JUDITH ANN JONES
The Work of the Superintendent in Developing a District Learning Community
(Under the Direction of SALLY J. ZEPEDA)

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the work of the superintendent in developing a district learning community. Through purposeful sampling, one school superintendent, along with another central administrator, a site-level principal, and a teacher participated in this study. Data collection included semi-structured interviews; fieldnotes and relevant artifacts were collected over a five month period.

Findings for the study centered around the change occurring in the district. Basic changes were made in curricular, instructional, and assessment processes and supported by structural changes in district procedures and policies. There was also evidence of cultural change in the target district. Successful implementation of change may depend on: 1) having a clear understanding of the anticipated outcomes for change, 2) developing and communicating a compelling rationale for change, and 3) ensuring the availability of resources necessary to carry out the change.

Leadership strategies used by the superintendent appeared to fit the transformational leadership paradigm. Strategies included development of a strong personal and organizational vision, translation of district beliefs into a strategic plan of action, and empowerment of individuals in decision making processes.

Essential characteristics of a district learning community were found to be similar to those of school level learning communities. These characteristics included development of a strong relationships supportive of group efforts to attain common goals, establishment of ways to work together or individually to achieve a common purpose, and dispersed leadership across the community.

Two important characteristics were found that appeared to influence the development of district learning community. The presence of a strong vision, for individuals and the collective group, set the stage for change and gave impetus to the

work. Also, the willingness of the superintendent to take calculated risks, such as equalization of power across the district and development of an interdependency between the central office and schools contributed to the development of a more unified district learning community.

INDEX WORDS: Change, Leadership, Learning Community, Risk Taking

Superintendent, Transformational Leadership, Vision.

THE WORK OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

IN DEVELOPING A DISTRICT LEARNING COMMUNITY

by

JUDITH ANN JONES

B.S., Georgia State University, 1973

M.Ed., Georgia State University, 1980

Ed.S., West Georgia College, 1993

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2001

THE WORK OF THE SUPERINTENDENT IN

DEVELOPING A DISTRICT LEARNING COMMUNITY

by

JUDITH ANN JONES

Approved:

Major Professor: Sally Zepeda

Committee: John Dayton
                    Thomas Holmes
                    Kenneth Tanner
                    David Weller

Electronic Version Approved:

Gordhan L. Patel
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
December 2001

DEDICATION

To my grandmother, Edna Baumgartner Greenleaf, whose life and times inspired my educational journeys;

To Mary Nancy Greenleaf Jones, whose faith, constant encouragement, and love of reading created a desire in me to reach for the stars;

To William Andrew Jones, whose stories, lessons, and constant presence challenged me to strive for excellence.

for the inspiration you sent my way, especially toward the end. It made the work seem more bearable. To my brothers, Andy and Jeff, thanks for your words of support and calm insistence that the study would be finished on time. To my dad, words cannot express how grateful I am to you for keeping me focused and believing in me throughout the process.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

NATURE OF THE STUDY

Introduction

The information age has unleashed potential for altering the gene pools of future generations, for the increased likelihood of biological or nuclear terrorism, for advances in medical care, and for creation of new jobs based on emerging technologies (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, & Smith, 1994). We stand poised at the brink of an age where we can only imagine what the future may be like for our children, grandchildren, and even ourselves. Although there is a tremendous amount of information readily available to us, we are still often unwilling to face the possibilities in our future and consider the impact our actions may have on tomorrow's world (Schlechty, 1997).

Gibran (1923) reminded us that our children are a gift we make to a future where we will not go. Identifying and planning educational experiences for today's students that will prepare them for the future is a challenge because we do not know what knowledge, skills, or attitudes they will need. Identifying what will be relevant to students and structuring their learning is both alluring and terrifying to educators. The allure lies within the opportunity to shape public education. Yet, the opportunity seems terrifying because it is not at all clear how we should proceed as we create the schools needed for tomorrow's citizens.

The current reality of increased violence by youngsters, high dropout rates, stagnant test scores, increasing poverty, and the breakdown of social institutions makes the goal of educating students both puzzling and elusive (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). Over time, schools have assumed roles once considered basic responsibilities of parents and community (Schlechty, 1997). Most schools now routinely serve breakfast and lunch

each day to children, provide care before and after school, conduct health screenings, and dispense a variety of other social services. The addition of responsibilities such as these increases the unpredictability of the future for educational organizations. What role will (or should) the school adopt as it works with students?

To further complicate matters, increased expectations for schools come at a time when support for schools seems to be dwindling. The number of children in our schools is increasing but the proportion of the population with children in school is decreasing. Many taxpayers are senior citizens or non-parents and often do not see any connection between what goes on in the local schools and their future (Schlechty, 1997). Because they fail to see the connection to their immediate well-being, they are more likely to oppose increased funding for schools, resist assuming additional tax burdens, support privatization, and withdraw positive support for the schools (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). These actions make the job of educating more students with fewer resources and less support an even greater challenge.

While it seems certain that schools must change to address these realities while we prepare students for the future, the work is hard and often the pace of change is frustrating (Johnson, 1996). We have learned much about change over the years, but that knowledge is not widespread among educators (Evans, 1996). Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1992) noted, "the capacity to bring about change and the capacity to bring about improvement are two different matters" (p. 345). Improving present schools while planning for the future suggests that the work must advance on several levels at once (Schlechty, 1997; Schmoker, 1996).

Improvement at the local school level should co-evolve with systemic change. The work needed at both levels is similar—developing a preferred vision of the future, creating interdependence, establishing network patterns, and designing feedback loops while challenging the underlying assumptions of common practice (Schlechty, 1997; Schmoker, 1996; Senge et al., 1994). In some school districts, the improvement process

is successful yet falters in others. How does substantive change occur? What empowers educators to make changes? How is the improvement process initiated, nurtured, and sustained in a district?

Some believe that a district superintendent can and should be the primary change agent in the district (Johnson, 1996). The superintendency is one of the most visible positions in an educational organization. Yet, for all its visibility, the role remains one of the most ambiguous (Crowson, 1987; Kowalski, 1995). Superintendents are usually held in high esteem by the community, but the public has difficulty explaining what a superintendent does to improve schools. Even district employees often cannot articulate how the superintendent influences the teaching and learning process within the district (Cuban, 1998; Hord, 1990).

Historically, superintendents have been more accountable for managing resources and settling disputes than for designing systems to improve schools for students (Kowalski, 1995). The complexity of issues presently facing school districts challenges superintendents to create an organization which produces results, is responsive to its environment, and is capable of self-renewal (Schlechty, 1997; Schmoker, 1996).

Shifting from resource manager to community builder requires new and different actions, skills, knowledge and ways of thinking on the part of a superintendent (Senge et al., 1994). The exploration of new roles and responsibilities for the changing educational organization and for those who lead them is just beginning. Review of previous research provided a glimpse of the evolutionary nature of the superintendent's role, but lacked information about how a superintendent initiates, nurtures, and sustains an organization fundamentally different from that of the past.

