence of literacy and advisory work. It seems like those were the big components that I remember.

Not only was Ronald entering into his new assignment with very limited information about high school redesign, he was entering the district at a time when the associate superintendent for high schools was resigning. Ronald remembered that:

> Once I began my work at Central High School, I had an opportunity to visit with some of the district leadership. It was an interesting time because the associate superintendent for high schools was outgoing and during that time, there was an interim and the interim did not really come in on a full-time basis for a period of a couple of months. During that time, the guidance was provided to me through the executive director for high school redesign. That was primarily the main contact that I had.

By July 2006, principals in the district had begun to formulate an opinion as to the type of high school redesign that would be implemented. The two basic types of redesign plans that were being implemented in the district included:

1. A plan developed in collaboration with the school community.
2. A model chosen by the school community but created by educational consultants.

The newly created office of high school redesign favored the implementation of the model created by educational consultants such as First-Things-First. The choice to support redesign models created by educational consultants was primarily a financial decision. The Gates Foundation was providing a $16,000,000 grant to support campus-wide reform and favored redesign plans that used a model created by educational consultants. Ronald recalled how he reached his decision to forgo the plans developed by the previous principal in collaboration with the school community and instead opt for a model created by educational consultants:

> When I visited with district leadership and started talking about what we were going to do at our high school, and when I considered the work that had been done, it seemed to me that the wise thing to do politically and professionally and for the school was to work with the First-Things-First model because it did several of the things that had been done in the redesign model that had been done prior to my arrival.

However, the decision to follow the First-Things-First model for the implementation of high school redesign was not an entirely popular decision with all of the community members partly because of the strong advocacy for the other model set by the previous principal.

> They really wanted to do a homegrown initiative. What the selling point was, the way I pretty much explained it to them, was that the end result, and the goals, and the outcomes that we were going to achieve are the same as the outcomes that were expected out of the initial research and design from the school team. We were going to be in Smaller Learning Communities, we were going to have advisories, have a literacy initiative, and those were the things that were the primary components that were done by the school team.

The unpopularity of selecting a model created by educational consultants in place of the "homegrown initiative" was heightened after the student scores on the state assessment caused the school to be rated Academically Unacceptable by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). Unfortunately, this came during Ronald's first year (2006/2007) as principal.

> Lots of people were complaining about these imposed structures, this, this, and that. My first year as a principal, academics took a dip. And that was partly because of my inexperience or not being ready or being distracted by the redesign. I thought the redesign was pretty distracting. I think there were some decisions that were made curriculum wise that were not good decisions and nobody said anything about it.

However, Ronald displayed a good deal of leadership temerity and stayed committed to his decision to follow the First-Things-First model and believed that the teacher buy-in, the student achievement, and overall program development eventually improved as a result of high school redesign. On this point Ronald stated:

> So we took a dip academically, and then started to come up very nicely and right now, and I believe partly because of the redesign but not only because of the redesign, the school has gotten out of all the "Needs Improvement." We are the

> highest performing Title I school in the district and they have all their programs working pretty nicely. Incredible dual credit numbers!

The next section provides the findings discovered during the analysis of the data. The data analysis is particularly revealing as it relates to the decisions made by Ronald regarding district-led reform. The findings are separated into categories that emerged during the analysis of the data: (a) the need to build capacity, (b) the need for focused leadership, (c) the need for structure, (d) time as a limited resource, and (e) absence of trust.

To further support an understanding of the positive and negative effects that high school redesign had on the campus during the high school redesign years (2004-2010), a data table (Table 5) describing changes in the student achievement is provided. Because the passing standards changed on the state assessment during the course of high school redesign, a simple year-to-year passing rate comparison will not adequately describe the campus progressing or decreasing in their achievement levels. Therefore, the data are presented in terms of changes in the achievement gaps between the campus achievement level and that of the state and the campus group.

Table 5. Changes in Student Achievement Gaps Between Central High School and the State/Campus Group (2004-2010)

District	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
State	-33	-30	-30	-40	-31	-22	-21
Campus Group	-11	-6	-5	-13	-8	-1	-9

Source. TEA (2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010).

Focused Instructional Leadership

Although Ronald selected the implementation of the First-Things-First model and remained committed to district-led reform, he worried that the reform was not focused on improving the teaching and learning process. This instructional leadership perspective is evident in the following recollection.

> Until we got our legs and our focus around instruction, we were just focused on the redesign. And I don't think that is a good thing. Because I think you are focusing on the structure. You're focused on the processes. You're focusing on "I don't like that," or "I do like this," or "any of that." And it's not about what teachers are there for. Teachers are there for teaching kids and watching kids grow and learn.

Therefore, if Ronald believed that the recommendations from the central office or parts of the First-Things-First model appeared counter to the instructional focus the campus had re-established during his second year, he was quick to remold these into what the campus staff could internalize. For example:

> So we had to take what was going on from technical assistance, from high school redesign, and make it work for us so that we were able to make our outcomes. That was the hard thing. How do you say things like "No, we are not doing that, we believe in it, we will do aspects of it, but we are not going to do it, just the way you tell us." And I think that started off really well with the idea that there were initially four schools that were targeted with this First-Things-First intervention. And our school and this other school said we were not going to do this whole model.

Ronald believed that because of his commitment to district-led reform and the implementation of the First-Things-First Model, the district did not intervene in the daily activities or decisions made at his school regarding high school redesign. According to his logic: “I never got any kind of grief about what we were doing. I think that we implemented pretty well. The things that we said we were going to do, we did them, and we did them well.” Ronald also believed that increasing problems at other campuses kept the central office personnel busy and away from his campus.

> Honestly, there were some fires that were really starting to burn in the district. They took a significant amount of attention from the redesign office and from the high school office that had to be focused on those other schools. So I think that what ended up happening was that the squeaky wheel gets the grease. I think that is how it goes. The thing is that we were okay.

However, Ronald did recall a time when the executive director for high school redesign tried to intervene in what Ronald and some community members, especially parents, believed was a school matter. The following paraphrases Ronald’s comments regarding central office intervention:

> The parents were struggling a lot with the fact that the redesign theme was pushed out politically as giving students a lot of choice. That was probably a bad move because in reality once the kids made their choice, they had very little choices after that. It was very structured. There were a lot of meetings about that. Well, the executive director for high school redesign showed up to school one day to one of the meetings and he came in to try and help. He did not mean to do this, but he upset the parents so much that they then liked me because they hated him.

Although it had been Ronald who ultimately decided that First-Things-First would provide the guidance of the redesign plan, he was not prepared to hand over the leadership of the school to First-Things-First. Ronald was especially concerned that the

First-Things-First model placed too much emphasis into organizing the visible structure of redesign and not a lot of emphasis on instructional improvement. For example:

> The other component of the First-Things-First model was the instructional improvement piece, and when I looked, I really did not see it. I did not understand what that meant from their model. What exactly was it? Was it literacy? What exactly where they going to come in and do with the science teachers? Were they going to use cooperative learning strategies? Were they going to help us with data-driven decision-making? It really wasn't very clear and I felt it was not wise to hand over the most important part of what the school is that drives long term sustainable change…what happens in the classroom.

The analysis of the data showed that Ronald believed that in order to provide the campus with an instructional focus, he should prevent First-Things-First from implementing aspects of their program that would create distractions to teaching/ learning, staff development, and instructional interventions. As Ronald recalls, the major aspects of the First-Things-First program were Smaller Learning Communities, Family Advocacy, and Instructional Leadership. Ronald was clear and upfront in communicating to the First-Things-First leadership that his campus would not implement the instructional leadership component of their model. His commitment to directing instructional leadership at the school is again displayed in the following statement:

> What I was able to negotiate was that we would receive the technical assistance and follow the technical assistance in the development and implementation of Smaller Learning Communities. And do the same thing with the Advisories. However, we would not do anything with them as far as the instructional improvement piece.

In the end, Ronald agreed to do aspects of their instructional model, but these aspects where only structural and had very little impact on the teaching and learning components that Ronald wanted to develop locally for his teaching staff. Recalling this decision, Ronald said:

> Some aspects of it were like mandatory double blocking of English language arts. Had to be on a block schedule, those sorts of things that were structural. That's no big deal. I mean, the structure is not what is going to make it work….A phrase I used to say, the structures are necessary, but they are insufficient. You can put these structures in, but if you don't do jack with them, nothing is going to happen. So that is the first kind of line we drew in the sand, and said we are not going to do that. And we drew some other kinds of lines.

In the area of staff development, Ronald took proactive steps to indirectly inform the faculty that the instructional leadership of the campus was still a primary function of the local instructional leadership team and not the First-Things-First consultants. Ronald rightly knew that establishing instructional leadership autonomy was important because, "There was a bit of reluctance from the faculty and from the parents quite honestly, regarding the use of any external providers." Furthermore, First-Things-First had become "the bad guy." As Ronald recalled:

> They had a lot of great ideas. A lot of good technical assistance. But what we ended up doing was making them stay in the background. So if they had any kind of professional development that we needed to provide, that I thought was worthy, and again, I had to think that it was worthy, then they would come in and they would train our folks, and then we would deliver it. We didn't let them come and present to us…to the faculty. Because first, I don't think they were very good presenters; second, even if they were, people did not like them, they were not our people.

Another area where Ronald found it necessary to draw the line with the First-Things-First representatives was in the use of the daily instructional time. The First-Things-First model heavily emphasized the development of what they called Family Advocacy. It was expected that through advisory classes, a teacher would build academically productive relationships with a small group of students. Although Ronald believed in the Family Advocacy concept, he worried that the academic time consumed by the advisory period could be better used in providing remediation time to the most struggling learners. For example:

> The advisory component is very social and emotional learning based and that's fantastic. But the advisory structure which was at one time 45 minutes once a week (now it's 45 minutes twice a week), was a great time to pull in tenth grade English Language Learning students and tenth grade bubble kids and do some focused targeted instruction. I thought we would make state accountability, but we needed to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) also to get out of this NCLB stuff....So I remember talking to the First-Things-First people. And you know, I almost brought one of the ladies to tears because she was upset that we were using Advisory time that way.

Further analysis of the data indicated that one reason for Ronald's reluctance to allow any redesign activity to take precedence over what he and his staff perceived as core curriculum teaching, learning, and remediation was his consistent concern with state and federal academic accountability. Ronald's clear understanding of the nuanced relationship between instructional leadership and exterior accountability is reflected in the following comments:

> We had the accountability! It wasn't the high school redesign office that had the accountability, it wasn't the high school office that had the accountability, and it wasn't First-Things-First that had the accountability. The heads that were going to roll were going to be our heads, not anybody else's.

Ronald's bold, not intoxicating stance on commanding the instructional reins of his campus was tempered by his awareness of the need to develop the instructional skills of his staff. The next section describes Ronald's perception of the instructional deficiencies among his staff.

The Need To Build Capacity

High school redesign as implemented at Central High School provided for the establishment of 5 Smaller Learning Communities (SLC), 5 Family Advocacy groups, 16 Professional Learning Communities (PLC), and an instructional coach in each of the four content areas. All of these redesign activities required organization for implementation as well as leadership from teachers and assistant principals. Ronald felt confident that his administrative team and the protocols required by the First-Things-First model could provide the organization for these activities. However, the leadership that would be required to change existing practices and beliefs was nonexistent and as such would have to be developed.

Because of clear goals set during his first year, Ronald's administrative team became accustomed to meeting and working together. However, as Ronald recalled, "We never got to talk about instruction enough, and the assistant principals needed to talk about instruction." The meetings primarily addressed administrative issues and left very little time for the discussion of instructional issues. To address this issue, Ronald set two meetings, a Monday morning "administrative cabinet" to talk about administrative issues and a Friday afternoon meeting to discuss instructional issues. This clearly delineated focus of the two scheduled meetings set the tone. On this point Ronald remembered:

> We took Mondays and made them administrative cabinet day and all we did was talk about administration: operational pieces, upcoming calendar events. Nothing instructional, just about how the school is running….So what we did is Fridays at 2:00 or 3:00 depending on whether we had a pep rally or not, we would have an instructional leadership team meeting. That meeting had the PLC leaders, the

> instructional coaches, and assistant principals. That whole meeting was dedicated to instruction.

Beyond allocating sufficient time to discuss instructional issues, Ronald had become concerned about the productivity of the Smaller Learning Community meetings. As he understood the problem, assistant principals had a limited understanding of the instructional concepts they were expected to develop in their teachers. It had become apparent to Ronald that what he perceived as low levels of student engagement, curriculum alignment, and academic rigor was perceived as acceptable to some of his administrators. Ronald described the perceived deficits in the following paragraph:

> If I said to the assistant principal, you're in charge of the SLC, and left it at that, there was a good chance that what his (assistant principal) expectations of what that meant, were going to be very different from my expectations.

To address this issue, Ronald and the representatives from First-Things-First developed what they came to call "calibration walks." During these walks, Ronald and an assistant principal visited classrooms within the Smaller Learning Community the assistant principal was responsible for supervising. The following description encapsulated the actual process:

> Let's say that one of the assistant principals was in charge of Health Science. So I went with him and one of the instructional coaches, and we walked through three or four classrooms real quick. Did our observations; collected our data; and we came back and started having conversation about what we saw. What was working? What was not working? What did we need to change? And we started developing more consistency and had conversations about instruction.

After the visits, Ronald and his assistant principals had conversations to develop consensus around what evidence of good instruction should exist in each classroom. Some of the questions used to structure the conversations included:

1. What’s the level of student engagement?
2. What are the primary learning activities being used?
3. What are the primary learning materials being used?
4. What degree of check for understanding is there?
5. What’s the alignment to the scope and sequence?
6. What’s the alignment from classroom-to-classroom?
7. What’s the alignment to the state standards? What’s the alignment to the high stakes test?
8. Is it contextually aligned (what we are asking kids to do)?

Ronald stressed that these types of activities helped provide a common direction in other aspects of the redesign process. Ronald believed that: “For the assistant principals who streamlined what their work was…and the assistant principals could go streamline with the teachers and their Professional Learning Community leaders, and teacher leaders.”

Because the academic achievement of the students at Central High School had consistently been sufficient enough to qualify the school as Academically Acceptable, the teachers assumed that the instruction they provided was at least adequate. However, the reality was that the instruction had been marginal, and the student achievement rates could quickly slip into levels below Academically Acceptable. Ronald realized that providing leadership to change existing practices and beliefs would not only require the development of the assistant principal’s instructional leadership abilities, it would also require the development of teacher leaders.

Ronald hoped that the professional development could be provided to the teachers via the Tuesday and Thursday Smaller Learning Community (SLC) meetings. However, the First-Things-First model called for teachers (designated as SLC Leaders) to lead these meetings and Ronald worried that the teachers were not prepared to lead their own peers. Specifically, Ronald's concerns were:

> These are teachers, they are not trained to facilitate adults, they are not trained to run meetings; they are trained to teach English or Math or whatever to kids who are going to do what they say, not to adults who are not going to do what they say.

This was especially true of teachers who felt their craft was being turned into routine work with no freedom to create their own lessons. After considering the number of teacher leaders on campus and the obstacles they had to overcome, Ronald provided staff development that would help them lead their peers. For example:

> I realized at some point that now I had Smaller Learning Community Leaders, which were teachers. I had Family Advocacy Leaders, which were also teachers. I had content area level teachers who were leading the Professional Learning Communities, and I had the instructional coaches. So when I counted them, there were over 30 teacher leaders, which was pretty good. It just ended up happening that way….So we started trying to get them a little PD on how you facilitate groups, because you can't just say "do it." So we got some PD through the technical assistance provider.

Apart from providing professional development designed to facilitate the numerous redesign and instructional improvement activities, Ronald also determined a need existed to provide a structured method of coordinating these activities. The next section describes Ronald's methods for organizing and bringing structure to the numerous activities.

The Need for Structure

Promoting high school redesign to teachers at Central High School was particularly difficult for three reasons. First, the community had finished considerable work in developing an initial plan for high school redesign and they were concerned that their initial work would not be validated. The community's resistance was described by Ronald as follows:

> Quite honestly, there was some reluctance; people wanted it to be a bottom kind of thing. I often used the phrase, "As top down as it needs to be and as bottom up as it can be." We wanted to give some bottom up, but it was really a top down initiative.

Second, the magnitude of the activities associated with high school redesign seemed too constricting for teachers who had come to believe that what they were doing in the classroom was adequate. On this point, Ronald recalled that:

> I can even remember people crying and saying "you're making me do the same lesson as somebody else and I am not a robot." I get that. And some of those teachers were very good teachers too. Some of them were very creative, and so I can see that I was putting them in a box and that was difficult for them.

Finally, Ronald himself was not entirely sold on the concept of student advisories mandated by the district-led reform. Nor was he convinced of the efficacy of the high school redesign that had been previously developed by the campus team or what was being promoted by First-Things-First. Ronald explained his position as, "It wasn't one of those things that when I walked into the school and I was gun-ho for Smaller Learning Communities or gun-ho advisories, I wasn't a champion of that."