Most previous studies of the superintendency and leadership in general were rooted in a technical-rational perspective and clustered around one of two major themes — contextual variables or personal variables (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995). Studies clustered around contextual variables have provided knowledge about the setting in

which the superintendent works while studies involving personal variables have provided understanding of the impact selected traits may have on the fulfillment of the work of the superintendent. What is lacking is the integration of these two themes to provide a broader picture of common practice in developing responsive organizations with a future focus (Kowalski, 1995)

Ogawa and Bossert (1995) asserted, "leadership shapes the systems that produce patterns of interaction and the meanings that other participants attach to organizational events" (p. 225). This implies that the development of shared meaning in an organization is determined, at least in part, by the actions of the leader. As superintendents engage in work such as developing learning organizations and communities, we need to have an understanding of how leadership influences such development. Survival of the public education system may be dependent on the quality of leadership provided by the district superintendent; thus examination of this aspect of the superintendency becomes a matter of some importance (Barnett & Berg, 1998; Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Carter, Glass, & Hord, 1993; Kowalski, 1995). Bridges (1982) noted that:

> The superintendent stands at the apex of the organizational pyramid in education and manages a multi-million dollar enterprise charged with the moral and technical socialization of youth, ages 6 - 18. Despite the importance of this administrative role to education and society, less than a handful of studies analyzed in this review investigated the impact of the chief executive officer. (p. 26)

Nearly 20 years later, little has changed. There have been few studies about the role district superintendents play in the improvement of student learning. Perhaps by beginning to understand the leadership skills, knowledge, and actions that create responsive, future focused organizations, we can develop a model leading to enhanced academic performance for all students (Cuban, 1998).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the work of the superintendent in the development of a district learning community. The purpose of this study was achieved by pursuing several objectives. The first objective was to explore how change occurred in the teaching and learning processes of a target district. The second objective was to investigate ways in which superintendent leadership influenced improvement in the teaching and learning processes. The third objective was to compare the improvement process of a district to that of schools. Finally, an integration of the three objectives was completed to arrive at a better understanding of the superintendent's work in developing a learning community.

Conceptual Framework

Educational reform efforts of the past 10 years have been aimed at improving the teaching and learning processes of schools for the purpose of increasing student achievement. The idea of a systematic, though at times idiosyncratic, process used by schools or districts as they engage in improvement efforts reflects the latest educational reform wave. These reform efforts are directed at creating educational organizations that achieve results for students while continuously seeking ways to improve their processes as they build a self-renewing culture. The development of a learning community represents a kind of organizational development process for improvement. Leadership work has been an integral part of this developmental process. Both learning communities and leadership are two topics with high visibility in contemporary professional literature.

Inquiry into learning communities and changing leadership roles are not new phenomena. They are rooted in at least two major areas of research. The first includes findings from the research on the leadership of district superintendents. Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000) characterized the typical superintendent while providing a look at how superintendents perceive their work at the turn of the 21st century. Investigations into research on the superintendency help to create an understanding of how the leadership

role has evolved and has been redefined over time. Recent studies by Carter and Cunningham (1997) and Jackson (1995) described the connections between the evolving role of the superintendent and the improvement of student learning. Work done by Blumberg and Blumberg (1985), Carter and Cunningham (1997), Norton, Webb, Dlugosh, and Sybouts (1996), Kowalski (1995), and Johnson (1996) portrayed the significant challenges faced by contemporary superintendents in building a culture to support the core business of schools—teaching and learning.

A second major area of research was that of learning communities. The literature on learning communities directed at the improvement of student learning was somewhat limited and primarily focused on the school as the unit of analysis. Studies conducted by Louis and Kruse (1995) and Wallace, Engel, and Moody (1997) provided a framework to understand what learning communities look like and how they operate at a school level, while Sergiovanni (1994; 2000), Wheatley (1992), and Zohar (1997) helped to create an appreciation of the leadership work in such a community. Learning communities and superintendent leadership represent the context of organizational development occurring in the district described in this study.

<div align="center">Research Questions</div>

This study centered around a set of guiding questions. Creswell (1994) noted that such questions are usually broadly written in order not to limit the inquiry. Initially, several general questions were developed to guide the study. As the study progressed, the questions were refined and subquestions were added to further focus the work of the researcher. The following questions and accompanying subquestions guided this study:

1. How did change occur in the teaching and learning processes of a school district?

    a) What changes in teaching and learning occurred in the target district?

    b) Who initiated teaching and learning changes?

    c) How were the changes facilitated?

2. How did the superintendent influence improvement in teaching and learning in the district?

    a) How did the superintendent determine improvement was needed?

    b) What strategies were used by the superintendent to facilitate improvement?

3. What were the similarities and differences between the improvement processes at the school level and at the district level?

    a) What were the dimensions of the improvement process at a district level?

    b) How were these dimensions like those of a school improvement process?

Significance of the Study

As public concern mounts about the quality of public education, reform efforts have spawned a number of changes in educational organizations. Among others, these changes have included organizational restructuring and redefinition of traditional leadership roles. Research has identified characteristics of schools which have become particularly responsive to complex issues and constantly changing expectations. Such schools have been called learning communities.

Curiously, studies about district level learning communities were missing from the literature. Districts face issues as complex as those of schools; therefore, it seemed paradoxical that so little knowledge was available about learning communities in the larger district context. If school learning communities result in increased student learning and enhanced professional autonomy, what might be the results if such a community existed at the district level? Because there has been virtually no inquiry about the development of learning communities at a district level, this study sought to address gaps between current knowledge of district learning communities and existing practice. Understanding the development of district level learning communities can, perhaps, provide another avenue for creating effective public schools.

A substantial body of literature exists on leadership, but only a few studies have been conducted about the work done by a superintendent to improve teaching and

learning processes in school districts. Since superintendents are key actors who will ultimately have to respond to the call for educational reform in their districts, it is important to understand how a superintendent discerns the need for improvement and how the need is addressed after it has been identified. It is reasonable to assert that reconfiguration of an educational organization and refinement of improvement processes are typically within the purview of the district superintendent; thus, beginning to understand how leadership might facilitate such changes may provide important information to guide other superintendents as they attempt to initiate, nurture, and sustain an organization different from that of the past.

In summary, this study is important for two reasons. First, it addressed a gap between theory and practice in the understanding of district level learning communities. Secondly, it provided a different perspective on the leadership work of the superintendent in creating educational organizations that diverge from those of the past.

Assumptions

- The research site chosen for this study was representative of the phenomenon of a learning community.

- Participants provided responses to interview questions honestly and to the best of their ability.

- The School Improvement Developmental Continuum (Appendix A), developed by the researcher, accurately identified key dimensions of the school improvement process and described the developmental stages through which schools progress.

- Artifacts collected from participants were representative of the context of the research site.

Definition of Terms

This study examined the formation of a learning community at the district level. In order to clarify terms used throughout the study, the following operational definitions were developed:

Change - movement from one state or condition to another.

Leadership - quality of an individual or group which influences others to seek a preferred future and become committed to the actions necessary to achieve the preferred future.

Learning community - Sergiovanni (1994) stated that learning communities were, "places where members have developed a community of mind that bonds them together in a special way and binds them to a shared ideology" (p. xvii). There are few organizational boundaries and community members consider a wide range of possibilities about how to accomplish their work together. Group members develop a sense of belonging and build the resiliency needed to survive the passage of members over time. There is a common sense of urgency that drives the work of community members (Sergiovanni, 1994; 2000).

Limitations

The study was limited to a single site which was bounded by a particular place and time. Another research study, conducted in an alternative setting or at a different time, might result in dissimilar findings.

Although safeguards against researcher bias were built into data analysis procedures (e.g., member checking), the study design was affected by the experiences, knowledge, and perspectives of the researcher. Given the identical study focus, another researcher might proceed in a different manner. Similarly, an analysis of data collected for this study by another researcher might result in contrasting or conflicting conclusions.

Overview of Research Procedures

Since the purpose of the study was to explore the work of the superintendent in developing a learning community, a qualitative case study approach was selected. The study was limited to a single public school district located in the northern section of a Southeastern state. Data collection included interviews, document review, and observations.

Selection of a research site for the case study was completed in a multi-step process. First, a relevant case profile was developed to identify a research site

representative of a district learning community. In the second step, constraints were identified for research participants and the researcher. Next, recommendations for potential research sites were sought from professional colleagues and peers during informal conversations and at professional meetings. Finally, superintendents were contacted directly about their willingness and availability to participate in the study.

The study was carried out in three phases. In the first phase, the research goal was to more fully understand the context of the research site, begin a description of the setting, and begin exploration of the work of the superintendent. Data were collected through interviews and a review of documents. Organization of data began and tentative coding categories were established. Data were analyzed using the constant comparative method. Based on preliminary analysis, guiding questions were refined, initial interview protocols were modified for the second phase of the study, and a case record was developed.

In the second phase of the study, specific dimensions of a learning community were explored relating to the work of the superintendent in the improvement of teaching and learning within and across the district. These dimensions were primarily explored by looking at teaching and learning changes within the targeted district and the work of the superintendent in facilitating identified changes. Data were collected through interviews, document review, and observation. Data analysis procedures included use of the constant comparative method for coding and the identification of pervasive themes. Data verification procedures included triangulation and peer review. Based on the analysis process, decisions were made about additional interviews to be conducted and additional documents to be reviewed. An interview protocol was developed for the final phase of the study.

The final phase of the study sought to identify any similarities or differences in the improvement process at the school level. Additional interviews were conducted with key personnel. In addition, data collected in the first two phases of the study were

synthesized and pervasive themes from the second phase were refined. Data were triangulated across interviews with study participants, document review, and observations. A member check was conducted. As a final step in the study, the district improvement process was mapped against the improvement process at the school level. This was done by comparing dimensions of the improvement process at the district level to those at the school level using the School Improvement Developmental Continuum developed by the researcher. (See Appendix A.)

Overall, the study design allowed the researcher to look holistically at developmental patterns of building a learning community while focusing on the leadership work of the superintendent.

Researcher's Perspective

Much of my experience in education has been working directly and indirectly with schools for improvement purposes. I have worked in local schools with teachers, parents, and others to develop, execute, and evaluate improvement plans. In my capacity as a central administrator, I have worked with state level staff members, central level administrators, school principals, and local school staff members as they engaged in the process of improvement.

Through the years, I studied school improvement primarily through the lenses of leadership, group process, accountability designs and strategies. As my professional knowledge and understanding of school improvement grew, I began to wonder why some schools were successful in their improvement work while schools with similar characteristics seemed less successful. Thus began a search for answers to help me better understand processes and organizational dimensions inherent in schools that seemed to meet the current academic needs of students while preparing them for their future.

My search for answers led me to the literature on effective schools and eventually to the body of research on learning communities. Several patterns began to emerge from the literature, from my observation of schools, and from experiences planning

professional growth activities for school teams. I began to conceptualize developmental

stages through which schools progress as they become increasingly responsive to the

students and community they serve. Based on this blend of research and practice, I

constructed a developmental continuum and began the process of validation. The review

process included feedback from peers and use of the continuum as a guide for planning.

Ultimately, the continuum was used as a framework for conducting quality reviews of

identified schools within my district. Observations in the field led me to refine the

School Improvement Developmental Continuum. (See Appendix A.)

However, I began to wonder about a larger unit of analysis—that of a school district.

There appeared to be connections between how schools staged the improvement process

and how districts conducted similar work. Thus, the idea for the study developed.

Reviewing the developmental continuum for schools, I contemplated the work of

leadership in creating learning communities. Early in the doctoral program, I became

interested in better understanding how leadership, particularly superintendent leadership,

impacts the main work of schools—teaching and learning. So, it seemed a natural next

step for me to examine the work of a superintendent in developing a learning community.

<div align="center">Organization of the Remainder of the Study</div>

This study was organized into five chapters. Chapter I outlined the purpose,

research questions, conceptual framework, significance of the study, assumptions,

definition of terms, limitations, overview of research procedures, and the researcher's

perspective.

Chapter II presented a review of relevant literature about the superintendency and

learning communities to provide a conceptual framework for the study. Two major topics

were addressed in the review. The first major section of the review included a broad look

at how the work of the superintendent has changed over the past century, a description of

contemporary superintendents, and the challenges they face in their work. The second

major section of the review examined learning communities and included detail about the

characteristics and development of such communities. The concluding section of the review examined the role that leadership plays in the development of learning communities.

Chapter III described the way the study was conducted. This chapter explained how the research site was selected as well as the details for data collection and analysis. In addition, the chapter included information about how validity, reliability, and objectivity were established.

Chapter IV presented data from the study and included findings related to the guiding questions. A detailed description of the research setting was included along with a profile of the participants. Findings were explicated in three sections and included figures to provide a more comprehensive view of the findings.

Chapter V included several sections. First, there was an overview of the study which included the guiding questions, research procedures, and context for the study. Next was a discussion of the findings arising from the study. Finally, the chapter concluded with a discussion of implications for practice as well as recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the work of the superintendent in the development of learning communities. This review of literature examined both the ethos of the superintendency and the constructs of learning communities.

The first section of the review focused on the ethos of the superintendency. Three key areas of research about district superintendents were examined: 1) evolution of the role of the superintendency, 2) challenges and issues currently facing superintendents, and 3) work of the superintendent in organizational development. Inquiry into the leadership role of the superintendent is not a new phenomenon. What became evident from the literature review was that many previous studies of the superintendency primarily viewed the leadership work of the superintendent from a scientific-management paradigm and thus may have failed to consider alternative perspectives. This more limited view of the superintendency may have created gaps in our knowledge and understanding about the leadership needed for districts to become learning communities.