While attempting to reconcile the stakeholders' differences with the impending high school redesign, Ronald came to develop a redesign structure that helped organize the expression and implementation of what high school redesign would consist. Accordingly his vision was:

> The selling point, the way I pretty much explained it to them, was that the end result, and the goals, and the outcomes, we were going to achieve are the same as the outcomes that were expected out of the initial research and design from the campus team. We were going to be in Smaller Learning Communities, we were going to have advisories, have a literacy initiative, and those were the things that were the primary components that were done by the campus team….I realized in looking at it, that it had its merits and that it could work and like lots of things it was going to depend on the implementation of it. If we implemented it well, if we stayed with fidelity, we stayed focused on improving the instructional core of what we were doing we would be okay. So that's the way it kept getting sold.

When Ronald was asked to expand on the structure that helped organize every aspect of the high school redesign, he responded that it was a leadership skill. According to Ronald, the skill is highlighted by the reality of what comprises part of the work of the principal. Ronald explained, "There is just a lot coming at you and you have to somehow make sense of it and organize it before anyone else can make sense of it and organize it." Ronald took this opportunity to once again emphasize that the structure of the high school redesign at his campus served the dual purpose of promoting the high school redesign as a homegrown process, while simultaneously defining the entire project. Ronald recalled stating that:

> We do three things at our high school. We do Smaller Learning Communities. We do Family Advocacy, and we do Professional Learning Communities. And that's what we do. So if we can do those three things well, kind of like the hedgehog concept in *Good Things to Great*, you can't be good at everything, but you can be good at these three things.

Ronald explained that every activity the campus engaged in had to fit one of the three general activities that they had organized redesign around. Furthermore, the emerging sub-activities needed to be implemented in a manner that did not frustrate other sub-activities already being implemented.

Although Ronald was able to articulate how high school redesign should be organized and implemented, the articulation did not control the pace of the numerous activities that he perceived the responsibility for managing. The next section describes the tremendous amount of time required for managing the implementation of high school redesign, as perceived by Ronald.

Time as a Limited Resource

One of the biggest challenges to developing and sustaining the structures of the high school redesign was the time that was required for this project. Throughout the two-hour semi-structured interviews and subsequent conversations, Ronald provided insight into the many activities that were related to the implementation of their redesign plan. Many hours had to be dedicated to understanding all aspects of the high school redesign, as well as the implementing and refining the process of redesign.

When Ronald was named principal and was just beginning to understand the redesign process, the first thing that began to consume his time was trying to understand what each consultant had contributed to or was attempting to contribute to the redesign experience. For instance, according to Ronald:

> When I looked at was going on in the district, with what seemed to be a vast amount of work with outside consultants, First-Things-First, as I mentioned…. There was also Educators for Social Responsibility that were in the area. There was also Institute for Learning out of Pittsburg in the area. I guess, I don't even remember, but the folks from Stanford where also in the area doing their work with high school redesign, and then the Dana Center. It seemed like a lot of folks where trying to get at collaborating with the district and the high schools. It was quite a number of folks that were involved….There was also something going on

> in the district with the Parthenon group that was contracted to come in and do some total quality processes.

Moreover, Ronald understood the tremendous amount of time that implementing comprehensive high school reform required. The time devoted was one reason that Ronald opted to go with First-Things-First as a model for the high school redesign. As Ronald pointed out:

> When I looked at the Smaller Learning Communities, it seemed like First-Things-First had a way of putting the school into Smaller Learning Communities so that we would not have to figure out what the thematic divisions would be. We wouldn't have to do all the research. We wouldn't have to do all the surveys for kids, do all the surveys for teachers. We wouldn't have to figure out how to do all that. They had that piece….Also, I did not want my teachers figuring out how to write units, advisory units. I wanted them focusing on teaching their core content areas effectively. So I'll just buy these units because I know they are going to be some people that like it and some people that don't like it. We will at least get off the ground. We will have something, and we will not have to mess with it.

The time required to implement the process for the high school redesign was by far the most taxing. Throughout the course of the research, Ronald mentioned activities and meetings that required his participation. Ronald enumerated the structured meetings expected of him. They included:

1. We had set up a schedule that on Tuesdays and Thursdays the SLC would meet together.…I would go to the meetings, the assistant principals would go to the meetings, but it just was not working. And I knew it was not working and they needed a lot more structure, but I waited for a while.
2. I would meet with the Small Learning Community Leaders every Monday afternoon.

3. It was just an administrative cabinet….We took Mondays and made them administrative cabinet day or time and all we did was talk about administration.
4. So what we did is Fridays at 2:00 or 3:00 depending on whether we had a pep rally or not, we would have an instructional leadership team….And then we would do calibration walkthroughs during that time also.
5. We said that they would come together, those PLCs once every three weeks for three hours after school….They were not going to have enough time to finish it because three hours isn't enough for three weeks, but they were going to get a start on it….I attended the PLCs, which is another thing…the administration has to be there.

These numerous activities associated with high school redesign heightened the need for collaboration within the campus leadership team. The collaboration, however, often required additional meetings among the staff.

Ronald's ability to make sense of the redesign activities was seldom, if ever distracted by what other respondents perceived as distractions from central office. Although his relationship with central office was not one of mutual support, it was not defined by conflict. The next section describes the distant, but positive relationship that Ronald held with the central office organization.

Absence of Trust

Ronald, unlike the other participants, did not dedicate time to discussing the issue of lack of trust with the central office. On the contrary, Ronald clearly indicated that he did not have any problems with central office. The lack of problems with the central office is described in the following statement:

> I don’t know why, but at our school they really didn’t get in the way very much. I think they were supportive. I really can’t say that they got in the way at our school. I think they were really supportive when I asked them and when I didn’t ask them to come by, they left us alone.

Throughout the entire interview, Ronald only once conveyed dissatisfaction with central office personnel. Referring to one of the administrators who directly reported to the executive director for high school redesign, Ronald indicated that:

> He had a guy that worked with him who kind of rubbed the people the wrong way. People didn’t put a lot of value in his expertise because he was young and did not have a very strong resume. So people didn’t listen too much to that guy either. So they just kind of stayed away.

The limited distractions, however, did not necessarily translate into direct positive support from central office. While other participants provided examples of positive support they received from outside agents, Ronald highlighted occurrences within the immediate campus that he perceived as encouraging. The next section describes these occurrences.

Positive Support

Ronald thought that a winning athletic program and strong academic kids facilitated the implementation of the high school redesign. While describing these two factors, Ronald chuckled and added that these had nothing to do with redesign itself but occurred parallel to the implementation. While discussing the athletic programs, Ronald praised his athletic director as having contributed a great deal to the campus climate. Specifically Ronald emphasized that:

> High schools have all the extracurricular activities. When the athletic programs are healthy, and when the fine arts are healthy, and when all the extracurricular programs are healthy, it just feeds the school. So at the same time that all the redesign was occurring, we had a really good head football coach and athletic director come in. He really organized that entire piece, so the athletes who also coincidentally had to be in one of two SLC, they were all together with the same teachers and we had a lot of coaches in those classrooms. They were really making sure everyone was behaving. All the kids were focused, and we started winning, more teams started winning.

Ronald was also quick to recognize that as the athletic teams experienced success the parents of the students became more involved within the athletic booster organizations. The participation in the booster organizations extended into support for the school programs including the high school redesign. According to Ronald:

> More teams started being successful and the boosters started being more organized. There was a number of things that came together to make the school have more pride. I don't really want to say have more pride, but it just started coming together. The athletics were coming together; the boosters were coming together, the boosters were more organized, or organized in a different way.

Ronald also mentioned the high school class of 2011. This group came onto the campus with a lot of students who were academically strong. These strong students had not become academically strong as a result of the high school redesign but instead provided an enriched academic face to the redesign process. The impact is explained by Ronald in the following paragraph:

> The class of 2011 came in maybe a year ago or maybe two years ago and all their heavy hitter kids, all the academically talented kids came in and met with me, and they said, that we had an athletic face and they wanted it to have an academic face. I kind of chuckled because I didn't know we had an athletic face. So I said, "Tell me more about that?" They really pushed us and we ended up going to, I believe last year we had two sections of AP Calculus AB, one section of AP Calculus BC, and one section of AP Statistics which was really good, and they were all full. One sections of AP Physics B, and one section of Physics C, so we ended up having 68 pass AP exams last year, which was really good for us.

The support for redesign that Ronald identified as existing with in his campus provided validation to what Judy alluded to as a campus being “operational in its most basic sense.” Ronald’s campus had healthy participation from parents, faculty members who saw the opportunity to build strong student groups, and most importantly, it had students who were openly demanding opportunities for increased rigor.

Case Profile Summary

Ronald’s case profile was significant in that it presented a campus whose student population, while strikingly similar to the other two campuses previously profiled, appeared to be academically ready and almost demanding of high school redesign activities. Additionally, the teacher’s ability to instruct, although considered marginal by Ronald, had enjoyed earning Academically Acceptable state ratings. Finally, the campus leadership had been consistent and began to develop an appreciation for redesign activities.

Although Ronald’s dialogue during the interview highlighted similar perceived distractions and concerns for the immediate success of the campus, he was able to implement his management and instructional skills without fear or distrust of outside agents. Furthermore, he was also able to maintain relations with First-Things-First agents in support of the campus redesign activities.

Participant Number Four – Michael

Michael is a Mexican American middle-aged male who at the completion of this study was serving as the associate superintendent for high schools in the urban school district that was the setting for this study. Prior to his appointment as the associate superintendent for high schools, Michael served the district as an Executive Principal for two years and as Director of High School Operations for one year. In these roles Michael supervised three of the principals who were participants in this study. Before his promotion to the central office, Michael served four years as principal at an inner city high school located in the north part of the district. This high school that served as the setting for this case profile will be referred to as North Side High School.

Prior to working in this central Texas urban district, Michael had served as a high school social studies teacher for five years, a middle school assistant principal for two years, a middle school principal for three years, and a high school principal for four years. The aforementioned experience occurred in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas.

In May 2004, while serving as high school principal in a suburban district located in the Rio Grande Valley, Michael received a call from the associate superintendent for high schools asking him if he would be interested in serving as a high school principal in the central Texas urban district that provided the setting for this study. The associate superintendent for high schools informed Michael that he was being recruited as part of an initiative designed to recruit principals with experience leading schools with predominantly economically disadvantaged students to Academically Recognized status from the Texas Education Agency (TEA).

Michael accepted the invitation to apply for the job of high school principal and was appointed the principal of North Side High School. Michael’s new school served a population of approximately 1600 students. Over a 20-year period, North Side High School had become absorbed into the inner city circle and ultimately came to serve a limited diverse population. Of all the inner city schools in this urban district, North Side High School was the only school that had a visible Asian American student population. The Asian American population had decreased from 18% to 3% at North Side High School by the time of Michael's appointment as principal. The decrease in the Asian American population at North Side High School was the latest example of academically enriched groups moving out of the school's attendance zone.

North Side High School opened in 1961 with the purpose of serving a middle-class population that was then expanding to the northern part of the city. However, by the mid-1980s, the city's economic development shifted to the northwestern part of the city creating the need for an additional high school. The new school was built just to the west of North Side High School and served almost exclusively an upper income Anglo American neighborhood. The building of the new school caused the school districts' attendance boundaries to be reconfigured and siphoned many of the economically advantaged and Anglo American students from North Side High School. By the early 1990s, North Side High School served a quickly diminishing 50% Anglo American middle-class population and an almost majority of Hispanic, Black, and Asian American students.

In an attempt to limit the "White flight" typical of suburban neighborhoods, North Side High School established various Career and Technology programs (CATE) and included a Head, Hands, Heart, and Health (4-H) program. The development of the 4-H program led to the lease and development of nearby land to facilitate the housing of various livestock. The large investment into the 4-H program was a direct attempt to encourage the Anglo American families, who historically participated heavily in the county's 4-H program, to continue enrolling their children in the school.

By 1999 numerous families from an affluent feeder elementary school no longer wanted their children to attend North Side High School and applied sufficient political pressure causing the school board and the superintendent to once again reconfigure the attendance zones. The new attendance zones and the building of an additional school, in a school district just north of North Side High School, helped to further diminish the ethnically diverse population. At the time Michael became principal of North Side High School, the school's diversity was barely visible: 73% Hispanic, 15% African American, 9% Anglo-American, and 79% economically disadvantaged.

In June 2005, after Michael's first year as the principal at North Side High School, the associate superintendent for high schools started talking to Michael and the other district high school principals about developing plans to restructure their existing high schools into schools that would more effectively serve and support the academic development of the district's most academically underdeveloped student population – ethnic and economically disadvantaged students. Michael recalled the first discussion he had with the associate superintendent for high schools that centered on high school redesign:

> She said, "You know, we really need to do something different in our high schools." I liked the line of questioning because I realized we weren't doing everything we needed to be doing. And it seemed like the way she was bringing it about, that it was going to be campus based, you know a community-based plan. You were going to be able to develop a plan with your community, work with it, and then implement that plan.

Although at the onset, Michael felt the district-led redesign efforts lacked focus on achieving academic improvement, his excitement for improving student outcomes quickly turned into action.

> When the associate superintendent for high schools first started down that path of high school reform, it got a little misdirected for a while. I still remember the time when she brought over a public relations firm that was going to help rename the campuses; and it even had the signs up there. They were going to redo the signage, and do all those things that really didn't change anything instructionally. And I think they were kind of going all over the map. But I have to give her credit. She had the vision to understand that we were not where we needed to be. I took the message back to our campus and gave it focus. I said "You know what, let's grab this, and let's run with it. Let's try to develop a plan that we can implement here." So we began having meetings.

By May 2006 (the end of Michael's second year as principal of North Side High School), the campuses' instructional leadership teams developed some definite high school redesign plans and were preparing for full-scale implementation. However, changes in central office leadership and the availability of $16,000,000 from the Gates Foundation, had raised doubts as to who was going to lead high school redesign at the campuses and the direction that high school redesign as a district-led reform would follow. For example:

> At the end of that year when we developed our plan, we quickly realized that central office had a different plan in mind. A lot of things started to change. First, the associate superintendent for high schools resigned. Then, we started to receive the Gates stuff that we were applying for. We were switching at the end of the year. It just wasn't going to be a campus-based plan, a home-grown plan, but it was going to be a plan that was going to be dictated from central office. So we grappled from the district and the campus asking, "Who was actually going to lead the redesign effort on your campus? Was it going to be a central office dictated redesign? Or was it going to be a community-based, campus-based plan that we would develop to go through?"

The struggle to determine who was going to lead high school redesign increased after the district received the Gates grant. This struggle further increased when the superintendent used some of the Gates grant money to establish an office of high school redesign. The office of high school redesign was supposed to ensure that a district plan for high school redesign was implemented. As Michael recalled, the district plan for redesign had some non-negotiable components:

> You were going to have to go into Small Learning Communities. You were going to have to implement an advisory plan that the students would have to go through; and you were going to have to somehow mysteriously get your teaching ratios to a level that you needed to be at. Basically, they wanted us to take every existing professional staff and put them in some form or fashion into a teaching staff to really lower the teacher student ratios. In concept, it was a real good idea, but in practicality it was very difficult idea to do.

Michael could not envision transitioning every profession staff into a classroom and, therefore, considered reducing class sizes and teacher loads as an unfunded mandate.

To ensure redesign consistency within the district's five high schools undergoing redesign and to meet with the Gates grant requirements, the school district encouraged the district-wide use of a tried and proven redesign model. From the initial stages of the Gates grant application process, the school district had developed a relationship with the Institute for Research and Reform in Education (IRRE). Because of this relationship, the district strongly encouraged the adoption of IRRE's redesign framework known as First-Things-First (FTF).

Although Michael believed in high school redesign, he was determined to implement a high school redesign plan that was developed and driven by the local community efforts and not one that was driven by an outside consultant hired by the district. His determination to lead his own plan is observed in the following statement:

> I remember very clearly when they wanted to bring in First-Things-First. They wanted to bring in First-Things-First, specifically at North East High, at Eastside High, and at Central High, and then the superintendent wanted me to put it in at North Side High School. And I said “No. I am not going to put in the First-Things-First at North Side High School. It is not part of our plan.”

When simple instance to implement FTF did not prevail, the central office staff escalated their efforts for persuasion by reminding Michael of the financial incentives associated with implementing FTF. However, Michael remained equally adamant that he would not coalesce with FTF. Michael clearly recalled:

> The superintendent and the executive director for high school redesign were both very, very adamant that I do this. The superintendent told me, “You’re going to throw away a couple of million dollars a year because you don’t want to implement their plan?” And I said, “That’s not what I thought redesign was about. I thought redesign was about looking at where our problem areas are, and coming up with a creative way of solving those problems, that it was campus based.”

While other principals were visiting schools across the country and beginning the first stages of implementation from what they learned visiting other schools, Michael and his leadership team remained focus on developing the teachers’ ability to instruct.

> So there was a lot of fanfare, a lot of play, a lot of the support from the office of redesign was going to North East High, East Side High, and Central High as they were implementing First-Things-First. I know several of my counterparts, my colleagues, they went to Florida, and they went all over the country. They visited all these schools all over. We didn’t. North Side High didn’t take a single trip. I didn’t go, nor did my teachers go anywhere – nowhere.