Learning communities were examined in the second section of the review. Most of what is known about learning communities in education has been based on inquiry conducted at the school level. The concluding section explored the salient features and operation of a school level learning community and examined the characteristics of leadership needed to develop and sustain such a community.

Ethos of the Superintendency

At the top of most public school district organizational charts is the district superintendent. The role of the superintendent is a puzzling one, and relatively little is

known about it (Carter,et al.,1993; Crowson, 1994). Curiously, the role of the district superintendent in reform efforts has been largely overlooked by educational researchers (Howe, 1994). Cuban (1985) observed, "the broader perspective of district administrators is often missing from the researchers' analyses of effective schools" (p. 132). Glass (1998) noted that the literature on the superintendency is generally lacking in focus and often compares the role of a superintendent to that of a building principal, even though substantive differences exist between the two roles. Further, there does not seem to be a model which explains how superintendents influence teachers (Cuban, 1985; Cuban, 1998).

This section of the review examined three areas within the superintendency. The first area of the superintendency looked broadly at the evolution of the superintendency over the past 100 years. Challenges and issues facing superintendents was the second area examined. The final area reviewed was the work of the superintendent in organizational development.

Evolution of the Superintendency

From the time that the first school district superintendency was established in Buffalo, New York in 1837 until the present, the superintendency has evolved through four stages (Bateman, 1996; Carter & Cunningham, 1997). Jackson (1995) noted, "the evolution of the role of the public school superintendent has paralleled the growth of the nation and reflected changing social, economic, and political conditions" (p. 9).

Initially, the role of the superintendent was mostly clerical in nature. The superintendent was required to carry out the policies established by the board of education and conduct the day-to-day activities of schools (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). School districts were stable organizations, and few changes were needed in the routine operation of schools. There was little expectation that the superintendent would direct either curriculum development or the teaching staff (Jackson, 1995). Glass et al. (2000) found that many early superintendents traveled from location to location sharing

information about free public education and have been identified as some of the earliest educational reformers.

The second stage of the superintendency was ushered in during the latter half of the nineteenth century and was attributed to increasing expectations for schools. Schools were expected to teach citizenship and traditional American values because of a large influx of immigrants from Europe. This new expectation created a shift in the teaching role (Jackson, 1995). A parallel shift occurred in the role of the superintendent as it moved from a clerical to an educational position. During this stage, superintendents were expected to be master educators with significant knowledge and expertise in curricular and instructional matters but the expectation remained that the superintendent would attend to the business of the district (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Jackson, 1995).

The third stage of the superintendency emerged at the beginning of the 20th century with the change from an agrarian to an industrial society and an explosion in the country's population (Jackson, 1995). A national focus on efficiency led to an expectation that schools should prepare students to take their place as adults in the factories. Such expectations again signaled curricular and instructional changes at the classroom level and organizational change at the superintendent level. District superintendents were expected to establish organizations which would provide the kind of educational activities and experiences to adequately prepare workers for work in the nation's factories (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). The superintendent was expected to be both business manager and professional educator (Jackson, 1995). It was during this stage of the superintendency that the operational nature of the role assumed a greater importance (Carter & Cunningham, 1997).

A series of events ushered in the fourth, and current, stage of the superintendency. Goldhammer (1977) noted that the issues facing schools changed significantly between 1954 and 1974 due to unanticipated cultural, political, and economic changes. The desegregation ruling of *Brown vs. The Board of Education* and

the launching of Sputnik in 1957 were two key events that created a sense of urgency

about school reform at the national level (Norton et al., 1996). As national political

leaders began to exert influence over local educational issues, schools increasingly

became the focus of social policy efforts where concepts such as equal opportunity and

civil rights were tested (Dale, 1997; Evans, 1996; Schlechty, 1997).

Throughout this stage, the diminishing authority of superintendents, coupled with

increasing criticism aimed at educational organizations, left superintendents feeling less

than expert in their field (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Johnson, 1996). A rather vocal

public supported the criticisms leveled by policymakers, and local boards of education

began to question the actions and guidelines established by the superintendent and

assume more authority in the development of policy and the operational aspects of

schools. When surveyed in 1970, superintendents identified professional attack as the

factor most likely to cause them to leave the field (Knezevich, 1971). In a 2000 study,

superintendents identified inadequate financing as a major reason to leave the field,

closely followed by the lack of support from the community and/or the board of education

(Glass, et al., 2000). No longer considered the educational expert, the role of the

superintendent has shifted to become more advisory and management focused (Norton et

al.,1996). Carter and Cunningham (1997) likened the role of superintendent to that of

chief executive officer in the business sector.

Contemporary superintendents face a struggle to balance the pressures from local,

state, and national levels as they work to improve the schools in their districts (Glass et

al., 2000). These pressures often arise from opposing expectations for schools expressed

by organized and powerful groups of people more concerned with the "resolution of

broad economic, ideological, and societal issues" (Carter & Cunningham, 1997, p. 32)

than with academic impact. Seeking balance often takes a political toll on already fragile

relationships within an educational organization (Johnson, 1996).

The role of the superintendent has become more facilitative than directive as a way to manage such pressure and conflict. This shift in the role of the superintendent has created a sense of urgency to better understand the relationship between the superintendent and the development of a rapidly responsive organization (Carter & Cunningham, 1997).

Challenges and Issues Facing Superintendents

Currently there are approximately14,000 district superintendents in the nation. The typical superintendent is a white, Anglo-Saxon male who is about 52 years of age. Over the past 50 years, the median age of superintendents has been between 48 and 50. However, more recently, Glass et al. (2000) noted that the median age increased to 52.5 years. This represented the oldest median age during the past 100 years. In large districts (more than 25,000 students), more than half of the superintendents were over the age of 55 as compared to1992, when slightly less than a third of superintendents in large districts were older than 55 (Glass et al., 2000).

There appeared to be a disparity between the number of males and females in the superintendency. The number of females entering the superintendency increased in recent years from 6.6% in 1992 to 13.2% in 2000, but the superintendency remained a male dominated profession (Glass et al., 2000). It seemed paradoxical that a profession so heavily populated with women serving as teachers, principals, and central office staff should have so few women in senior management positions.

From 1992 to 2000, the percentage of minority superintendents increased slightly, from 3.9% to 5.1%. Demographic projections for the nation indicate that by the year 2020, approximately 38% of students will be minorities. Thus, as the population becomes more racially diverse, minority groups will have greater influence on the nature of schooling, how schools are governed, and who leads them (Hodgkinson, 1985).