In the end, Michael was relieved that the superintendent allowed him the flexibility to implement the redesign plan that had been developed by his campus leadership team. However, he recalls that because of his unwillingness to implement the district-driven model the central office leadership team consistently harassed him. He also believes that the school's efforts lacked central office support and money because of his recalcitrance.

> I was lucky that the superintendent gave me the flexibility to not implement the First-Things-First project. But that was always a constant fight, a constant fight with the office of redesign when it was created after the grant and with the superintendent, of not doing our own thing. We were accused of not following the district curriculum, accused of not following the district protocols, not following the district because of the way we wanted to do redesign. Subsequently, we were left out of a lot of money that other campuses were given but at least we were given the freedom to do things our way. I thought that was much more important than just getting financial resources and support. So I got very little support from office of redesign. To implement the North Side High's plan, we absolutely didn't get anything.

To further support an understanding of the positive and negative effects that high school redesign had on the campus during the high school redesign years (2004-2010), a data table (Table 6) describing changes in the student achievement is provided. Because the passing standards changed on the state assessment during the course of high school redesign, a simple year-to-year passing rate comparison will not adequately describe the campus progressing or decreasing in their achievement levels. Therefore, the data are presented in terms of changes in the achievement gaps between the campus achievement level and that of the state and the campus group.

Table 6. Changes in Student Achievement Gaps Between North Side High School and the State/Campus Group (2004-2010)

District	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
State	-36	-28	-32	-30	-31	-25	-24
Campus Group	-12	-3	-8	-3	-6	-6	-8

Source. TEA (2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010).

Focused Instructional Leadership

During the several years prior to Michael's arrival, student achievement at North Side High School declined. The staff attributed the declining student scores on the state's mandated assessment to the exodus of the high-achieving students and the influx of a large at-risk Limited English Proficient (LEP) population. However, Michael knew that the declining scores could also be attributed to lessons that lacked rigor and lacked methods for engaging the students. For Michael the solution was clear. Teachers were either going to improve their instructional delivery methods or they would be coached into finding another job.

> It wasn't easy. I ended up changing out the staff at North Side High School. By the end of my second year, we had changed out 65% of the teaching staff, half of the administrative staff, and half of the counselors were gone. We said to these teachers, "You know what, you don't belong here. You are not fitting in to what we want to do." So it wasn't easy. It wasn't like everyone woke up and said "This is a great plan."

The staff that opted to stay and buy into the high school redesign plan that Michael and his staff promoted were challenged to work harder and longer than what they worked before. Additionally, they were moving forward without the support from central office. According to Michael, not only had his staff not participated in the district's redesign plan, they also moved forward without the help of the district's instructional support staff.

> Everyone just stayed out of our way. I got special permission from the chief academic officer at the time to not follow the district's curriculum. I had to present our plan to her curriculum people and explain why I did not want to follow the district's Instructional Planning Guides (IPGs) or participate in the district's benchmarks. We also did not have to participate in learning walks. None of that, none of that went through North Side High.

Michael recalled the tremendous amount of work involved in developing their own redesign plan, developing their own curriculum, and developing their own assessments. However, Michael also proudly recalled the feeling of success and the winning culture that was being developed at North Side High School:

> At first it was tough because the teachers are doing the heavy lifting. So at first, it was like “wow, this is a lot of work.” But then teachers started saying things like, “wow, we are empowered to create our own curriculum, we are empowered to create our own assessments.” So they really bought into that and it created this culture, a little arrogant culture, that we were not going to do what the district wanted us to do, we were doing our own thing, and as long as we continued to provide success we were going to be able to do that.

When Michael was asked why he insisted on not following the district’s redesign process, he responded that the district leadership was overly focused on implementing visible structures of redesign that would be very difficult to sustain once the Gates grant was exhausted. More importantly, Michael felt the district’s plan neglected improved instruction. For instance:

> The focus was all on the structures, on the “sexiness” of Small Learning Communities, advisory programs, and what not. It was all just built on what provider we could bring in. Well, that money dries up. And when that money dries up, there is no sustainability for it. There was no discussion of core instruction. What constitutes rigorous, highly engaging core instruction? And that was the problem with redesign. There was no talk about what constitutes quality instruction in the classroom and how do we do that. So I think that is one of the main problems that they had and data does not move that way.

In summary, Michael believed the district redesign plan only showed an attempt to improve student outcomes, but was doomed to fall short of actually improving them.

The high school redesign plan that Michael and his leadership team developed and implemented did have two of the three redesign elements directed by the central office. These included providing advisories for students and reducing teacher loads by double blocking classes.

> We did the student advisory program four days a week. We did four days a week of advisories and we did reduce the teacher load by double blocking in Math and English Language Arts. We did do that. So we double blocked and every kid was double blocked in Math and Language Arts. Ninety minutes every single day.

Although Michael did not believe in most aspects of redesign, he did see a benefit in reducing class sizes and teacher loads.

Michael emphasized that he could only reduce class size by double blocking two core areas (Math and Reading) and not the four core areas the district initially asked promoted. Michael extended that even though teachers had more manageable class sizes, they still needed to improve their ability to create more engaging and rigorous lessons. The next section discusses the efforts that Michael and his leadership staff employed to build the instructional capacity on their campus.

The Need To Build Capacity

Throughout the interview, Michael seized every opportunity to emphasize that what North Side High School's redesign efforts lacked in flashiness and headline making news it made up in teacher development and student improvement.

> So our big effort was put towards people. I mean, it was really focused on building teacher capacity, building the capacity at North Side High. It wasn't anything fancy, it wasn't anything sexy. I told the superintendent at the time, "This isn't sexy; it isn't something you can go to the papers and sell. But this is going to move data." And that's what you saw. The results were four years of sustained growth from our students.

From Michael's vantage point, much more could be gained by ensuring that all available resources were directly dedicated to ensuring that the teaching staff improved their instructional delivery. To this end, Michael directed his team's time and effort into the development of good units and lessons. Michael recalled:

> We created our own protocol for developing units and lessons. The process was something that I and an academy director had created. It's a classic Backwards Design model that we used. The Backwards Design model guided the development of the common assessments, reviewing student work, going through all instructional components.

Michael's commitment to developing the instructional capacity necessitated building similar capacity in his young administrative staff. To facilitate the instructional development of his assistant principals, Michael restructured the administrative staff whereby two seasoned assistant principals were elevated to the position of academy director. The academy directors supervised the instructional development of the assistant principals as well as the implementation of all instructional improvement efforts in the classroom. Michael described the focus of the academy directors in the following statement:

> They focused in on instruction. One academy director was put in charge of the ninth grade and I actually had two assistant principals that reported to her. They focused on the 9^{th} grade. And then the other academy director was put in charge of the 10^{th}, 11^{th}, and 12^{th} grade and had two assistant principals report to her as well. They were completely instructionally focused and made all decisions: hiring decisions, programmatic changes, curriculum changes, anything that had to do with instruction had to go through them.

Before elaborating on the instructional duties of each of the academy directors, Michael explained that "academy director" was a misnomer. As Michael described it each academy director was actually an academic dean.

> We called them academy directors because that was the title that was on the books. They really were not in charge of an academy. The term is a misnomer because the office of human resources did not want to reinvent a new position. I wanted an academic dean, that's really what I wanted. And so we ended up

> calling them academy directors. They are still called academy directors to this day. But they are really academic deans.

Michael emphasized that his academy directors were actually academic deans because he wanted to emphatically describe their academic focus versus the district's focus for developing "academies," or Smaller Learning Communities, as visible structures of redesign.

The academy directors ensured that each assistant principal learned to lead the teaching staff through conversations about instruction. The assistant principals learned from Michael and the academy directors what a classroom walkthrough should consist of and how to dialogue with the teacher about what was observed during the classroom walkthrough. Michael notes that the efforts to develop his administrative team helped bring about consistency throughout the school.

To help develop the capacity of the teachers, Michael and his staff primarily used job-embedded staff development. For example, the teachers were led by the academy directors and assistant principals to identify the students' curricular needs and then plan assessment and instruction to support those needs. Therefore, the teachers were simultaneously being challenged and assisted (according to best practices based on research) in developing rigorous and engaging lessons as a regular part of their job.

When Michael felt confident that his staff had begun to master the Backwards Design model, he became open to receiving assistance from the central office. Specifically, Michael was interested in receiving the type of help that would provide for the needs of his English Language Learners (ELL). It was during this time that the

Assistant Superintendent for Instruction introduced Michael to Quality Teaching for English Learners (QTEL).

Michael was clear with the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction that they would only receive the type of help that focused on developing the teachers' capacity to instruct. Michael and his leadership staff were not interested in working with a vendor who would seek to impose their system in place of the school's system. The following statement describes Michael's pleasure with their new-found instructional partner (QTEL).

> I sat down with the representative from QTEL and it was all about what we were doing at North Side High School. It wasn't about what she was about. It was about what we were doing in the school. She really wanted to spend a whole day finding out what we were doing in the school. I saw easily what this could merge into because it was all about quality teaching. That's all it was, it was all about pedagogy, that's it.

Finally, Michael insisted that any help afforded to North Side High School's redesign efforts should be unconditional and not cause the school administration to be supervised by the office of high school redesign. The following statement summarizes Michael's passion for autonomy.

> I would accept help from QTEL as long as I maintained control in dealing with them, and it was not going to be a redesign thing where they (office of high school redesign) were going to dictate. If I could maintain control, then I would be willing to negotiate.

Throughout the entire redesign process, Michael remained emphatic about keeping his distance from the office of high school redesign.

Michael maintained a similar stance regarding the structure that should be provided for the management of the improvement activities at his campus. The next section describes Michael's perceptions about the need to provide structure to the redesign activities.

The Need for Structure

Organizing the redesign process for North Side High School was a task that Michael gave special attention to because he understood that the redesign activities his teachers engaged in would be time intensive and complex. In order to be successful, Michael would have to eliminate confusion and ensure his teachers sensed a lot of support from his administrative staff. To eliminate the potential for any confusion, Michael decided to not use any of the central office's instructional support staff and instead directed all aspects of redesign through his campus level administration.

> I had six administrators who assisted me. Two of these were the academy directors and four were assistant principals. We didn't use any of the district's instructional coaches; we didn't use any of the district protocols. We did everything ourselves and everything was led by our administrators.

Each academy director supervised two assistant principals. One academy director was in charge of the freshman class and the other academy director was in charge of the upperclassman. However, Michael quickly explained that this administrative structure only defined who directed the administrative services (discipline, special education, bilingual, etc.) provided to students. The administrative structure did not define or limit the instructional leadership provided to teachers across grade levels. Michael feels that the true structure behind high school redesign at North Side High School was the organization of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).

> We put all our efforts into Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Each of the assistant principals was assigned a core content area: Language Arts, Math, Science, or Social Studies. The assistant principal, under the supervision of the

> academy director, led PLCs comprised of content area teachers. For example, the assistant principal in charge of the Math Department led the PLCs for Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II. The PLCs were charged with developing the curriculum, common assessments, and the designing of rigorous and engaging lessons.

In describing the structure used to manage redesign, Michael remained committed to organizing all aspects of redesign into instructional organizations that fostered core area collaboration.

To further emphasize that collaboration among content area teams was the most important work, Michael implemented a master schedule that provided common planning time to content area teachers. “Having the teachers who taught the same subject off during the same planning time was one of the best things we did.”

Similar to other respondents, Michael spent time discussing the vast amounts of time dedicated to implementing reform. The next section describes the time-consuming activities that engaged the North Side High School faculty.

Time as a Limited Resource

According to Michael, “the first year of high school redesign at North Side High School was by far the most time intensive.” Redesigning the organizational structure took time and consideration. However, according to Michael, these structures were still “just visible structures of high school redesign. The real work was redesigning the curriculum, assessment, and lessons.” During the interview, Michael recalled the lesson redesign process in which his teachers were engaged:

> First, academy directors, assistant principals, and teachers developed a scope and sequence based on the state’s student expectations. Of course, we heavily emphasized the student expectations that we knew would be tested and provided little time to the student expectations that would not be tested in the state’s

> assessment. Next, we broke down the scope and sequence by units and began to develop common assessments for these units. We had launched common assessments across the board. The expectation for rigorous learning was defined by the rigorous questions we developed. Finally, once we knew exactly what we wanted the students to learn we began to develop the engaging lessons. This was a lot of work.

During the first year of high school redesign, teachers were barely able to develop assessments and engaging lessons one or two weeks ahead of the scope and sequence they themselves had developed.

After the first year, time during the PLCs meetings was mainly dedicated to reviewing the data from the common assessments, improving the richness of the lessons, and moving the most difficult student expectations into the established units. Although Michael was proud when he recalled, “Having the teachers who taught the same subject off during the same planning time was one of the best things we did,” he admitted that the common planning time was not “enough time to get everything done.”

To alleviate the anxiety and frustration teachers were beginning to feel, Michael provided teachers with one planning day per month. It was during this time of the interview that Michael recalled having to use different funding sources to pay for the substitutes that covered the teachers’ classrooms during the planning days.

> We paid for the subs with different monies we had coming to us. There was nothing we got paid from the office of high school redesign. It was all done using Title money. We got some other school improvement money that we were able to use, and we got High School Allotment money.

When Michael explained that his teachers did not receive any “extra duty” compensation for the redesign work they were completing, he was asked how he kept his teachers engaged and motivated. Michael astutely responded:

> You know, what actually was nice and reassuring was that the teaching staff viewed and commented on all this work as, "We are forging our own way, and we are creating our own stuff." So the buy-in was tremendous.

The level of collaboration enjoyed at North Side High School facilitated the autonomous implementation of high school redesign.

Unfortunately, the trust enjoyed by Michael and his teaching staff was not experienced between Michael and outside agents, especially central office. The following section describes Michael's lack of trust for central office.

Absence of Trust

Michael dedicated some time to discussing lack of trust with the central office leadership. First, his distrust focused around the actions of the office of high school redesign. When Michael asked about his skepticism with the newly created office of high school redesign, he explained:

> The autonomy of high school redesign rested with the redesign office. And that was one of the other problems. In retrospect, looking back, the high school redesign office, which was in charge of the money, not just in charge of the Gates money, the $16,000,000; they were in charge of the $6 or $8,000,000 of high school allotment money as well. That all rested there. And that office did not report to the associate superintendent for high schools, that office reported directly to the superintendent.

Michael extended that the unchecked and largely unbalanced power of the office of high school redesign created bureaucracies that absorbed power and did little to affect campus improvements.

> So because they held the money, the principals felt they were pulled, like you had two bosses. You had your boss that supervised you, the associate superintendent for high schools, but he had no money because all the money rested with the office of high school redesign. If you were good with them, then you were going to get whatever program or money you needed. So, it was the whole "kiss the ring" philosophy. Whoever had the ring, you were going to kiss

> the ring and get the resources. So that office ended up building. They went from a two office shop where they had two little cubicles to an entire decked out building. They wanted for nothing. I think they got up to 12 staff members.

Next, Michael expressed his distrust of central office by presenting his knowledge of the historical mistakes central office had made when they attempted to provide leadership to campus reform efforts. In particular, Michael recalled the influence of central office over the repeatedly failed reform efforts at East Central High School.

> If you go back and look in historical data that we have on them during that first year, I think they had at one time, only one African American kid passed Math for the entire year. So it was bad, it was really, really bad. At this time is when office of redesign started to be created. Redesign now says “We want to own this school to do this.” So, at that point the principal, Margie, is caught in crossfire. Her supervisor, who created this school with her, is gone and she is trying to implement to the best of her ability what she believed the core mission of the school was. Redesign is pressing on her, why don’t we get FTF in here? She is losing the support of the superintendent. Office of redesign wants to redesign the school under their control. They don’t agree with the way she has her school set up. So now, she is fighting at all fronts, and she is fighting the data situation.

Michael’s independent account of the failed redesign efforts at East Central High School were validated by Margie’s own account. Additionally, the knowledge of these central office interventions contributed to his lack of trust for central office.

Finally, his actions throughout the redesign process clearly indicated that he did not trust the direction of the district-led redesign. When he was asked why he disagreed with and opted to not follow the district’s redesign process, Michael provided the following response.

> I think that we as a district tried to redesign in isolation. You can’t change the high school without changing the vertical team. Your data will be very short lived. You can do some painting of the school, you can tweak it a little bit, but if you want it long term, you need to do it vertically, elementary, middle school, all the way to high school. We never engaged in those conversations when we were going down this path. It was all a high school thing. And then we didn’t engage

> our communities, we engaged our teaching staff, but we didn't engage our communities as much.

Michael's sentiments about central office consistently emphasized his perception that central office merely directed reform efforts for the sake of appearances rather than for the sake of effecting true change.

Michael's absence of trust for outside agents, especially central office, was in part due to the absence of support provided to Michael's independent ideas for redesign. In this final section, Michael's perceptions are described.

Positive Support

Michael consistently pointed out that central office did not provide any type of support, including financial support, during the redesign process. However, he later acknowledged that the greatest support provided by the superintendent and the associate superintendent for high schools was that they gave him the freedom to implement his own plan.

Case Profile Summary

Michael's case profile depicts a principal who viewed district-initiated reform as an opportunity to affect locally developed instructional improvements. Although the reform was originally initiated by the district's central office, with some district-driven parameters, Michael took decisive steps to ensure that the reform framework at North Side High School was defined through a campus process.

The district's leadership consistently encouraged a redesign model that incorporated the use of a proven framework for redesign, such as First-Things-First.

Michael, however, shirked the district guidance and opted for a redesign framework that centered primarily on instruction. To this end, Michael organized his administrative and instructional personnel in a manner conducive to collaboration and used his master schedule to structure all reform activities around professional learning communities.

Michael's bold stance on defending the campus autonomy disqualified North Side High School from the financial support given to other campuses that incorporated tenets of the districts reform agenda. However, Michael emphatically insisted that his campus-implemented improvements could be sustained long after the existence of the grant money.

Participant Number Five - Malcolm

Malcolm is a middle-aged African American male. During the time frame that this study encompassed, he was in his last six years as an in-service principal. Prior to his assignment as principal of Eastside High School (the setting for this case profile), Malcolm possessed 14 years of combined administrative experience. Malcolm served two years as an elementary school assistant principal, four years as an elementary principal, three years as a middle school principal, and five years as a high school principal. All of Malcolm's administrative experience occurred within the district that was the setting for this study.

In April 2004 as Malcolm was completing his fifth year as principal of North Side High School, the associate superintendent for high schools informed him that the school district was organizing a "Blueprint Program." According to the information given to Malcolm, North Central High School and Eastside High School would be provided the autonomy and resources necessary to research and create a learning environment conducive to successful student achievement. The aforementioned support would help define the “Blueprint” for academic success to use with students from poverty at the district. The resources were going to sustain a director who would oversee both campuses and additional compensation for a principal with a proven track record of success. The principal chosen would assume the school’s chief leadership role. In the following quote, Malcolm recalls how he made his decision to apply for the job.

> The high school associate superintendent actually encouraged me to go for that opportunity over there. And then the director, after he was hired, actually called me and asked me to apply for the job as well. I had been at my previous high school for five years and it had been kind of my modus operandi to change schools after four or five years, so I was ready to make a change anyway. I was under the impression that going under the guise of the Blueprint initiative that I would be given more autonomy.

Eastside High School, where Malcolm began his final assignment as a high school principal, served two very distinct student groups. First, Eastside High School served the neighborhood students who were predominantly children of color and mostly economically disadvantaged. Second, Eastside High School housed the district’s Language Arts and Science Academy (LASA) that served students who primarily lived outside of the school’s immediate attendance zone. These students were primarily White with adequate financial resources. The neighborhood student population at Eastside High was approximately 49% African American, 49% Hispanic, 2% White, and 80% economically disadvantaged overall. The student population at the Language Arts and Science Academy was approximately 6% African American, 22% Hispanic, 57% White, 15% Asian, and 22% economically disadvantaged overall.

The dual track system at Eastside High School was a result of the community's efforts to fight the "White flight" syndrome experienced by most large city expanding communities. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Eastside High School, much like the other high schools in the school district, enjoyed a well-balanced student population. However, as the city was developing to the northwest side of town, many of the neighborhood residents with financial resources fled to the newer residential developments.

During the late 1970s, a group of businessmen known as the International Business Machine (IBM) collaborated with the Chamber of Commerce and a few prominent businesses to urge the school district to create a science magnet school at Eastside High School and a Liberal Arts Academy at East Central High School. In 1985 the Science Magnet was established at Eastside High School and in 1989 the school district created the Liberal Arts Academy at East Central High School. After a few years of independent coexistence (mainly because the Science Magnet and the Liberal Arts Academy were within five miles of each other), the school district suggested that both magnets merge at one campus. The district's recommendation to merge the units coincided with the East Central High School principal's wishes to oust the Liberal Arts Academy from his campus. Therefore, in 2002 it was decided that the two academies merge under the name of Liberal Arts and Science Academy (LASA) and be housed at Eastside High School.

Malcolm arrived at Eastside High School in June 2004 and immediately began reviewing the preliminary reports completed by the Southern Regional Education Board

(SREB). According to Malcolm's review, the reports indicated that a huge disparity existed between the services afforded to the students who attended the magnet school and the neighborhood students in general. According to Malcolm:

> I called it a Tale of Two Cities because the magnet program that served upper and middle class families, mostly White, had a plethora of elective courses. And it appeared that any kid on that campus could have access to these great magnet elective courses, and such, and these allegedly outstanding pre-AP and AP programs. From the outside looking in, it appeared that Eastside High School was a fully integrated school; about a third African American; about a third Latino; and about a third White. But upon closer inspection I found that one non-magnet student had attempted an AP course and just fewer than 400 magnet students were taking those opportunities.

Although Malcolm was dumbfounded by the limited opportunities afforded to the neighborhood students, he was also well aware of the co-dependency that existed between the magnet and neighborhood factions at Eastside High School. First, the scores on the mandated state assessment, reported as a whole, allowed the school to consistently be rated as Academically Acceptable by the state's accountability system. Many feared that without the high rate of passing scores from the magnet students, Eastside High School would have consistently received the Academically Unacceptable rating that neighboring East Central High School and North Central High School had received for consecutive years. In addition, Eastside High School enjoyed the largest and most celebrated band program in the central Texas area. The band program was one of the few fully integrated programs at Eastside High School. However, the band program depended on participation from both the magnet students and the neighborhood students. Finally, there was a financial dependency. The magnet school had benefited from federal funds (Title I) provided to Eastside High School. Malcolm summarized the magnet school's financial dependency on Eastside High School in the following quote:

> The magnet school was a school that on its own would not qualify for Title I federal funds. I think the percentage of economically disadvantaged students that attended the magnet, if I recall, was 22%. Eastside High School was 80% economically disadvantaged. Together, we were right at about 50% economically disadvantaged.

The combined high percentage of low-income students qualified the school as a Title I campus and, thereby, qualified them for Title I financial support.

During the 2004/2005 school year, Malcolm worked with his new supervisor (the Blueprint Director), the associate superintendent for high schools, and the Liberal Arts and Science Academy Director to begin addressing discrepancies outlined in the SREB report. Malcolm was excited about the opportunity to work directly with his new supervisor and particularly proud of the increased enrollment in the Advanced Placement courses by the neighborhood students. On these two points, Malcolm recalled the following:

> The high school associate superintendent was not our supervisor anymore. When I was hired as principal, the magnet school program also received a magnet school director. For the first time in history, the magnet school director did not report to the school principal; instead he reported to the Blueprint Director. However, in reality, he would attend all of the magnet parent meetings and take care of that side of the house, and then report to me in the cabinet meetings which had all of the administrators and counselors. We held that on a weekly basis. It was a great set up.

The administrative structure that Eastside High School was operating under was conducive to the operational autonomy that Malcolm had envisioned.

However, as the 2005/2006 school year was getting underway, the Blueprint Director submitted his resignation to accept a promotion in another school district. Upon his resignation, the superintendent made the decision to once again place Eastside High School and North Central High School under the direction of the associate superintendent for high schools. Although Malcolm had previously been placed under the direct supervision of the Blueprint Director, he and the principal at East Central High School had continued to participate in all of the activities directed by the associate superintendent for high schools. These activities included the monthly meetings and the summer staff development provided to the other high school principals. During the summer staff development held in June 2005, the associate superintendent for high schools started talking to the high school principals about developing plans to restructure their existing high schools into schools that would more aggressively address the deficiencies outlined in the SREB report.

In order to further engage the principals in the redesign process, the central office arranged for all 11 high school principals to attend the School Redesign Network's (SRN) Summer Institute at Stanford University. During the weeklong conference, the principals heard proponents of high school redesign (such as Linda Darling-Hammond) promote the need to redesign existing large high schools into smaller schools. Malcolm recalled how he processed his decision to fully implement high school redesign:

> I thought that this would be an exciting opportunity at the turn of the millennium, because I thought this was going to be the future of high schools. And I thought we should kind of get away from traditional high schools, which in my opinion had become obsolete.

Malcolm extended that redesign activities should be limited to the non-magnet component of the school. On this pointed, he stated:

> So when it came to redesign, I thought it was prudent to do redesign. Not necessarily for the magnet program, but for the non-magnet program to try to create a situation where no matter what student you were, you were going to have access to outstanding teachers and outstanding course work.

Malcolm also elaborated on why he thought redesign at Eastside High School should focus on creating programs for the neighborhood students only and leave the magnet students out of the redesign equation.

> My original plan was to basically leave the magnet alone. Basically for political reasons – my predecessors became ex-principals trying to mess with that magnet program. Because of the politics, and really because it was a successful program in terms of numbers, and course offerings, and such, it was a program to be left alone. So my strategy was to try to not make their mistakes and try to enhance the non-magnet situation at the school.

As the 2005/2006 school year started, Malcolm made immediate plans to begin the process to redesign the school. To help principals develop a full redesign process, the superintendent had secured the consulting services of the School Redesign Network (SRN). The SRN consultants encouraged Malcolm to form a redesign committee that included teachers, parents, and students. Once the committee was formed, the SRN consultants facilitated a series of visits to various small schools across the country. Malcolm summarized the trips in the following paragraph:

> I remember traveling to different parts of the country (California, Kansas City, Kansas, New York City) specifically to look at high schools across the country that had different redesign initiatives. I took a team of 12 people: a couple of parents, a couple of students, seven staff members, and myself. We went on these trips. As we went on these trips, we were trying to look at schools that were similar to our demographics. And the demographics I am speaking to is our non-magnet demographics.

The central office leadership team was encouraged by Malcolm's willingness to engage the redesign process and believed that his leadership style would be a perfect component for a partnership with a high school reform consultant. The central office leadership team was aware that the Gates Foundation, whose money they were hoping to secure, would fund the implementation of proven redesign plans. Because of this, the superintendent encouraged Malcolm to consider a high school reform model called First-Things-First (FTF). The First-Things-First reform model was created by the Institute for Research and Reform in Education (IRRE).

> The superintendent of the school district had a private meeting with me at one of the high school principals' meetings and encouraged me strongly, he did not demand it or make it mandatory, but encouraged me strongly to take a deep look at an initiative from the Institute of Research and Reform in Education, otherwise known as FTF or First-Things-First. At the time I said we would take a deep look at it and give it strong consideration since I felt it was something he really wanted. And his reasoning was that Gates Foundation always funds FTF. From that, I gathered that the research on the program was strong, and that the implementation was strong. FTF had been around for about a decade at that time. I was left with the impression that this was something that the superintendent really wanted for Eastside High School.

Although he was skeptical of the superintendent's suggestion, Malcolm researched the model and visited schools that had successfully implemented First-Things-First. Throughout an entire year of studying redesigned schools, Malcolm continued to be impressed with the results obtained by First-Things-First. Eventually, Malcolm led his redesign team to select First-Things-First as the redesign model for Eastside High School. Malcolm remembered:

> It just so happened that when we went to these trips to determine what redesign organization we would work with, the presentations by the Institute of Research and Reform in Education folks (IRRE), or FTF folks, their presentations were strong. We went into the schools. It appeared that the school people were really inspired and encouraged and fully supporting FTF. This was in Kansas City, Kansas, and Houston that I am talking about….At the end of the process, it was decided unanimously that FTF was the way we were going to go as a school.

The following sections present the findings discovered during the analysis of the data. The data analysis focused particularly on the decisions made by Malcolm regarding district-led reform.

To further support an understanding of the positive and negative effects that high school redesign had on the campus during the high school redesign years (2004-2010), a data table (Table 7) describing changes in the student achievement is provided. Because the passing standards changed on the state assessment during the course of high school redesign, a simple year-to-year passing rate comparison will not adequately describe the campus progressing or decreasing in their achievement levels. Therefore, the data are presented in terms of changes in the achievement gaps between the campus achievement level and that of the state and the campus group.

Table 7. Changes in Student Achievement Gaps Between Eastside Central High School and the State/Campus Group (2004-2010)

District	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
State	*	*	*	*	-36	-46	-31
Campus Group	*	*	*	*	-8	-20	-13

*Indicates data reported was constituted by a different student group.
Source. TEA (2008, 2009, 2010).

Focused Instructional Leadership

Of the five Tier I high school principals who were directed to immediately begin to develop and implement high school redesign, only Malcolm made an immediate commitment. Malcolm was embracing a spirit of interdependence with the district leadership and its systems while the other four Tier I principals were working to assert their autonomy. All five principals understood that implementing Smaller Learning Communities and providing advisories were mandatory. Deciding what model, if any, would be used for redesign was left to the principal to decide.

Malcolm's redesign process was not made simpler for having chosen to follow the district's plan of implementing redesign through First-Things-First. As Malcolm recalled, the district leadership and the First-Things-First leadership were attempting to pursue interdependence not only in an East Central High School to central office relationship but also interdependence within all five Tier I high schools and the central office. Having interdependence among high schools was particularly difficult for Malcolm to embrace because each school had an entirely different situation and engaged in a separate process to determine the redesign model implemented. Malcolm described his frustration with the following statements:

> Now, we were out in front of the other schools, somehow. And we had to wait because North Central High School had not decided what they were going to do. And then at some point, Central High School had somehow become part of the FTF conversation. But they had not gone through the process that we had gone through because they were not a Blueprint School. We basically had to wait a year. At that point, people in the school, in terms of teachers and also people in the community, were beginning to think aloud, "Oh, this was just another political scam. We had all this time, we did all this research, we went to all these places, we made a decision, and now we are being told we can't do it."

Malcolm's primary reason for not wanting to wait for the other campuses to decide if they were going to follow the First-Things-First model was his eagerness to provide for his school the continued focus on teaching and learning established during his first year as principal. The following statement summarized Malcolm's first year success stories.

> We had put together some things that the principal would just do to let folks know that the school was on the right track. Better discipline, the climate was better. You know, there was a perception. We had put some programs in place. We had made some agreements with the fire department to have the fire academy. We had won a grant to get Project Lead the Way…Pre Engineering specifically for Eastside High School. We had put together a robotics program. We had put together a science Olympiad. So we had done some things that people wanted.

To ensure the continued focus on teaching and learning was maintained, Malcolm decided that East Central High School would follow the entire redesign plans of First-Things-First including the plans for instructional leadership and staff development. His decision, although consistent with the wishes of the superintendent, did not guarantee coordination with the other central office personnel. As Malcolm recalled:

> At Eastside High School, we went totally FTF for a period of two years, including professional development training. Sometimes that would get me in trouble with the high school associate superintendent. However, my retort was always, "Look, we signed a contract with these people and said we were going to do it, so we are going to do it." So that caused more frustration because then I had, for example, the district Director of Social Studies and the Director of Math, constantly calling me to tell me that my math teachers were not at these required district trainings. So for those two years, I just held my ground and said we were going to do this FTF stuff.

The First-Things-First model of high school redesign called for the implementation of a block schedule. The plan further encouraged principals to ensure that students sat in a Math and Language Arts for 90 daily consecutive minutes. The block scheduling plan, with double blocking in Math and Language Arts, provided heavy emphasis in the core instructional areas. However, by design this schedule only allowed for elective classes to meet every other day. Malcolm again embraced the components set forth in the First-Things-First model but recalled having to re-align his block scheduling implementation plans because of interventions from central office. Malcolm explained:

> We had a very complicated schedule. We had a block schedule but we also had "skinnies"…we called them, which were really 45-minute classes within the 90 minute block of some of the classes. The principals that were going to go through this redesign process first, the FTF principals, had to sit down with the Athletic Director and head football coaches because they didn't want whatever it was that we were going to do to interfere with athletics in any sense, shape, or form.

Malcolm perceived the directive to accommodate athletics as a de-emphasis of teaching and learning and an intrusion on his instructional leadership role. Malcolm expressed frustration by comparing the setting he found himself in to the setting he experienced as a teenage athlete in inner city Chicago.

> In Texas, it appeared that in order to do redesign, you had to schedule it around football, which was another level of frustration for me. And I say that because my personal experience as a college athlete was that the schools in Chicago did not have an athletic period. We had practices afterschool, and we felt that athletics was given a little too much priority in scheduling the school and everything else down here. We came up with a schedule that appeased the high school coaches because they wanted to see their athletes every day.

The directive to implement high school redesign around athletics, indicated to Malcolm that the autonomy he had expected was quickly diminishing.

Malcolm soon found that the biggest challenge to redesign was navigating through the bureaucracies of the central office in order to decide a timeline for redesign implementation, create a staff development plan conducive to the campus needs, and setting a class schedule that supported campus needs. Although he expected most of the challenges he faced, the increased level of frustration with the central office bureaucracy was unexpected. Nevertheless, it became apparent that the administration of First-Things-First was complicating the school's normal bureaucratic challenges with the central office. Malcolm shared his perception about the “collaboration” of the bureaucracies in the following recollection:

> The creator and founder of the Institute for Research and Reform in Education gave us a bombshell. And I am thinking it was a bomb shell to the superintendent, but I don’t know if they were in on it together. The superintendent comes to me and says “Malcolm, we have decided that the only way to make this work with FTF is for us to have separate PEIMS numbers for Eastside and the magnet. We want you to work with Eastside because you have done this work with FTF.”