The men and women in the superintendency are responsible for the educational activities and experiences of students within their districts (Norton et al., 1996). Their

districts represent a diverse nation with regard to enrollment, economic wealth, and demographic composition. Districts range in size from less than 1,000 students to more than 300,000 students. Some districts are composed mainly of high-income families while others represent a majority of families well below the poverty line (Norton et al., 1996).

The average tenure of district superintendents has decreased in recent years. From 1950 until 1980, the average tenure for large city superintendents dropped from 6.5 years to just over 4 years (Yee & Cuban, 1996). More recently, the average tenure seems to be just 2.5 years (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). Heller, Woodworth, Jacobson, Stephen, and Conway (1991) found that slightly more than half (53%) of district superintendents had been in their position for less than five years, and only 40% felt they had job security. The high turnover rate was attributed primarily to friction between the superintendents and their school boards and has taken a toll on organizational development and district finances. McKay and Grady (1994) noted, "the result is a three year cycle of dismissal, search and selection, reorganization, and dismissal again — a dysfunctional pattern considered by some educators as the single greatest hindrance to improving the quality of our schools" (p. 37).

Regardless of reference group homogeneity, district factors, or tenure concerns, superintendents face similar issues (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). These issues can be grouped into one of the following categories — conflict, reform, finance, governance, or communication. The categories are not mutually exclusive, instead the smaller issues within them overlap to influence the work done by the superintendent (Barnett & Berg, 1998; Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Kowalski, 1995; Norton et al., 1996).

The first significant challenge for the superintendent is conflict. While conflict is everywhere, Hayden (1986) specified two major and constant sources of conflict for the superintendent — the role of politics and the purpose of schooling. Blumberg and Blumberg (1985) identified three aspects of a superintendent's political life. They are:

"the politics of local educational decision making; the politics of being a non-elected executive of a focal public enterprise; [and] the politics of survival" (p. 46). The knowledge base needed by district superintendents is extensive, but they must be able to survive in a highly political and conflicted environment. Carter and Cunningham (1997) noted that "the success and prosperity of American education may well depend as much on the survival of the superintendent as it does on his or her ability to be an effective educational leader" (p. 3).

Between 1970 and 1990, external demands heightened the tension of the superintendency. Prior to this time, the superintendent's role was primarily as a manager or educator, with little or no political overtones (Jackson, 1995). However, Blumberg and Blumberg (1985) noted that this period marked the end of the myth that the superintendency was an apolitical profession. Ongoing desegregation issues, pressure from special interest groups for policy changes, and an expectation that schools would fulfill a greater societal role all contributed to increased political conflict within the superintendency (McCloud & McKenzie, 1994). Political differences between myriad groups within the school district were representative of the larger political picture outside the district (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). The success of the superintendent was often a statement of political acumen (Blumberg & Blumberg, 1985).

The challenge for superintendents within the highly political arena of a school district is to establish credibility and " embrace the political power that can mobilize resources to achieve results" (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). The superintendent must be knowledgeable about internal and external groups and work to provide different opportunities to build collegiality and consensus (Johnson, 1996). Diverse groups with dogmatic agendas about the purpose of schooling must often be brought together to establish a common focus for the learning community. The National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration (1987) asserted that superintendents "must

exercise the wisest kind of political behavior by resolving the conflicting demands of many constituents and, in turn, gain their support for decisions" (p. 7).

A second cause of conflict can be traced to a lack of agreement about the purpose of schooling. While the topic has been debated for decades, it is increasingly tied to a political agenda and exacerbated by the rate of change within society (Schlechty, 1997). Symbolically, the district superintendent is charged with all issues related to the youth in the community (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). Expectations of community members, business leaders, government officials, and the professional community vest responsibility in the superintendent for the reparation of societal ills, increased student academic performance, and the overall well-being for the youth (Caine & Caine, 1997; Norton et al., 1996). The accelerated pace of change in recent years has left many superintendents and their districts overwhelmed and frustrated by the conflicting and contradictory expectations of the many publics regarding the primary purpose of schooling (Carter & Cunningham, 1997).

Facing these contradictory expectations has often left district superintendents wondering how to respond to school reform. The challenge of trying to create systems responsive to the needs of children is often at odds with initiatives from the federal and state levels which seem to value compliance over educational improvement (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Glass, 1992). However, as more and more fiscal resources drawn from state and federal sources come to the district with rigid requirements for spending, it is incumbent upon the superintendent to become an advocate for mandates and initiatives which place control of resources within the local arena. Such activity often constrains the more pressing work of creating the systems necessary to focus on children. Repeatedly, superintendents are left with a powerless feeling (Carter & Cunningham, 1997).

Accountability demands by the public and by governmental officials also contribute to the powerlessness felt by superintendents. They, their schools, and the teachers are often compared on the basis of a single measure — test scores. Increasing

demands are placed on the superintendent to quickly identify and implement practices leading to increased test scores. Fullan (1993) argued that the consequences of such practices draw energy from the real work of reform. Superintendents feel compelled to focus less on systemic issues impacting student learning and more on stabilizing or returning to the status quo (Carter & Cunningham, 1997).

To face the school reform challenge, district superintendents must redefine power structures without sacrificing the overriding mission of the district (Konnert & Augenstein, 1990; Norton et al., 1996). Empowering individuals or teams closest to educational impact requires superintendents to model collaborative decision making processes and to provide structures that encourage others to participate fully in achieving the vision and mission of the district. Because redefining power structures often requires different skills of staff, the superintendent must create learning structures that promote development of the knowledge, skills, and habits of mind congruent with a participative decision making framework (Konnert & Augenstein, 1990).

Increasing fiscal resources for educational endeavors during a time of dwindling revenues is another issue facing district superintendents (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Yee & Cuban, 1996). Over the past three decades, superintendents have consistently identified financing schools as their most pressing concern (Cunningham & Hentges, 1982; Glass, 1992; Knezevich, 1971). Often the issue of working with the budget process predicts the success or failure of a superintendent's tenure in the district (Carter & Cunningham, 1997).

During the past decade, the proportion of funding for schools has shifted from state to local funds (Norton et al., 1996). Nationally, from 1986 until 1992, the percentage of funding provided by local funding sources increased from 43.9% to 47.0% while state funding dropped from 49.7% to 46.4% (U. S. Department of Education, 1994). Even though the proportion of funding has declined from state revenue sources, involvement of the state has increased significantly through legislated accountability

systems, countless new programs, and unfunded mandates (Odden, 1994). District superintendents must balance needs of the system with available resources.

Escalating demands on educational organizations comes at a time when most local taxpayers are disinclined to increase funding for schools (Johnson, 1996). School districts are expected and often mandated by local, state, or federal policies to train teachers, add new programs or initiatives that will meet the needs of diverse student populations, provide technology, and upgrade or equip facilities for students. Taxpayers increasingly allege that the funding required by local school systems is in direct contradiction to taxpayer interest (Yee & Cuban, 1996). Yet, as the population ages, many wonder if their tax money would be better spent on health care for senior citizens than on schools where the academic quality seems to be declining (Schlechty, 1997). Additionally, parents of children in private schools are often resentful that they must pay taxes to support public education while paying tuition for their children (McDonald, 1996).