At the onset of the process Malcolm made a conscientious decision not to include the magnet program as part of the redesign. However, through the redesign discussions held during campus advisory council, which had parents from the community and parents from the magnet program, it was becoming increasingly apparent that the magnet community was not pleased with the large amounts of redesign money allocated to Eastside High School. As Malcolm recalled, the concerns made their way to the superintendent:

> Things were coming to a head and the superintendent really became nervous and concerned about what was going on. I guess people were coming to him… unbeknownst to me, or any administrator that I know of in the building…that board members were getting pressure by the magnet community, that they felt that we were not paying enough attention to them at the administrative level.

The fact that his two predecessors were removed as principal of Eastside High School, primarily for not getting along with the magnet side of the school, caused Malcolm to worry. Additionally, he worried because the current redesign plan was built on a premise of interdependency between the side of the school that served the neighborhood community and the magnet side of the school. This interdependency included the use of common spaces and some course offerings and extended to the state’s academic accountability system. The following statement described Malcolm’s frustrations after witnessing the collaboration of the superintendent and the president of the Institute for Research and Reform in Education.

> So I remember saying, "Look, you have asked me before about this redesign thing and you have asked me before about options. And I said that the worst option was for us to split this campus and keep the magnet on this campus. Not only do I lose students that can test well but I also lose space to really be flexible in what we want to do in creating this FTF program." So I felt that was the worst option. I said "the best option is to keep the school as it is. We are making gains as a school. We redesign the part that's broke, the part that has pain. The second option would be, if there must be a split, that the magnet should go somewhere else…find its own campus and let this become a comprehensive FTF school."

By the end of that day's debate, Malcolm was extremely frustrated and hurt. He did, however, realize that the decision to split the two schools had been made.

As a career principal, Malcolm felt that his only good option was to publicly support the superintendent. In the following statement, Malcolm expressed his acceptance on the reality that surrounded him:

> So at this point when the superintendent determines that it's going to be a split school, he determines that there is going to be two principals. And again, if I had been a younger guy, I would have left at this point because I did not believe in having two captains running the ship. But I wanted to see this redesign thing through and I didn't want to run out, because at this point the Blueprint Director had left already.

Malcolm's commitment to the community provided him the emotional fortitude needed to endure what he perceived to be a betrayal from his supervisors.

Because of the increased academic needs of the campus, Malcolm was not able to dwell upon his soured relationship with central office. Instead, he needed to focus on developing the instructional capacity of his administrators and teachers. The next section discusses the capacity building activities as described by Malcolm.

The Need to Build Capacity

For state accountability purposes, Eastside High School and the magnet campus were formally reported as two separate campuses during the 2007/2008 school year. The 2007/2008 school year was Malcolm's fourth year as principal at the school. The larger district community believed that Eastside High School, without the magnet students, would not be able to meet the state assessment standards. In the following passage, Malcolm described the feeling of insecurity that permeated some district circles because of the aforementioned perspective:

> The perception was that because East Central and North Central were multiyear unacceptable…and we had the same demographics…we were going to be unacceptable as well. So it was pretty tense that first year because we had lost the magnet kids, we had lost the magnet scores, and I actually had supervisors informing me that based on our benchmark data, there was no way our kids were going to be successful on our TAKS.

However, because of the collaboration and development that Malcolm had seen among his staff, he believed differently. Although Malcolm worried because the magnet scores were gone, he felt confident that his students would be successful. Malcolm noted:

> The staff was really coming together as a staff in those smaller learning communities. They knew who the kids were. Through surveys…we had gathered…the kids felt connected to the communities. They knew what communities they were in and who the teachers were in there.

At the end of the school year, the campus was informed that with some exceptions they had met the state standards and would receive an overall rating of Academically Acceptable. Although there was reason to celebrate, Malcolm ended the year on a sour note. Malcolm believed that it had become increasingly clear that what mattered most to the central office were the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) scores and the school rating derived from these scores. It was also becoming clearer that the TAKS scores would be difficult to maintain. On this point Malcolm recalled:

> Come testing time we all knew what the bottom line was. Regardless of how well you qualitatively perceived this initiative to be going, you better do this TAKS thing. Long story short, we did pass the TAKS with some allowances. And then all of the sudden, I'm a hero again and we are hot. I learned again that it really didn't matter what we were trying to do for kids and the community. The bottom line was the test scores. It was disheartening. I kept this to myself. I didn't tell the staff. I didn't tell the cabinet about it.

One of the first indications that the scores on the state's assessment would be difficult to maintain was the weakness in the commitment demonstrated by the faculty. Although the staff had come together and committed to the structures of redesign, they were not necessarily committed to providing increased rigor to the students. For example, Malcolm remembered:

> The reality was that our kids did not take benchmarks seriously, probably because some adults in the building didn't either. FTF had an English curriculum that I almost forced people to do. It was just a battle, which made things worse in the building because I was making teachers do something that we had said we were going to do, but when it came down to it, all of them didn't want to do it.

Malcolm had discovered that implementing First-Things-First as a campus structure would cause a strain in the non-combative relationships he had thus far enjoyed with his staff.

At the end of the 2008/2009 school year (Malcolm's fifth year as principal of Eastside High School), the student scores on the state assessment decreased dramatically. In an effort to determine causal effects for the school becoming an

Academically Unacceptable campus, Malcolm began to explore the need to develop his administrators and teachers.

> So scores come back, it was Science and Math the reason we tanked. Politically, FTF was being blamed from the board level and the central office level. And I was saying, “No, it was not FTF, it was people in my building, it was me because I was not more hands on like I had normally been.”

In discussing the shortcomings of his administrative staff, Malcolm shared that his administrative team lacked experience and the ability to provide instructional leadership. The following statement described the lack of instructional leadership provided by Malcolm’s assistant principals.

> I had at this point an academic director and four assistant principals. My academic director that I had hired early on as principal of Eastside High had taken a job with TEA. I was in the midst of terminating another assistant principal. My other assistant principal, I promoted to academic director because he was a great facilities manager, great assistant principal.

What also made the situation at Eastside untenable was Malcolm’s reality. In his fifth year as principal, the wear and tear of the political battles fought with the central office had taken their toll on Malcolm’s spirit. According to Malcolm:

> By 2009 my energy level was very negative. I was given advice to delegate more responsibility to my administrative team, since I had extra administrators. I became involved in a lot of committee meetings again. Basically became more of a CEO than a principal, took my hand off of the pulse, and believed what people were telling me in meetings instead of really digging into the data myself.

After reflecting on the reason that Eastside High School failed to sustain even the minimal required academic growth during the 2008/2009 school year, Malcolm shared the following analysis:

> Test scores come in later. Kids bomb! Kids bomb! I am angry! People are beginning to blame FTF for this dip in test scores. And it wasn’t FTF. It was the fact that people were not taking care of their business, including me, in terms of

> looking at data, examining data, making sure teachers were doing what they were supposed to do. And my fault was that I thought I had people in place who were taking care of business and the bottom line is that they weren't.

The objective information which Malcolm thought he was receiving from his administrative staff had clearly failed to depict the campus' academic reality.

Malcolm shared that during his previous three assignments as a campus principal, he self-induced his exit after five years. In the same manner, he initially planned to only be principal at Eastside High School for five years. However, as Malcolm recalled, the campuses' TEA designation as Academically Unacceptable changed his plans.

> That was the year I had planned to leave Eastside High School but personally I felt that I couldn't leave because I didn't want to go out low performing. And I didn't want people to blame FTF for that failure because it wasn't FTF. We did struggle with some things.

Malcolm's decision to remain principal at Eastside High School was primarily based on improving the state's accountability rating.

Therefore, Malcolm decided to dedicate most of his time and energy to improving the teachers' capacity to engage the students in a rigorous curriculum. In order to address the state of academic affairs at Eastside High School, Malcolm organized a Science and Math Instructional Improvement Plan that included the direct help of FTF and the central office. Because of the three-year relationship, Malcolm had already established the cooperation of First-Things-First. The incorporation of the central office personnel into the improvement plan was facilitated by a central office administrator named Michael. Michael had previously earned the job as principal at Malcolm's earlier campus (North Side High School) and was now an Executive

Principal. In his current position, Michael was responsible for supporting principals and established a record of success as an Executive Principal at North Central High School. Malcolm summarized the Science and Math Instructional Improvement Plan development with Michael in the following statement.

> Michael was willing to come in and help. I give him credit for that. He wanted to take over the Science. I gave him the academic director, and I took the FTF people. We got a Math specialist that I paired with my Math Department Chair. I took her out of the classroom, I didn't have her teaching.

After recruiting the needed personnel, Malcolm was able to move forward with the implementation of his Math and Science Instructional Improvement Plan.

The first part of the plan consisted of providing staff development to the math and science teachers. From the onset of the Science and Math Instructional Improvement Plan, Malcolm noticed resistance from some of the teachers. This resistance was disappointing and eventually resulted in severing contractual agreements between those teachers and the district.

> I brought my science and math teachers back for two weeks in the summer, which they didn't like, which really angered me at that because I felt they weren't really soldiers. They were not in it for the right reasons. I felt we were in a desperate situation and we had to do something extra to get out of that situation. And some attitudes…a few attitudes disappointed me. Long story short, teachers were gone by Christmas: about half of my Math teachers and three of my Science teachers.

The severing of contractual agreements with some of the Math and Science teachers provided Malcolm the opportunity to hire teachers who were willing to implement the improvement plans as designed.

The implementation of the Science and Math Instructional Improvement Plan consisted of providing teachers an almost scripted curriculum in math and science.

Throughout a job-embedded staff development model, the teachers were learning how to be more engaging and more rigorous in what they expected from their students. In discussing the math component of the improvement plan, Malcolm recalled:

> This is where life became less fun because I knew that a prescriptive program would be frowned upon by the teachers and the students. We put in position a thematic Math curriculum that was based on total mastery and the impossibility to fail. The Math person from FTF helped us rewrite the curriculum and helped us learn how to study the objectives.

The Science Improvement Plan was developed by Michael who put together a Backwards Design Model that he had used at North Side and North Central High School. The collaboration between the principal, the personnel from First-Things-First, and the central office personnel (coupled with the teachers' efforts) resulted in dramatic increases in student achievement scores. At the end of the 2009/2010 school year, Malcolm's sixth and final year as principal, the student scores on the state assessment led to a TEA designation of Academically Acceptable. Malcolm proudly recalled that achievement:

> I basically became a principal again. I wasn't the middle manager. I did what we thought was best for kids. It wasn't what was best for the adults in the building. So even though the kids complained all year about not being able to move on, unless they mastered something, by the end of the year with the help of FTF and the high school office on the science side, test scores jumped up, flew up by miraculous numbers.

The gains that were accomplished during the redesign phase were direct results of the collaboration between all stakeholders. However, these improvements mainly occurred during the final year of Malcolm's tenure. Analysis of the data indicates that the earlier years of Malcolm's tenure where primarily dedicated to building systems that would sustain the developed high school redesign framework. The following section describes the importance that Malcolm placed on these structures.

The Need for Structure

As an experienced principal, Malcolm felt confident in his ability to manage a campus and was not overly concerned with campus management structures such as operations, budget, safety and security. Instead, Malcolm thought mostly about the tremendous amount of time and effort dedicated to high school redesign and worried that without establishing related structures, all the redesign practices would be discarded after his departure. For example:

> Because of my experience…having principaled multiple campuses…I felt that the school needed a system in place upon my leaving Eastside High School. Because this would have been my third year, and I only like to work five years in a joint, I wanted a system in place because at that time I was pretty hot as a principal. I was getting job offers in other parts of the state and parts of the country and I wasn't sure how long I was going to stay at Eastside High School. I wanted a system in place that no matter who the principal was it was a system that the adults had bought into and it was going to be able to go on for a number of years after my departure.

With establishing structures to sustain redesign in mind, Malcolm moved to implement a redesign program that would ensure longevity of the redesign practices.

First-Things-First provided the structures that Malcolm was seeking in a redesign program. He recalled the structure and process that First-Things-First provided to the development and implementation of their redesign process:

> The process of naming the Smaller Learning Communities…having the students rank which ones they wanted to go to…and having the teachers decide which ones they were going to belong to was great. Then the process of actually reconfiguring the building so that the SLCs were contiguous to each other really brought the energy of the building to a positive strong energy. People were saying things like "Okay, this is really going to happen." Energy soared!

Malcolm also appreciated the ongoing support provided by First-Things-First representatives to the Small Learning Community Directors. In his opinion, the continued presence of the First-Things-First representatives ensured that the campus developed all redesign practices in a manner conducive to establishing longevity.

Time as a Limited Resource

Instead of spending a tremendous amount of time developing a high school redesign plan, Malcolm and his redesign team dedicated time to researching proven models of redesign throughout the country. As part of this effort, his redesign team visited schools in New York City, Kansas City, Boston, and Houston. Malcolm expressed an affinity to the work that was done in Houston, primarily because he observed that the student demographics were high at-risk. Malcolm described the time-intensive process that he and his redesign team invested in selecting a proven model:

> We were very impressed with what we saw in Kansas City, but we wanted to see something that applied in the state of Texas. So that is how we were led to the school in Houston. It was the only school in Houston doing FTF. The principal had been there about seven years, and I think he is still there, this is five years later. So we saw that the climate of the school was excellent, the teaching, the professional learning communities appeared strong. We went announced one time and we went unannounced one time. We wanted to make sure we were not seeing a “dog and pony show.” The second time around, things were going on just like the first, in terms of people working together, and collaborating, kids being good kids, and all that sort of thing.

The visit to the Houston area school that was implementing First-Things-First solidified Malcolm’s decision to move forward with implementing First-Things-First at Eastside High school.

Malcolm described the process of sharing information with the greater Eastside High School community.

> The 12 people who went on these trips and me held a series of forums to the larger community. We gave three forums if I remember correctly. We also gave presentations to and kept the Campus Advisory Council (CAC) apprised of the different trips we were going on. We would bring back information on what we felt and thought.

Throughout the interview process, Malcolm never expressed dissatisfaction or frustration with the time he and his administrative staff dedicated to selecting and implementing a redesign plan. However, Malcolm consistently expressed dissatisfaction at the time required to successfully work through what he perceived as “central office red tape.” In his opinion, “the district does what central office does; it created even more bureaucracy. It’s what ultimately happened.”

Malcolm believed that the central office started creating obstacles to redesign from the very beginning when they “forced Eastside High School to wait for East Central, North Central, and Central High School to select First-Things-First,” before allowing them to implement their plans.

The obstacles posed by the central office continued to tax the limited time because the central office was overly focused on creating different levels of bureaucracies. Malcolm summarized his frustration when describing the rearranged role of one of his redesign personnel: the School Improvement Facilitator (SIF).

> The SLCs were supposed to be able to create learning environments and activities. Now, it’s the job of the SIF to look at the guidelines of the money to see how the money can be used. And if the SIF could document what area that activity satisfied, we should have been able to go with it. Now, of course, the SIF would come to me with it. We would have cabinet meetings about it and decide yeah or nay or go back and modify. But it was supposed to be all about the campus doing right by its kids. Well, it got to the point that after we would have that processed, it would still have to go to the high school office to see if it fit their interpretation of fitting within the rules. And sometimes it did and sometimes it didn’t. Then we would have to start that same process again.

Malcolm perceived that the bureaucratic red tape at central office increased during the high school redesign process and became an impediment to implement change.

The frustration created during the time that Northeast High School had to wait to implement the First-Things-First model and the perception of increased bureaucracies at central office combined to increase Malcolm's distrust for central office. The next section describes the absence of trust that Malcolm felt for central office.

Absence of Trust

Data analysis revealed that Malcolm had a deep distrust of the central office and the superintendent's politics. Beginning with the decision to separate the magnet school from Eastside High School and culminating with the decision to discontinue the services of First-Things-First, Malcolm felt the central office as a whole lacked the conviction to do what was right for kids. Malcolm used a common phrase within the district to describe the actions by the central office: "central office is more concerned about appearing to make improvements than actually making the improvements."

Malcolm expressed concern that the decision to separate the magnet from the campus was processed in isolation of the campuses leadership and was done primarily for political reasons. Malcolm further expressed distrust of the central office bureaucracy as he recalled the power that the office of high school redesign had amassed and the confusion that it created:

> From the principal's perspective, it was a fight over territory. Roles should have been clarified from the superintendent to the various offices. That did not happen, so it became a territorial tug-of-war between the office of the associate superintendent for high schools and the office of high school redesign. Since the office of high school redesign had garnered so many staff positions and was in

> charge of a significant amount of funds, much more so than the associate superintendent, it appeared that they were running the district.

At the end of Malcolm's tenure as principal of Eastside High School, he felt that once again that he had reason to distrust the central office. The last unsettling experience with the central office involved the decision to discontinue the services of First-Things-First. Malcolm felt that the decision to dismiss First-Things-First as the technical assistance provider was based on personal choices and not what was best for students.