The prioritization and reprioritization of fiscal resources can create conflict within an organization and the community (Conner, 1998). Placement of financial resources determines which programs or initiatives will be emphasized or ignored. Recommendations for resource allocation are generally made by the superintendent to the board of education. Sometimes, a difficult and painful reexamination of the overall district mission and vision must be made in order to clarify the best way to allocate fiscal resources. This reexamination can raise new conflicts or surface old conflicts among stakeholder groups which must then be mediated by the superintendent (Carter & Cunningham, 1997).

Accountability issues can also surface in the arena of school finance. Taxpayers, boards of education, and the community are becoming more results-driven than ever and continue to search for evidence that the benefits for students are indeed worth the monies

spent (Norton et al., 1996). Odden (1992) noted that accountability systems of the future will most likely link funding to student learning.

School finance issues challenge the superintendent to bring the community together in understanding problems facing the educational system while communicating the realities of financing excellent education (Schlechty, 1997). Data must be presented about the long and short term effect of budget decisions (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). Moreover, the superintendent must seek non-tax funding sources such as community based foundations and grant sources for specific programs (Norton et al., 1996).

Another issue for superintendents is the devolution of authority for education (Barnett & Berg, 1998; Brunner, 1998). Routinely, the public challenges conventional authority of the superintendent and debates are common regarding who should decide both the critical and routine issues of schooling. Increasingly, there is a feeling that authority and decision making be moved away from bureaucratic constraints and placed in the hands of the public. Site based management, privatization, and charter schools have gained widespread support as alternative ways to govern the process of education and increase local control of resources (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). However, accountability for student learning continues to be focused on the superintendent (Barnett & Berg, 1998).

Superintendents are challenged by devolution to redefine their role (Schlechty, 1997). Existing power and authority relationships must be reexamined and consideration given to how a dynamic for change can be created within a new structure (Barnett & Berg, 1998). This challenge is often both personally and professionally painful for superintendents who consider themselves stewards of public resources and protectors of community values. They must construct change strategies and navigate their organizations through the process while delicately balancing centralization with decentralization. Ultimately, however, they must provide to their public the degree to

which students and schools are succeeding in learning and teaching (Barnett & Berg, 1998; Norton et al., 1996).

The final issue, communication, is a critical area impacting all others and containing several components. There are many challenges for the superintendent in the arena of communication. Chance (1992) noted, " those who enjoy a long tenure and are viewed as successful strive to communicate fully with the community as well as the board" (p. 22-23). Critical incidents occur within a school district on a regular basis and public response is often directed toward the superintendent. Effective superintendent communication can neutralize such incidents and use them as a springboard for new direction. Generally, critical incidents are representative of conflict between coalitions within the greater community and provide opportunities for the superintendent to build a base of support for necessary initiatives (Carter & Cunningham, 1997).

Communication is also critical as superintendents begin to implement and improve programs. An effective and broad-based communication system must be developed increasing community advocacy for improvement efforts (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). Such communication will be critical to the success of reform efforts. Fullan (1993) noted, "There is no question that the problems of reform are insurmountable without a dramatic increase in the number of alliances practicing positive politics" (p. 350). Building such alliances hinges on the superintendent's ability to communicate core values, to support and to encourage broad participation in decision making while communicating the emerging vision to interested parties.

The role of the superintendent in communication must shift from that of disseminator of information to a more facilitative one. Superintendents must focus energy and commitment on promoting democratic discourse (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). Bringing diverse groups together and helping them focus on the big picture while developing fair processes that assure equitable treatment of all are highly dependent on communicative capabilities of the leadership (Louis & Kruse, 1995). While this role is

not new for the superintendent, many superintendents lack preparation for the complexity of the role. They sometimes ignore mounting community conflict or suppress differing points of view within their own staff (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). Overcoming these barriers represents a significant challenge for some superintendents in the twenty-first century.

Development of Organizational Culture

Schein (1992) asserted that the development of organizational culture involves helping others to make sense out of the events and relationships within an organizational context in order to move the organization forward. Organizational culture can be thought of as "shared philosophies, ideologies, values, assumptions, beliefs, expectations, attitudes, and norms that knit a community together" (Kilman, Saxton, & Serpa, 1985, p. 5). Organizational cultures can be either strong or weak and generally determine the success of the organization.

A clear relationship has been established between organizational culture and leadership (Bennis, 1989; Schein, 1992; Schlechty, 2001; Senge, 1990). Norton et al. (1996) identified three important responsibilities that district superintendents have in the development of organizational culture. First, the superintendent must develop a personal and deep understanding of the district culture and then communicate that understanding to others. Secondly, the superintendent must consciously work to establish a vision that will guide the work of the organization. Finally, active implementation of the organization's vision for the future is a responsibility of the district superintendent.

Understanding the culture means getting to the belief system and shared assumptions of the membership. Often, shared assumptions arise from solutions to problems that the organization has encountered over time. However, assumptions can become so firmly established in the culture that there is resistance to change. It is the job of the superintendent to help those within the organization become aware of their

assumptions and to focus on how the assumptions might help or hinder the organization in moving forward.

Development of a vision is another area where the impact of leadership is critical (Bennis, 1989). Norton et al. (1996) noted that the visioning role requires superintendents to "develop a common agreement among members regarding the purposes of the organization and the basic assumptions of its culture" (p. 80). In development of a vision, emphasis is placed on member participation and the role of the superintendent is to empower others to think through the issues and problems that might stand as obstacles to achievement of the vision.

Carter and Cunningham (1997) noted that the superintendent's role is to build capacity for others to see themselves assuming new roles and responsibilities as the district moves toward achievement of the vision. Leading through personal example, providing support for shared values, and focusing attention on the change effort are all strategies that superintendents can use to build capacity (Norton, et al., 1996).

McAdams and Zinck (1998) identified four characteristics of district superintendents that help to shape organizational culture of a school district. These characteristics included focus of attention, goal-directed activity, modeling of positive behavior, and an emphasis on human resources. In their study of superintendents in effective districts, the most striking finding was the ability of the superintendent to engender loyalty among staff.

Section Summary

This section of the review reflected on the leadership role of the district superintendent. The evolving nature of the superintendency was traced through the past century to understand present conditions under which they work. Over time, the work of the superintendent has shifted from being a keeper of the educational system to a leader of the system. Superintendents face significant issues and challenges. Much of the

superintendent's success depends upon his/her ability to create an ethos supporting the teaching and learning mission of schools.