Malcolm explained that Michael, who was about to be elevated to the position of associate superintendent for high schools "never gave First-Things-First a chance." Malcolm explained that Michael, as principal of North Side High School and as Executive Principal, favored establishing Professional Learning Communities (PLC) under the direction of the campus principal. Malcolm further emphasized that Michael was selectively blaming First-Things-First for the students' low performance on the state assessment during the 2008/2009 school year. The following account described Malcolm's perception of the politically driven decisions at central office:

> So we were able to not be low performing. But even with that, Michael determined that the contract with FTF was not going to be renewed. Which I was against but I did not have any more power because I was retiring. FTF was dumbfounded because they could not understand why they were not being renewed when they were an integral part of our Math scores being turned around and the fact that the teachers had really bought into SLCs. So I learned again, that despite all of one's best efforts to try to put a system in place, it all depends on what the leadership wants. Whether the data showed some promise or not, in this case, it was all based on what somebody wanted to do or did not want to do.

Malcolm believed that despite all of their efforts to try to implement a system, it would be central office that would once again make decisions in isolation of the primary stakeholders.

Finally, Malcolm shared that the only individuals hurt by the rash decisions from the central office were the students.

> In my opinion, we were just experimenting with kids. And the kids that need us the most are going to be left behind because the kids that don't need us are going to learn anyway. The middle class kids and upper class are going to be all right anyway.

Malcolm rightfully believed that the poor kids who need something sustainable over a long period of time were the ones who were being manipulated the most.

Throughout the high school redesign process, Malcolm was able to set aside his frustrations and distrust of central office in order to garner resources for his campus. His emotional fortitude provided for him and Northeast High School a pathway to the central office resources when they were most needed. The next section describes the central office resources that Malcolm was able to make available to his teaching staff during the school year following the Academically Unacceptable rating by TEA.

Positive Support

Although Malcolm consistently and extensively elaborated on the distrust of the central office, he also acknowledged that Michael, as an agent of the central office, had been one of the driving forces that helped North Side High School improve the Science scores. In this instance, and if only for one school year, the central office and the campus principal collaborated in a fashion that directly provided for the improved services of the students.

Michael's assistance with the development and implementation of the science portion of the Science and Math Instructional Improvement Plan allowed time for Malcolm to dedicate himself not only to the math portion of the instructional improvement plan but to the overall health of the campus. Although teachers expressed concern and in some cases outright insubordination when directed to implement the instructional improvement plans, Malcolm had the support and freedom to address each situation.

Because of their collaborative efforts and the hard work of the teachers who chose to remain on staff, the students of Eastside High School enjoyed increased passing rates in their math and science state assessments. In the area of Math, the Eastside High School students posted a 22 percentage point increase. In the area of Science, the students posted a 21 percentage point increase.

It is important to note that the collaboration between Malcolm and Michael, in this instance, was directly related to improving the instructional process and not immediately related to sustaining the high school redesign elements. During the time that Michael was collaborating with Malcolm, the associate superintendent for high schools, the executive director for high school redesign, as well as the superintendent had retired from the school district. It should further be noted that Michael had been named the apparent replacement for the associate superintendent for high schools, and the district had opted to dissolve the office of high school redesign.

Case Profile Summary

Malcolm’s case profile, unlike the other four profiles, presented a principal who was willing and able to implement the district-led high school redesign initiatives as prescribed by the district’s central office. Malcolm extended his cooperation to include the selection of a high school redesign consultant preferred and partially selected by the school district.

The initial cooperation may have resulted in high levels of student engagement and student achievement and may have potentially arrived at a redesign model to serve as a guide for other struggling campuses. However, the success was not fully realized due to unanticipated pitfalls and leadership changes. The unanticipated pitfalls primarily consisted of an instructional staff who was willing to engage in the structural and immediately visible aspects of high school redesign, but unwilling to redesign the instructional process.

The short-lived era of high school redesign at Eastside High School was in part due to the retirement of Malcolm, as well as the change in leadership at the central office. The absence of the initiating principal, the superintendent, and even the executive director for high school redesign made the transition away from high school redesign more possible.

CHAPTER V

CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

This chapter reports the themes and findings derived from the analysis of the five case studies. The discussion supports the emergence of the themes and provides clear responses to the research questions. After transcribing and conducting an extensive review of the data through intra-case and cross-case analysis, six themes emerged. The themes discovered were: (a) focused instructional leadership, (b) the need to build capacity, (c) the need for structure, (d) time as a limited resource, (e) absence of trust, and (f) positive support. The careful analysis of the themes provided actionable answers to the research questions.

Focused Instructional Leadership

Review and analysis of the data showed that each of the five high school principals observed a correlation between the entity that provided instructional leadership to the campus and the academic success or failure of the campus. Moreover, the data indicated that providing focused instructional leadership fell into the following subcategories: (a) defining effective instructional improvements, (b) protecting instruction from outside distractions, and (c) asserting territorial control over instruction.

Defining Effective Instructional Improvements

An awareness of the need to provide instructional improvements was consistently reiterated by all campus principals. Another consistent view among the high school principals was the awareness of the absence of a defined instructional improvement process linking all agents (the central office, campus personnel, and private consultants) who sought to influence the instructional improvement efforts at the respective high schools.

The interviews revealed that the principals believed and articulated that instructional improvements should not simply consist of improving the teaching and learning process. The principals indicated that the teaching process should be improved by developing engaging methodologies in order to sustain the students' attention in rigorous lessons. Moreover, the principals indicated that the development of engaging methodologies needed to occur with an infusion of remediation activities to scaffold the students' learning to the required content level. However, according to the principals, the central office and other outside agents were not able to strengthen the teaching and learning process. Instead, they created confusion by focusing on a multitude of strategies that included elaborate reports, rewritten redesign plans, nebulous literacy initiatives, and curriculums that were not aligned with the state's assessed curriculum.

Protecting Instructional Focus from Outside Distractions

Each of the five participants clearly and consistently emphasized throughout their interviews they perceived that one of their duties as instructional leader was to protect the instructional focus on their campus from outside distractions. One of the reoccurring distractions perceived by the principals consisted of the involvement of central office personnel whose instructional improvement strategies were not consistent with those already being developed on the campus.

The principals also perceived as disturbing the imposition of instructional improvement strategies by the consultants hired by the school district. The instructional improvement strategies of the consultants were not consistent with the strategies being promoted by the campus instructional leadership teams or even other central office agents. The instructional improvement strategies from the district and the outside consultants were not necessarily poor strategies. However, the strategies did not have the same focus and could not possibly synergize the teachers' efforts. For example, the district's instructional improvement agents focused their learning strategies on the sequence of the instructional program guides (IPGs); the consultants focused their learning strategies on a selected initiative such as reading; and the campus principals focused their learning strategies on prioritizing student learning expectations via backwards design models. What made the process untenable was the fact that all three strategies occurred simultaneously. Finally, judging by their actions, the principals chose to serve as protectors of the campuses through their establishment of instructional focus. The principals preferred to rely on establishing campus-based instructional focus rather than mediate between their campuses, the central office, and the outside consultants.

Asserting Territorial Control Over Instruction

The principals scrutinized the improvement strategies provided by the school district and outside consultants to determine several legitimate points. Their scrutiny sought to determine if the strategies validated localized efforts, focused on teaching/learning, and provided a clear means to meet the state's accountability standards. Data desegregation showed that the principals displayed territorial protection behaviors as a primary means to protect their teaching staff from outside agents who routinely frustrated and confused the campus-based efforts. All of the principals indicated that they did this because the prepackaged instructional practices promoted by outside agents omitted the current academic level of students involved and failed to tailor practices to meet those students' academic needs. The principals also displayed territorial protection behaviors as a means to develop teaching capacity on their campus. All of the principals interviewed felt it was important to provide teachers improved instructional methodologies and feedback on the implementation of emerging methodologies. However, according to all of the principals, the redesign consultants favored the establishment of visible structures of high school redesign at the expense of methodology improvement and instructional coaching.

Finally, the principals consistently displayed territorial protection behaviors as a means to ensure that their campuses met the required state accountability measures. Beyond the implementation of Smaller Learning Communities and advisories the principals worried that the curriculum being promoted by the redesign consultants over-emphasized learning that existed outside the state's mandated curriculum. Because of this lack of curriculum-assessment alignment, the principals feared that unless the state's curriculum was emphasized, students would not develop the skills required to perform adequately on the state's mandated assessment.

The Need to Build Capacity

In this study each of the five high school principals revealed an intense concentration on the professional development needs for their teaching and administrative staff. After reviewing the data, The Need to Build Capacity was identified and organized into subcategories. The subcategories are: (a) overwhelming presence of underdeveloped teachers, (b) instructional development of assistant principals, and (c) accepting help from the outside.

Overwhelming Presence of Underdeveloped Teachers

The task of repurposing existing high schools was made acutely difficult partly because of the overwhelming presence of underdeveloped teachers in the district's lowest performing campuses. The overwhelming existence of underdeveloped teachers was manifested in two ways. The two ways included teachers who were either novice teachers to the profession or experienced teachers who had erroneously understood their instructional skills to be adequate. In either case, the teachers had to willingly develop new instructional skills, while simultaneously developing the academic deficiencies of their students. The combination of underdeveloped teachers and academically deficient students created a greater need for high school redesign but simultaneously made the attainment of redesign goals extremely difficult.

The principals at North Side, North Central, and East Side High School discussed at length the time engaged in documenting teachers in order to improve or force them out of teaching assignments. The principal at each high school described various cases where teachers were terminated, transferred to other campuses as part of the state's requirements to reconstitute, or responded to the principal's encouragement to leave the profession altogether. The removal of mediocre teachers unfortunately coincided with the already disproportionate existence of novice teachers. This increased the overall rate of teacher turnover and the number of teachers with less than five years' teaching experience. Table 8 represents the increased concentration of teachers with one to five years' teaching experience over two years of high school redesign implementation.

Table 8. Increased Concentration of Teachers With One to Five Years of Teaching Experience

District	Percentage 2005/2006	Percentage 2007/2008
Central	34.7	33.2
East Central	26.0	46.5
East Side	33.0	39.5
North Central	33.9	41.2
North Side	27.8	41.1
District Total	30.3	31.1

Source. TEA (2006, 2008).

An additional teacher-related obstacle to high school redesign was the high rate of turnover among teachers in the critical core areas (mainly math and science). The principals at North Side, North Central, East Central, and Eastside high schools each indicated that they had reconstituted, terminated, or encouraged to leave the profession teachers from their math and science department at a rate disproportionate to teachers of other subjects. The final teacher-related obstacle to high school redesign, particularly for campuses that had attempted to implement a proven high school reform model, was the increased need for teacher leaders. According to all of the principals, many of the teachers were struggling to teach engaging lessons and the few that were not struggling did not necessarily have the adequate skill set to provide instructional leadership to their peers.

Instructional Development of Assistant Principals

Each of the five Tier I high schools that were directed to implement high school redesign had two or more assistant principals hired within the redesign period. The new assistant principals only had teacher experience prior to their elevation to administrative status. These same new assistant principals were now expected to provide instructional leadership to teachers in at-risk settings.

The principals provided job-embedded professional development for the assistant principals. For example, during a training where the teachers were learning how to make the lessons more engaging and rigorous, the assistant principals were also learning how to lead the teachers in the same process. Additionally, principals found it necessary to have extensive dialogue with the assistant principals about instructional leadership. The discussions usually centered on explaining and modeling what constituted rigorous engaging instruction. The principals also gave regular examples of the coaching that the assistant principals should provide for the teachers. Consistent with what occurred concerning teachers who were unable or unwilling to develop, some underperforming assistant principals were terminated, transferred to other jobs, and in some cases marginalized within the organization.

Accepting Assistance from the Outside

The last finding in this subcategory is of particular interest because the principals had knowingly built barriers to protect against the central office and outside consultants in their role as campus instructional leader. The principals clearly indicated that they did not accept direction regarding the curriculum, the particular strategies for sequencing the curriculum into engaging lessons, or instructions regarding how to incorporate strategies to develop the students' academic deficiencies. However, it is interesting to note that each principal felt comfortable and welcomed financial or other assistance from the central office and/or outside consultants when developing the instructional capability of their teachers and assistant principals. For example, staff development was welcomed by principals as long as it consisted of understanding the importance of scaffolding lessons, developing rigorous engaging lessons, or valuing students. The conditioning of the mind was also welcomed so as long as it did not specify a particular strategy or program. Further analysis of the data on this point qualified that the acceptance of help from the central office and outside consultants was related logically to the principals' fear of the campus not meeting the state accountability measures and being deemed as Academically Unacceptable.

The Need for Structure

The tasks inherent in the principals' position considerably increased as they became involved in the redesign process. When the principals reflected upon the increasing number of tasks associated with redesign, each responded by evaluating the existence or absence of structures to manage those additional tasks. This theme, The Need for Structure, is presented in three subcategories: (a) adherence to policy and procedures, (b) instructional management structures, and (c) visible high school redesign structures.

Adherence to Policy and Procedures

The routine organization of the campus was discussed by one participant as the existence and practice of organizational processes, such as bookkeeping, enrollment procedures, and student data management. The same principal stated that although she felt her priority should have been to lead campus-wide reform efforts, the absence of a structured campus hindered her focus on these efforts. For example, the knowledge of overdrawn budgets, unsupervised students, graduating students who had not met graduation requirements, and willfully insubordinate para-professional employees absorbed that principal’s limited time and energy. Heightening the principal’s level of concern were potential state and federal audits that would determine mismanagement of funds and the thwarting of legal guidelines related to student academic requirements. Discussions with the principal determined that her efforts aimed at establishing more order and greater discipline at the campus were directly related to her desire to establish a culture of standards.

Instructional Management Structures

The five principals discussed the need for structure as a means of managing the large numbers of activities related to high school redesign. The instructional management structures, if present, assisted the principals in sequencing and managing high school redesign activities. When the instructional management structures were nonexistent, the redesign activities led to confusion and eventual failure.

The principal of North Central High School discussed the absence of these management structures and related that because of the large amounts of money available to the campus redesign efforts items were purchased and school trips were held without regard to any learning or campus reform objective. The principal of East Central High School elaborated on the topic and added that because of the absence of management structures she was not able to balance campus improvement efforts that provided for the immediate and long-term needs of the students. As a result, the campus did not provide for the immediate learning needs and failed to meet state accountability standards.

The principals of Central, East Side, and North Side high schools described the management structures they implemented to direct their high school redesign activities. For these principals, the redesign activities at their campuses had to directly relate to one of the high school redesign components. If the redesign activities were deemed directly related to one of these components, they found that the staff would actively participate and support these activities even if the activity placed the teachers outside of their comfort zone. On the contrary, any activity that did not relate to a redesign component was discarded without regard to who was proposing or endorsing the activity.

The principal of North Side High School structured all high school redesign activities around Professional Learning Communities and did not participate in any district-led activities for fear of losing focus. The principal of Central High School developed a redesign structure that helped organize the expression and implementation of what high school redesign would consist of at his school. All activities related to high school redesign at Central High School had to relate to Smaller Learning Communities (SLCs), Family Advocacy, and Professional Learning Communities. At East Side High School, the principal specifically adopted a proven model and accepted the direction of the consultants to ensure that the systems implemented would help sustain the high school reform during the coming years.

Visible High School Redesign Structures

Although the principals were given the freedom to select if their respective campuses would implement a proven model for redesign or implement instead a locally developed plan, each campus had to ensure their models included Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) and advisories. The implementation of SLC required the development of instructional themes, managing the student choices for an SLC, reorganizing the teaching staff into SLCs, and providing contiguous spaces for the SLC classrooms. Although these reorganizing activities were part of the SLC implementation, the principals expressed dissatisfaction with the time consumed organizing and implementing the SLC component of high school redesign. The principals also expressed concern that the teachers began recognizing the reorganization of the high school into SLC as the primary component of high school redesign rather than focusing on the need for the changed instructional behavior necessary for demonstrable and sustainable student learning improvement.

Time as a Limited Resource

Each of the five high school principals perceived an inability to balance the allocation of available time between completing daily tasks and the time required to complete high school redesign tasks. The theme Time as a Limited Resource fell into three subcategories: (a) coaching time, (b) absence of coordination, and (c) managing outside assistance.

Coaching Time

All of the principals believed that improving the teaching and learning process was the most important component of high school redesign. Because of this belief, a lot of the staff's time was dedicated to planning instructional improvements designed to create more engaging and rigorous lessons. Moreover, the principals perceived that effective implementation of instructional improvements would only be complete when teachers were provided adequate feedback. Many assistant principals were not able to provide adequate feedback to the teachers or deliver immediate instructional leadership. Therefore, in order to provide for continued instructional improvements, the principals first had to spend considerable time developing an instructional leadership skill set within their assistant principal ranks.

Four of the principals discussed the importance of developing within their assistant principals a consistent method for measuring sound instructional practices. Judy used in-service and retired principals to coach her assistant principals. She also used the Executive Principal to help develop her assistant principals' instructional leadership skill set. Margie indicated that she spent time developing her assistant principals as well as facilitating the Oversight Principal's coaching of her staff. Michael used the academy directors to train the assistant principals on the backwards design instructional model. Ronald held meetings specially designed for instructional dialogue and held calibration walkthroughs to ensure that all assistant principals had a consistent understanding of instructional standards at the campus.