<center>Constructs of Learning Communities</center>

The notion of community has been widely pondered in educational literature over the past decade (Hord, 1997). Pertinent educational research in this area has been primarily focused at the school level. The phenomenon has been viewed from both a theoretical and practitioner's standpoint (Wallace et al., 1997). Both perspectives are important and contribute to an understanding of learning communities at the school level. However, there has been only limited research to understand how the learning community process develops at the district level. This section of the literature explored the constructs of learning communities through the development of three broad themes: (1) the essential characteristics of a learning community, (2) the development of a learning community, and (3) the role of leadership within a learning community.

Essential Characteristics of Learning Communities

A learning community was defined in Chapter I from the work of Sergiovanni (1994) and Capra (1996) as a community where interactions between and interdependence of members form a base, shared ideologies are the center, and the commitment of members to action binds them together. Learning communities share at least three essential characteristics: a) ability to create sustainable relationships over time, b) clear sense of collective values and purpose, and c) commitment to staying centered on the common work of the group (Sergiovanni, 1994; Wheatley, 1992).

The first characteristic, the ability to create sustainable relationships over time, is more than developing congenial or collegial relationships between community members (Sergiovanni, 1994). Community members work together in ways that support both individual freedom and the need for each other. Sustainable relationships evolve that foster diversity and cooperation among members over time.

Individuals within the group continuously seek to discover what relationships are necessary and possible for attainment of group goals. The process of being together in a shared community allows new capabilities and talents in individuals to develop (Zohar, 1997). Complex networks evolve as community members work out relationships over time and create more possibilities. Interdependent feedback loops allow for constant communication flow between members and continuous change through adaptation and modification. A single change or disturbance holds the potential to reverberate throughout the entire community (Capra, 1996).

The second essential characteristic of a learning community is a clear sense of collective purpose. In this community of mind, community members develop a common understanding of why they are together and what they are trying to accomplish. Clarifying what community members are trying to achieve often changes the nature of relationships within the community (Sergiovanni, 1994). Through open and shared dialogue, members begin to develop shared values as well as create a clear picture of the end result they are seeking. Increased opportunities to discuss the actions and strategies that will define the collective work of the group usually forces community members to look closely at the systemic nature of issues and identify ways to improve systems to support the work of the group (Sergiovanni, 1994; Wallace et al., 1997).

A critical factor in working together to establish a collective sense of purpose is the function of shared decision making. Shared and active participation in decision making activities helps to foster a resilience and commitment to the work that will sustain group members over time. The unfolding vision of the future represents the hopes and aspirations of the group and guides community members in their day-to-day work (Hullfish & Smith, 1961; Wallace et al., 1997).

The third and final characteristic of a learning community is the commitment of community members to stay focused on the work of the group (Sergiovanni, 1994). Development and communication of compelling goals to the broader community is

important to foster widespread ownership. Stewardship compels group members to do the work necessary for the group to attain its goals. There is a blending or blurring of roles as boundaries and predetermined actions assume less importance and more emphasis is placed on achievement of goals. Because community members are focused on how they can contribute to attainment of shared goals, they frequently reach out for other partners who can help the group achieve its purpose. New partnerships become part of the learning community plan for renewal and serve to mobilize even more community effort (Hullfish & Smith, 1961; Sergiovanni, 1994; Wallace et al., 1997).

Development of Learning Communities

Understanding essential characteristics is only part of the overall picture because creating a learning community is complex. Louis and Kruse (1995) studied schools involved in restructuring efforts to identify conditions enhancing development of a learning community. The research done by Louis and Kruse (1995) at the school level was important for several reasons. First, Louis and Kruse provided a framework to understand what conditions were necessary for the development of a learning community at the school level. Secondly, through the work of Louis and Kruse, changes occurring in schools as they progressed toward a learning community were explicated. Finally, the importance of leadership in the development of a learning community was highlighted.

The right structural, human, and social conditions were found to be important underpinnings of the development of learning communities. According to Louis and Kruse (1995), structural conditions defined the supportive nature of the environment necessary for emergence of a learning community. Supportive environments "offer faculty the opportunity to grow and develop, creating a workplace that is supportive of both people and the process of school change" (Louis & Kruse, 1995, p. 202). The most supportive environment fostered interdependence across work practices, strengthened interpersonal relationships, and extended to collective areas of improvement over time. Louis and Kruse concluded that the necessary structural conditions were: a) time to meet

and talk, b) physical proximity, c) interdependent teaching roles, d) communication structures, and e) teacher empowerment coupled with school autonomy.

Louis and Kruse (1995) further classified structural conditions as either essential preconditions or intervening factors in the development of learning communities. Essential preconditions (teacher empowerment, school autonomy, time to meet and talk) helped set expectations and establish a culture so staff could take advantage of the intervening factors. Intervening factors (interdependent teaching roles, physical proximity, communication structures) provided purpose and natural opportunities for teachers to communicate and work together (Louis & Kruse, 1995).

Louis and Kruse (1995) reached several conclusions about the role of structural conditions in developing community. First, while structural conditions were found to be necessary, by themselves, they were not sufficient to ensure the development of a learning community. Second, absence of supportive structural conditions impeded development. Finally, it was determined that structural conditions had to be present along with social and human resource factors to sustain growth of community.

Development of a learning community that supports both the people and the change process requires the presence of compelling social and human resource factors. Bryk and Rollow (1992) identified several factors contributing to the development and sustainability of a community. These factors included trust and respect, structures to socialize new members, supportive leadership, receptivity to improvement, and access to expertise.

Supportive leadership and shared expertise of classroom practice by teachers were identified by Louis and Kruse (1995) as critical human and social factors in the development of a learning community. For successful development of learning communities to occur, both had be present across the entire school and not limited to isolated pockets of select people or initiatives.

Value was added to the change process by shared teacher expertise in several ways. Development of a strong, shared cognitive base prepared teachers to trust each other while learning to trust themselves as new learning and skills were applied. Next, when teachers began to focus their work around common goals and expectations for practice, a sense of efficacy and increased openness to improvement developed. Finally, a culture of inquiry and continuous improvement emerged to engage others in the development of community (Louis & Kruse, 1995).

However, Louis and Kruse (1995) found that shared teacher expertise alone could not advance or sustain the development of a learning community. Supportive leadership was an influential reciprocal factor. Leadership in a learning community emanated from both administrators and influential teachers. Such dispersed leadership served to encourage, support, and reinforce inquiry and reflective thinking about classroom practice and to expand such thinking to a school-wide level.

Through case studies, Louis and Kruse (1995) documented characteristics of schools as they progressed through four developmental stages in becoming a learning community. Figure 2.1 shows each developmental stage and the characteristics associated with that stage identified by Louis and Kruse (1995).

Figure 2.1 Developmental Stages and Characteristics of Learning Communities

Developmental Stage	Characteristics
Static	• Little direction or focus for restructuring efforts. • Lack of collaboration between community members. • Community members unwilling or unable to begin improvement work. • Work done by staff addressed only surface needs. • Lack of shared values among group members. • Leadership vested in a single individual or only a few people. • Little information or allowance for feedback.