Absence of Coordination

Judy, Margie, and Malcolm indicated that implementing high school redesign was consistently and almost systematically diminished due to the absence of coordination between the campuses vision of redesign and that of the outside agents (state, federal, district, and First-Things-First units) who exercised oversight of the improvement plans. The absence of coordination manifested in two ways. One way was in the purpose and role of outside agents working to implement concurrent improvement plans. The second way was the insistence by outside agents regarding the type of redesign activities that should be implemented.

East Central and North Central high schools were operating under sanctions from the state and federal government for not meeting accountability standards. Because of this, each campus was required to develop and implement improvement plans that addressed campus academic deficiencies as related to each system. Simultaneously, each campus was required to deal with agents from each governmental agency that had oversight of the respective improvement plans. In addition to dealing with instructional agents from the state and federal government, the principal also had to coordinate the instructional improvement efforts being promoted by district personnel and the First-Things-First (FTF) personnel hired to implement a proven model for redesign. The principals agreed that the contributions of each entity had the potential to improve the academic achievement of the students. The activities of each entity, however, presented a different approach to improving teaching and learning. Therefore, the activities were not able to be simultaneously implemented and only served to further frustrate the parties involved.

Managing Outside Assistance

Additional delays and frustration occurred because of the disagreements between the outside agents and the campus leaders regarding the high school redesign activities. The disagreements between the central office and the campuses centered around the type of redesign model that should be implemented and the type of activities that would be approved or disapproved by the combined bureaucracies of the executive director for high school redesign and First-Things-First. Because the disagreements were occurring after the redesign process had begun, the terse dialogue combined to delay the implementation of redesign activities as well and create disjointed redesign efforts. The principals expressed concern that a lot of time was spent defending the originally approved campus redesign plans and defending their position on the specific redesign models chosen for implementation at their campus. In the worst case scenarios, the entire high school redesign plans changed from one year to the next after extensive work conducted and resources expended. In other less dramatic scenarios, the improvement activities at various campuses were altered abruptly. Nevertheless, in all cases, the capricious changes caused disjointed redesign efforts.

Absence of Trust

Review and analysis of the data revealed that four of the five high school principals held or developed a deep distrust of the central office. The fifth principal did not distrust the central office. However, he did not have full confidence in the central office’s ability to lead campus reform. As a result of this lack of trust, the principals did not accept the leadership from the central office during the implementation of high school redesign. The Absence of Trust theme derives from various factors. The factors of the theme were divided in three subcategories: (a) perceived prior treatment of colleagues, (b) bureaucratic tendencies of the central office, and (c) organizational politics.

Perceived Prior Treatment of Colleagues

Ronald was the one principal who did not express distrust of the central office. Ronald, however, was a new employee to the school district, while the four other principals who did express distrust of the central office had been employed with the school district prior to the inception of high school redesign. These principals had firsthand knowledge of the district’s immediate and past failures. The past failures of the central office included repeated failed attempts to reform other schools as well as failed relationships with prior campus-level colleagues. The failed relationships with prior campus-level colleagues caused the principals to empathize with their colleagues and provided cause to perceive the central office as disloyal to dedicated employees. Although the principals believed that some of these failures could be attributed to a limited skill set among the central office personnel, most of the principals felt that the failures were more likely rooted in the inherent bureaucratic tendencies and the political nature of the central office.

Bureaucratic Tendencies of the Central Office

According to all of the principals, the bureaucratic tendencies of the central office perpetuated increased inefficiencies by creating larger self-serving bureaucracies. Specifically, the principals consistently alluded to the tremendous growth of the office of high school redesign. According to most accounts, the redesign office grew from an executive director and a secretary working out of two cubicles to as many as 12 employees taking charge of an entire floor of a building. The expansion of the redesign office was not limited to personnel. The redesign office also expanded its control over budgets that were traditionally expected to rest within the purview of the associate superintendent for high schools. The principals came to distrust a system that expected them to respond to the disjointed direction they were receiving from the high school office and the redesign office. Additionally, the principals expressed frustrations regarding having to deal with an additional and separate management level.

Organizational Politics

The principals felt that the central office was more committed to responding to political pressure than they were to their employees or to providing for the needs of students. In expressing this perception, the principals cited personnel appointments that had more to do with "politics" than with leadership and to the pressures that were exerted on principals to accept and eventually discard consultants. Four principals explained that individuals with little to no leadership skills were elevated to positions as part of a "good old boy" network. These decisions, according to the principals, were made without regard to the inefficiencies and dysfunction that would eventually be caused. Two principals elaborated extensively on this notion and added that these poor decisions caused frustrations among principals and eventually brought an abrupt ending to some mid-management careers in the district. The same four principals perceived that the central office obligated them to participate in certain activities with the sole purpose of bringing national notoriety to the redesign efforts of the district. According to the principals, these efforts had little to do with improving the educational progress of the students at the high schools.

Positive Support

The principals at East Central, East Side, and North Side high schools willingly accepted support from certain outside agents. The Positive Support theme was derived from the entrusted confidence the principals placed in individuals who had previously served as principals and were now ex-principals serving as Executive Principals or Oversight Principals.

The principals explained that the confidence entrusted to these outside agents was primarily due to the respect they earned from previous assignments. Michael, the previous principal at North Side High School, was placed at East Side and North Central High School as an Executive Principal overseeing the instructional improvement plans. Madison, a retired high school principal, served as the Oversight Principal at East Central High School. In three cases, the principals expressed trust for these outside agents and believed that they were providing significant contributions to the instructional improvement efforts at the campus.

The confidence the principals expressed for the aforementioned ex-principals was attributed to various reasons. First, the ex-principals offered their help unconditionally in carrying out the improvement plans designed by the campus principals and never sought to impose their own beliefs, methodologies, or curriculum. Secondly, the ex-principals continuously reassured the principals that they (the campus principals) continued to be in-charge of the campus and that their role as Executive or Oversight Principal was only to support the principal in whatever way the principal desired. Finally, the ex-principals immersed themselves in the improvement efforts (spending many hours on the campus) and afforded the principals the time to address other pressing issues. For all intents and purposes, these ex-principals became an equal, but complimentary, extension of the principal.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings from the cross-case analysis and provided detailed descriptions of the emerging themes that organized the study's findings. In the humble opinion of this novice researcher, the findings are original and add to the existing body of knowledge in the fields of educational leadership and organizational change. The emerging themes included: (a) focused instructional leadership, (b) the need to build capacity, (c) the need for structure, (d) time as a limited resource, (e) absence of trust, and (f) positive support.

The analysis of focused instructional leadership relayed the principals' belief that in order for instructional leadership and organizational change to be successful, the initiative should be defined in terms of what the instructional improvements will consist of from the beginning. The principals perceived that the instructional staff should be protected from those individuals who (because of their own agenda) may provide distractions to the established instructional focus of the campus. The analysis established that the principals believed that asserting territorial control over instructional improvements was absolutely necessary.

The principals described the need to build capacity as a necessary antecedent to successful high school redesign. According to the principals, the overwhelming presence of novice teachers regenerated itself especially as principals detected a sense of discomfort among the entrenched experienced teachers. Also necessary was the need to build capacity among assistant principals. The assistant principals were able to successfully maneuver through the daily routines of discipline management, bus duty, and inventories. However, most were limited in their ability to extend the principal’s instructional leadership. Finally, the principals showed an isolated willingness to accept help from outside agents in developing the capacity of their teachers and assistant principals. However, the principals limited the help to developing the skill set of each and not to accepting a specific instructional strategies or programs.

The principals described two distinct types of needed structures in order to successfully carry out high school redesign. First, the need for structure was described as the need to create a culture that was conducive to following policies and procedures. The structured procedures provided for the safety and security of students, while the structured policies ensured the campus’ compliance with district policies, state laws, and federal laws. The second needed structure included a method by which to organize and prioritize the overwhelming number of instructional improvements related to high school redesign. Finally, the principals felt that overemphasis on the visible high school redesign structures provided minimal impetus toward the students' academic achievement and detracted from the urgency to develop instructional improvements.

The principals considered time to be a limited resource and described what they considered as time well invested and what they considered frustrated time. Time well invested consisted of coaching time dedicated to the establishment of essential instructional routines including curriculum alignment and lesson design. Frustrated time included time dedicated to explaining or defending their instructional programs to the central office agents who in actuality only sought to impose their own programs. Frustrated time also included the time dedicated to managing the well-intentioned outside assistance from consultants that often did not compliment sound existing campus practices.

The absence of trust consisted of the principals' preconceived notion that the central office officials could not be trusted. This notion prevented the principals from maximizing the benefits of district-led high school reform. The absence of trust was created by the principals' perception of the negative treatment some of their colleagues received from the district. Additionally, the principals perceived that the central office was more concerned with defending and growing bureaucracies than establishing efficient procedures conducive to campus success. Finally, the principals did not trust the politics of the central office, particularly the machinations of the superintendent. The principals believed that the superintendent and the central office were more apt to make decisions that obtained for the central office a self-serving benefit that was not even remotely related to campus improvements or student learning.

Finally, this study found that the principals understood the need for support during the high school redesign enterprise. One principal found and was able to capitalize on internal support, while three others expressed value for the support provided by certain outside agents when the support providers understood the established campus instructional norms and acted in such a way as to be nonthreatening to the principals' established authority and limited time.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides a comprehensive summary and an explanation of the purpose for the research. By expanding on the researcher's personal interests and hopes for improved practices in instructional leadership, a case is made for the urgency of improved relationships between the central office and the school principal. The last component of the chapter presents the conclusions reached along with recommendations for improved practices and future research.

Summary of the Research

The need for educational reform found in the central Texas urban district that provided the setting for this research project was consistent with the descriptions of urban educational settings described by Woolworth (2007), Anagnostopoulos and Rutledge (2007), and Cuban (2010). Similar to the descriptions indicated in the aforementioned research, this central Texas urban district primarily served low-performing economically disadvantaged children of color, whose families had been drawn to these neighborhoods because of affordable housing.

Researchers who have studied reform movements in this type of school setting have yet to find evidence of a district that has achieved successful and substantial district-wide reform (Cuban, 2010; Barber & Mourshed, 2007). Researchers who espouse the same beliefs of Cuban (2010) and Barber and Mourshed (2007) will find supporting evidence in the lived experiences and particularly the obstacles faced by this urban district attempting to implement reform. Specifically, research by Nelson et al.

(2009) indicated that the continual shifting of district priorities, the turnover in leadership, the inability to collaborate, and fear of reprisals would frustrate the system. Unfortunately, each of these factors was clearly evident in the themes and findings derived from this research.

Research by Raynor (2006) indicated that an additional obstacle to implementing school reform was the unhealthy emphasis on state and federal school accountability measures. The findings in this research complemented Raynor's findings by concluding that principals measured the worth of each of their activities in relation to the effect each would have on improving student achievement on state-mandated assessments.

Finally, researchers such as Rorrer et al. (2008) and Honig et al. (2010) discussed practices for improving relationships between central office leadership and campus leadership. For example, Rorrer et al. (2008) concluded that the district level leadership should build capacity by coordinating and aligning the work of others through communication and collaboration. Next, Honig et al. (2010) advised that teaching and learning were improved when direct, intentional support to the central office (principal partnerships) was evident. These improved relationships are particularly beneficial when attempting to implement school reform. However, principals' perceptions in this study indicated that the district level leadership did not heed the advice of these researchers.

A summative evaluation of the reform movement in this school district provides evidence for proponents wishing to advocate for or against the success of district-led high school reform. Those who are proponents for the successes achieved through high school redesign in the school district researched can rely on the state assessment results and present evidence of increased student achievement over the course of the district-led high school reform period.

Table 9 describes (by school) the change in the percentage of students who met the state's mandated assessment standards between the 2003/2004 school year and the 2009/2010 school year (TEA, 2004, 2010). It should be noted that East Central High School was divided into two schools after the fourth year of redesign, and as such, is reported as two separate campuses. It should also be noted that the scores reported for Eastside High School in 2004 reflect the inclusion of the magnet students. However, the scores reported in 2010 only include the neighborhood students. Therefore, a true comparison is not available for Eastside High School.

Table 9. The Change by School in the Percentage of Students Who Met the State's Mandated Assessment Standards Between the 2003/2004 School Year and the 2009/2010 School Year

District	2004	2010	Difference
Central	35	56	21
East Central (A)	25	40	15
East Central (B)	25	44	19
Eastside	*	*	*
North Central	27	54	27
North Side	32	53	21

*Data not available.
Source: TEA (2004, 2010).

The proponents who wish to argue against high school redesign can point out that district-led reform in this school district is little or no different than the limited and unsustainable success of other reform movements throughout the country. According to

Michael, who at the conclusion of this study was serving as the associate superintendent for high schools, by the 2010/2011 school year, very little evidence of the high school redesign initiatives remained. The six-year high school redesign reform period was summarized by Michael with this statement:

> From my position, it looks like a lot of learned lessons. We blew through sixteen million dollars! What's left of redesign? I look back and see that we don't have First-Things-First in any of our three schools anymore; that was a high dollar initiative. We don't have advisories in every one of our schools, which was another huge investment. We don't have SLCs in all of our high schools. I mean the Office of Redesign doesn't even exist anymore. Period! I mean, all the people are gone. So, when you look back and you ask, "What did we really do in redesign?" I mean, what is different in high schools? You can't really find a whole lot of those elements there anymore.

Because of the aforementioned quote, it should be re-emphasized that the purpose of this research was not to determine if the reform efforts in this district were a success or a failure. The purpose of this research was to understand the intricacies in the central office to campus relationship that prevent school districts from sustaining academic growth and reform. Moreover, this research project was undertaken with the hope of expanding in a significant way on the research of others who have advocated for a changed district leadership model. In the next part of the chapter, I have outlined several conclusions, which if addressed properly, can provide for a significantly improved campus-central office relationship.

Conclusions

In an effort to explain the conclusions outlined below, I have compared the organization of school districts I have been part of and have studied to the organization I experienced as a commissioned officer in the U.S. Navy. A comparison of these organizations has led to an overarching conclusion that “defined autonomy,” as described by Marzano and Waters (2009), is incomplete. Marzano and Waters explained that the “superintendent expects building principals and all other administrators in the district to lead within the boundaries defined by the district goals” (p. 8). However, the real world organizational realities inherent in large public bureaucracies like school districts prevent principals from leading within these boundaries.

The U.S. Navy, for example, has an admiral and his/her executive staff who command a fleet, much like a school district has a superintendent and his/her cabinet who lead the schools. Each ship in the admiral’s fleet has different capabilities and seldom operates in close proximity to other ships. Some ships have the capability to defend themselves against aerial attacks, others have the capability to launch surface-to-surface strikes, others hunt submarines, and some support the fleet by carrying supplies, weapons, or spare parts. Support ships, however, do not possess the capability to defend against a direct attack. Nevertheless, each ship in the fleet exists solely to support the same mission.

School districts appear to operate within a similar organizational framework. For example, different schools in the same district seldom serve students with similar backgrounds and capabilities. The schools are usually located in different neighborhoods. Some schools serve affluent neighborhoods with students who are able to meet most academic challenges, while other schools operate as magnet schools serving students with particular interests such as music or science. Finally, some schools serve primarily low socio-economic students who are struggling to learn. However, each school exists to support the same district's mission. However, there are structural differences that affect the autonomy when one more closely compares school districts to the U.S. Navy.

In the Navy, the captain of each ship is delegated the authority by the admiral to use his/her personnel in the manner necessary to achieve the fleet's mission. There is an understanding that decisions made on the ship will be made independently, but not in isolation of the fleet's mission. This philosophy is referred to as command by delegation and decentralization.

The principal of a campus, much like the captain of a ship, is delegated the authority to hire personnel, develop a campus improvement plan, and implement strategies that will ensure the academic success of each student. Schools usually refer to this practice as site-based decision-making.

Although the U.S. Navy and a school district have similarities in their organizational framework, each organization has varying degrees of success as measured against their stated mission. The ability to make decisions that will be carried out is an immediate difference. The Navy uses phrases such as "command by delegation and decentralization," while school districts use phrases like "site-based decision-making." Each phrase has a clear, yet different connotation. One can expect that decisions made in the Navy clearly support the top command's directives. However, decisions made by a central office leadership team may not be implemented by campus principals with the same degree of steadfastness. In fact, the school's site-based decision culture creates room for principals to dilute the impact of decisions made by central office mainly because of the school’s existence within the surrounding community.

Another difference can be made by comparing the most vulnerable naval ship to the most vulnerable school in a district. Supply ships enjoy disproportional success compared to inner city schools because in the Navy, supply ships are not required to launch the same weaponry as Fast Attack Frigates or Destroyers. Moreover, they are protected from having to defend against a direct attack by the enemy. In contrast, inner city schools are required to have their students pass the same state assessments and meet the same accountability standards as any other school in the system, regardless of their inherent deficits and structural vulnerability.

Marzano and Waters’ (2009) “defined autonomy” concept is incomplete because it assumes that the organization of a school system operates much like other more traditional organizations where directives are followed and goals and missions define daily operations to a much higher degree. However, in this Navy-to-school organization comparison, we can determine that while both organizations employ a similar framework, they operate under different rules of engagement and exist within very different organizational cultures.

This study has concluded that the district goals and mission do not define the daily operations of a campus. Because of this, the district goals and mission are often reprioritized because principals are insecure, believe they have a better understanding of the local context than does the central office, and are oftentimes frustrated by the central office’s political machinations. The following section discusses these conclusions.

First Conclusion – Principal Insecurity

Throughout the interviews and the processing of the data, it became evident that the principals were consistently concerned with the state academic ratings and as such, a sense of insecurity was created. This insecurity, caused by the incessant concern over state ratings, manifested itself as an influence in each of the findings articulated in Chapter V: (a) focused instructional leadership, (b) the need to build capacity, (c) the need for structure, and (d) time as a limited resource.

The principals' insecurity was further exacerbated by the presence of a combination of a high at-risk student population, inexperienced teachers, and the prescriptive redesign activities on the campus. Furthermore, the principals felt that the campus leadership team was the sole owner of the state ratings, especially if the campus was ultimately rated as Academically Unacceptable (AU).

Every major activity throughout the redesign process that was suggested to the principals was perceived as an imposition and a distraction that might cause them to lose ground in meeting the state standards. Whether the activity was implementing an advisory or providing staff development on reading fluency, the principals always measured the activity against the immediate outcomes relative to the accountability systems.

The principals consistently talked about their refusal to give up the reins of instructional leadership. However, a question that needed to be answered was: "What exactly is instructional leadership?" Is instructional leadership the curriculum, the pedagogy, or the ancillary materials? It appears that for the principals, the instructional leadership was anything that directly dealt with being able to move the academic achievement as measured by the state assessments. Therefore, the question: “Will this practice move data?” was a common one posed by principals when they were asked to implement a new redesign practice.

When the principals elaborated on the conflicts between them and the outside agents (the central office and First-Things-First consultants) regarding who was going to provide the instructional direction of the campus, they consistently clarified that the activities promoted by First-Things-First or the central office leadership team were not necessarily unrelated or inadequate ideas. For the most part the principals believed in the value of the suggested activities. However, they also believed that each of those activities detracted, rather than supported, the immediate focus of meeting the state standards.

The amount of time dedicated by the campus staff to implementing high school redesign was tremendous. The quantified time dedicated to activities such as designing, balancing, and implementing Smaller Learning Communities would have otherwise been directed to focusing on meeting state academic standards. However, the principals perceived that the energy dedicated to these activities created for teachers a purpose other than improving upon their teaching craft. Incidentally, the teaching skill that the principals perceived as most important was the teachers’ ability to develop engaging and rigorous lessons that supported student outcomes within the state-assessed curriculum.

Finally, the principals described a lack of trust toward any outside agents who sought to mandate campus activities under the label of high school redesign. The lack of trust was not founded upon a belief that the central office or First-Things-First personnel were sure of the inevitable failure of the principals. The lack of trust derived mainly from the principals' belief that the central office was detached from any punitive action related to the state and federal accountability system. Moreover, as it concerns the trust issue, the principals perceived that outside agents treated their teachers with limited regard. For example, Margie felt that the First-Things-First consultants did not validate their teachers' concerns. Ronald openly stated he did not let them (First-Things-First) present staff development because the teachers just did not like them.

The principals were convinced that in the event the campus received an AU rating or failed to meet Adequate Yearly Progress, the shame, responsibility, and burden of implementing sanctions would only be theirs to carry. The absence of a sense for shared responsibility served to reinforce the existence of a traditional leadership model and created a barrier to the development of a single leadership team as described by Rorrer et al. (2008).

The principals' insecurity was to some extent a reflection of what the principals believed to be their reality, as defined by the setting or context. The next section describes how the principals perceived their local context and specifically how they described the central office's disregard for the immediate needs of their local context.

Second Conclusion – The Importance of Context

The importance of context was an awareness found in each of the principals throughout the review of the data and eventual development of the following themes: focused instructional leadership; the need to build capacity; the need for structure; and absence of trust. The five principals who served as the participants in this study fell into two broad categories: principals who bought into the district-led redesign process and those who did not. What was apparent to the researcher was that there were no immediate commonalities, such as years of experience in administration or years of experience with the district, between the high school principals who bought into the district-led redesign process and those who did not. Instead, the acceptance and eventual implementation was dependent on what Tony Alvarado (as cited in Cuban, 2010), referred to as the “right combination of situation and individuals” (p.16).

In this case, the “situation” was that which was enjoyed by Michael, Ronald, and Malcolm. All three principals worked in schools that were stable and were ready to implement high school redesign. In the case of Central High School and Northside High School, each school had enjoyed stability in leadership and small but sustained academic growth over the previous three years. Although there had been changes in leadership, the changes were not dramatic and for the most part, perceived by the faculty as a natural occurrence. In the case of Eastside High School, the Liberal Arts and Science Academy had systematically helped produce an Academically Acceptable rated school. Although the school had also experienced changes in leadership, the school appeared to be progressing well.

In terms of individuals, high school reform was found in Ronald, Michael, and Malcolm, three principals with varying but high degrees of experience. Each considered themselves as cutting edge company men eager to establish a record of achievement. For their efforts, each was in some way rewarded. Ronald was given a lateral position at central office, Malcolm received the coveted Principal of the Year award, and Michael was promoted and eventually named the associate superintendent for high schools.

The broad categorization of principals who did not buy into the district-led redesign process, when studied closer, also determined that there were no immediate commonalities within these principals. Instead, the decision to not buy into the district-led redesign process was more directly linked to a response to the local context. Two schools (East Central and North Central) simply needed “Intensive Care Unit” interventions as described by Judy. Each school was plagued with years of not meeting state and federal accountability standards, consistent turnover in leadership, and a faculty that lacked a sense of unity and structure.

Although the district did divide the 11 comprehensive high schools into a tier system and determined that the lowest performing tier would immediately implement high school reform, the district made this decision solely based on data and in isolation from the principals. Furthermore, this decision escalated into the district attempting to impose consultants and implement similar strategies at all five campuses. These decisions were perceived by the principals as being made with the purpose of increasing an already large central office bureaucracy without regard to the individual campus needs, the respective principal’s situation (local context), and the district’s capability to implement reform. This perception further reinforced the existence of a traditional leadership model and created a barrier to the development of a single leadership team as described by Rorrer et al. (2008).

Beyond the principals' insecurity and concerns for the immediate needs of their community, the inconsistency and confusion caused by varying redesign plans further alienated principals from the central office leadership. The next section describes how the inconsistencies of the central office confused and frustrated the principals.

Third Conclusion – Inconsistency and Confusion

Throughout the interviews and the processing of the data, it became clear that the entire high school redesign process was plagued by inconsistencies that increasingly frustrated the principals and escalated the lack of trust for outside agents. The inconsistencies and confusion were underscored by apparent shifts in improvement focus each time the district engaged additional outside agents. This was compounded by a high turnover in central office leadership positions. The inconsistency and confusion expressed by the principals was observed in the development of the following themes: (a) focused instructional leadership, (b) the need for structure, (c) time as a limited resource, and (d) absence of trust.

The initial discussions for high school reform began during the 2003/2004 school year when the superintendent announced that the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) would conduct audits of the district's 11 comprehensive high schools. After reviewing the SREB audit reports, the principals began working with the associate superintendent for high schools and their local communities to implement the recommendations noted in the reports. However, as the principal of Northside High School noted during his interview, the academic reform focus under the leadership of the associate superintendent began to shift from instructional improvement to a public relations focus. By the summer prior to the 2004/2005 school year, the principals were being led to develop infomercials that promoted their school and to consider ways of renaming their schools.

During the 2004/2005 school year, the principals were introduced to the School Redesign Network (SRN) from Stanford University and to the focused concept of *high school redesign*. Agents from the SRN initially indicated to the principals and their local community that they favored a customized high school redesign process, which would be developed through a research-based approach and would not promote a "one size fits all" strategy to developing their high school redesign plans.

However, the SRN consultants began to place a large emphasis on the inclusion of the "ten features of small schools" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002) into the redesign plans. The coaching provided by the SRN consultants increasingly focused on Darling-Hammond's 10 features of small schools and frustrated the principals who had been working to implement the recommendations made in the SREB reports.

The confusion among the principals and the community further increased when they were introduced to agents from the consulting group First-Things-First (FTF). The agents from First-Things-First were unwilling to deviate from their "canned program" and clearly promoted a "one size fits all" approach as they attempted to engage multiple schools in a similar redesign framework.

The confusion resulting from the shifting of improvement plans was made more difficult to overcome by the turnover among top ranking leaders (principals, central office staff, and the district's superintendent) involved in the reform process. Between the 2003 and 2009 school years, three of the five high schools involved in this study (Northside, North Central, and East Central) had three different principals each. The two other high schools (Central and Eastside) had two different principals each during the same time frame.

In most cases, the shifting of principals caused a shift and sometimes total departure from the current redesign plans. In some cases, the district leadership capitalized on the shifting of principals to facilitate a larger shift in the high school redesign plans. However, in other cases, the incoming principal encouraged the change of redesign plans. For example, Judy entirely removed the First-Things-First consulting group when she arrived at North Central. However, Ronald was highly encouraged by the office of high school redesign to move from a locally developed redesign plan to a plan developed by the First-Things-First group. In the most extreme case, East Central High School was directed by the central office and the office of high school redesign to shift their redesign plans three different times. Each shift in the high school redesign plans coincided with the transition to new campus leadership.

Among the central office staff, three different individuals served as the associate superintendent for high schools and one additional management layer was created – the office of high school redesign. The newly created office of high school redesign significantly shifted the authority for high school redesign away from the associate superintendent for high schools and facilitated other shifts in reform focus. The shifts in focus included a departure from the SREB recommendations, a complete shift from the

SRN consultants, and the promotion of the First-Things-First high school redesign framework.

The retirement of the district's superintendent and the executive director for high school redesign signified the "beginning of the end" for the high school redesign era. Finalizing the end of the high school redesign era was Michael's (former North Side Principal) appointment as the associate superintendent for high schools. Michael brought an end to the district's relationship with the First-Things-First consulting group and formalized the end of high school redesign.

The next section offers suggestions for improving the central office-campus relationship by directly addressing the findings and conclusions reached by this study. The implementation of these recommendations may potentially promote a different organizational framework that more closely fits Marzano and Waters (2009) concept of "defined autonomy."

Recommendations for Practice

The plight of the urban school as described in Chapter II has created a national sense of urgency among reform researchers, policymakers, and practitioners. This heightened concern resulted in an effort to implement a reform movement of significant intensity such as the one described by Neild and Balfanz (2006). However, the sense of urgency that triggered the reform movement and degree of intensity with which the district leaders attempted to implement the reform caused a sense of frustration among the campus principals.

The principals' sense of frustration, articulated in more detail in Chapter IV, included concern over instructional programs, limited capacity among the campuses instructional leadership team, and the need for time to implement the prescribed reforms. Because the reform was being implemented at the most vulnerable campuses in the district, the principals were also concerned about absence of structures to support reform initiatives while simultaneously harboring suspicions that the central office cared little about a population of students that lacked powerful benefactors.

Throughout the remainder of this section, recommendations for improved implementation of district-led reform are discussed. Furthermore, these recommendations seek a district leadership team as outlined by Rorrer et al. (2008) that is constituted by everyone from the school board down to the campus principal. Finally, the recommendations address the findings and conclusions of this study.

The solicited best practices from the Southern Regional Education Board, First-Things-First, and those espoused by the central office should guide candid conversations, among district agents and campus principals. In order to better guide these conversations the district leadership should seek help from individuals who are able to keep conversations focused on the needs of the district rather than prescribe solutions. Unfortunately, the outside agents (i.e., SREB and FTF) contracted by the district prescribed solutions and were not willing to reframe these solutions in a local context.

The focused conversations should produce a menu of sequential improvement operations that define the district-led high school redesign initiative clearly for each identified school. According to this researcher, the list should include, in a district prescribed order, the following redesign activities:

1. Defined instructional improvements,
2. Implementation steps for emerging methodologies,
3. Development plans for local instructional leadership,
4. Implementation of more rigorous courses,
5. Implementation of student advisories,
6. Implementation of Smaller Learning Communities,
7. Implementation of career and technical courses.

The redesign activities should be viewed as a framework for high school redesign rather than a specific high school redesign plan. Although the campuses should be expected to operate within this redesign framework, the development and implementation of a specific high school redesign plan should be left to the individual campus.

Although the principals and campuses would not be allowed to omit aspects of the redesign framework, each would be expected to operate within certain degrees of autonomy. For example, each of the five high schools, through a local effort, should assess their ability to undertake each activity, define improvement steps that will prepare them to undertake each activity, and then propose a timeline for implementation of each activity. This practice will lessen the principals' perception of encroachment and allow the latitude to prioritize local needs that they believe make their campus more vulnerable to state and federal accountability systems.

All principals should be encouraged to associate themselves with a critical ally of their choosing that will support them in all reform efforts. The superintendent and other central office agents should not seek to impose any group or organization to lead localized efforts. However, the critical ally should be able and willing to support the principal in implementing activities within the district's redesign framework. It should be understood that one campus may associate themselves with a group such as First-Things-First, while another campus may align themselves with a retired principal who serves as an administrative partner.

The high school redesign activities as well as each campus' timeline for implementation of the activities should be published and often discussed with the local school board and through community forums. This practice will develop shared accountability for the implementation of the high school redesign as well as work to create and articulate a shared culture.

Finally, the school district (principals and central office agents) should propose to the local school board an assessment instrument for evaluating the success of high school redesign implementation. The assessment instrument should have corresponding rewards and sanctions for successful and limited implementation of high school redesign activities. A committee composed of district staff (central office and principals) should study causal factors of a campus that is not progressing and make recommendations for improvement. This practice will prevent the dictating of improvement actions guided by the individual hubris of any agent (internal or external).

This section's discussion would not be complete if the role of financial support for high school redesign activities was not mentioned. This district should only accept money from philanthropic organizations that allow districts to operate within locally developed plans and who do not prescribe consultant groups or specific activities. Accordingly, the district should assess their ability to repurpose available local, state, and federal funds in support of reform activities rather than accept money which results in increased bureaucracies.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Because I served as a principal at one of the high schools within the district, I had a preconceived notion of the experiences each principal would describe. Listening to each of the participants describe the time-intensive events that kept them away from their families helped me recall my own experiences within the district. The juggling of multiple managerial activities coupled with situations involving uncooperative teachers was all too familiar. However, what I had not anticipated and was surprised by was the intensity of the conversations between the principals and the central office regarding the activities associated with implementing district-led reform. The experiences of each captivated my attention and opened possibilities for additional research.

The development of an improved relationship between campus principals and central office personnel necessitates additional research by interested parties. It is recommended that interested parties conduct additional research in this central Texas urban district or other urban districts in the following areas:

1. What factors do principals believe must be in place at a chronically low-performing campus prior to implementing district-wide high school reform and what collaborative actions do they believe the central office team and the campus leadership can take to achieve these factors?
2. How do principals perceive the continued existence of an executive principal acting as the extension of the principal and as an agent of the central office when implementing high school reform at chronically low-performing campuses?
3. What perceptions do key central office personnel have regarding the development of a shared accountability model for chronically low-performing campuses who engage their staff in district-led reform efforts and what factors should constitute a shared accountability model?
4. What key central office personnel and campus principal actions should be undertaken in order to establish a shared sense of leadership and what obstacles do principals and key central office personnel believe exist?

Final Thoughts

Tony Alvarado's "by-chance" description of successful school reform should not be the determining factor for successful school reform. District leadership, through continuous dialogue, should spend ample time assessing individual campus needs, the respective principal's situation (local context) and their capability and willingness to implement district-led reform.

The principals and the central office administrators should establish a shared responsibility for the state ratings. Shared responsibility should be based on the premise that principals should not be allowed to excuse themselves from taking calculated risks while implementing district-led reform. Conversely, central office personnel should also articulate an understanding of the potential drawbacks during the implementation of district-led reform. Candid acknowledgment of the potential obstacles should be coupled with realistic actions to create a working environment safe from undue accountability and potential harm to careers.

In closing, I am reminded of my first year coaching basketball. When I reported to Coach Tim Martin and presented myself as his new freshman basketball assistant, he quickly explained the high-paced practices and modeled the type of drills he wanted the players to run. Next, he explained, over long conversations, that in previous years, the team had won district championships because they had been able to capitalize on certain situations, but had failed to advance in the state playoffs. His new philosophy was not only to exploit situations, but to create game-time situations that would allow our players to outperform the opponent. In opposition to Tony Alvarado’s “by chance” description of successful school reform, district leadership and campus principals should work to create situations where improvement can be achieved and sustained by analyzing past performance and constantly using “closing the loop” methods and “deliberate practice” techniques similar to those described by Coach Tim Martin.

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