Fragmented	• Competition between sub-groups. • Pervasive sense of apathy. • Low levels of trust and respect. • Minimal efforts made to involve the larger community. • Individuals assumed traditional roles and responsibilities. • Lack of supportive leadership.
Developing	• Commitment to improved student achievement. • Group work centered on strategy identification and implementation. • Efforts made to foster collaboration. • Leadership through shared decision making.
Mature	• Effective shared governance. • Dispersed leadership. • Commitment to shared values and norms of the community. • Group members open to innovation. • Systematic inquiry. • Strong involvement of the larger community.

Leadership in Learning Communities

Leadership was a common factor in each developmental stage identified by Louis and Kruse (1995). The work of leadership in the development of learning communities played an important part in the outcomes achieved by schools, and included setting expectations, establishment of a culture to support inquiry, and managing conflict.

While the work of Louis and Kruse (1995) was based on the development of learning communities at the school level with the principal as the driving leadership force, there may be parallels to the leadership work of the superintendent at a district level. Therefore, it was important to understand the role that leadership played in the development of learning communities at the school level.

Setting expectations was one way that principal leadership impacted the development of learning communities at a school. In learning communities classified as mature, Louis and Kruse (1995) found an expectation that teachers were significant

influences in both the work and direction of the school. Leadership opportunities were offered to many individuals in the school and through exploration of alternative goals and consensus building on important issues around teaching and learning, the status quo was challenged. Opposing viewpoints were not only allowed, but encouraged, as the principal worked to stimulate new ideas (Louis & Kruse, 1995). Leaders built the capacity for the entire community to think and act strategically.

Another leadership theme found to be prevalent in a mature learning community was the work of the principal in building a culture supporting inquiry (Louis & Kruse, 1995). Principal leadership promoted a culture of inquiry in several ways. First, compelling knowledge and ideas from outside the school community were sought by the leader. By developing a network with outside educational agencies such as the university and the district office, the principal was able to help teachers increase their skills and actively examine their teaching practices. Second, the leader actively championed the need for information and data. There was constant and continuous dialogue about what was working and what was not working. Action research was conducted by staff members to determine the effectiveness of instructional strategies and plan for deployment of financial resources as well as professional development. The constant dialogue about the work of teaching and learning promoted redefinition of the teaching role within the school. Teachers began to see themselves as both consumers and producers of knowledge (Louis & Kruse, 1995).

Management of conflict was a third area where principal leadership played a pivotal role in the development of a learning community (Louis & Kruse, 1995). The principal worked to constructively resolve conflict by surfacing differences of opinion on critical issues and then providing safe ways for staff to discuss and resolve such issues. In order to promote such conflict resolution, the principal had to be willing to live with ambiguity and tolerate the diversity inherent in the work of a school. By using commonly held values and goals of the group as the criteria against which to consider differences,

the leader was able to reinforce the community concept rather than fragment it with dissension (Louis & Kruse, 1995).

Finally, leadership within a developmentally mature school had a different configuration than that of the typical principalship. Many of the traditional tasks done by the principal were given up or changed completely. For example, meetings were facilitated by teachers and others in the school and not by the principal. There was an expectation that teachers would take charge of meetings and plan agendas to address critical issues while determining whether the school's actions were consistent with the mission and vision. Also, changes were made in how time was spent by the principal. Time previously spent on solving the problems of others was instead spent on helping others to solve their own problems. By being accessible to the staff, redefinition of the leadership role gave more support and assistance to teachers while promoting a strong case for change (Louis & Kruse, 1995).

Interestingly, leadership concepts identified by Louis and Kruse (1995) in the most advanced developmental stage of a learning community seem similar to the work of superintendents across the nation as they work to meet the increasing challenges of providing quality education for students. Leithwood, Aitken, and Jantzi (2001) noted such leaders are often labeled transformational because they acknowledge the complexity of the context, adjust their leadership style and behavior accordingly, and manage to work on many dimensions at once. What remains to be examined is whether leadership work as identified by Louis and Kruse (1995) can be transferred to a district level in order to develop learning communities at a macro level.

Section Summary

Ideas within this section of the review provided insight about what a learning community at the school level looks like, how it develops, and what the work of leadership is in developing and sustaining such a community. Rost (1991) conceptualized leadership for community building as "an influence relationship among

leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes" (p. 102). Such leadership was considered to be both interactive and multi-directional. Leadership was not vested in only few people but shared among community members. Each member has the opportunity to influence the work and direction of the community and bears both the responsibility and burden of leadership. Desired outcomes were based on the establishment of mutual purposes and changes were so directed. While much of the previous work has been done at the school level, questions remain about how, or if, such a process can be established at the district level.

<div align="center">Chapter Summary</div>

The work of the district superintendent has changed over the past 100 years, paralleling change in society. As society evolved from an agrarian to industrial to information focus, the work of school superintendents shifted from being a keeper of the system to leader of the system. Much of the shift can be attributed to increasing expectations for public schools. Several areas of change were discussed in the review.

First, the nature of the superintendent's work changed. Early in the history of the superintendency, the work was primarily clerical. There was little expectation that the superintendent would be involved in curriculum planning or instructional design. Over time, however, expectations for district superintendents shifted to include more duties directly related to student learning. Increasingly, contemporary superintendents have been viewed as stewards of the public with accountability for student learning, safety, and well-being in addition to being chief advisor for finances, facilities, and human resource development.

Secondly, the challenges and issues facing contemporary superintendents are different than those of their predecessors. The issues facing early superintendents were no less critical than those of contemporary superintendents, they were simply representative of society at the time. Whereas superintendents of today are grappling with issues such as finding the balance between centralization and decentralization of

functions and decision making, early superintendents grappled with how to communicate the concept of free public education to the masses. Other issues found to be facing contemporary superintendents included securing adequate funding for quality education, dealing with dissension between groups about the purpose of schools, and creating an organization responsive to changing needs of society.

Third, changing demographics of the superintendency were traced over the past 30 years. While more females and minorities have entered the superintendency during that time, it remains a primarily white, Anglo-Saxon male group. The average tenure for superintendents in large cities dropped from 6.5 years in 1950 to 4 years in 1980. Most recently, the average tenure for urban superintendents has again decreased to 2.5 years.

A clear relationship was found between organizational culture and leadership, therefore, many believe that the superintendent can, and should, be the primary change agent in a district. Research identified three responsibilities of superintendents in the development of district organizational culture as development of a deep and personal understanding of the district culture; working to establish a vision to guide the organization's work; and actively implementing the organization's vision. Several characteristics of effective superintendents were also identified in the research and included focus of attention, goal-directed activity, modeling of positive behavior, and emphasis on human resources. One of the most striking findings about effective superintendents was their ability to engender loyalty among staff.

Contemporary superintendents are expected to be more facilitative than directive and to bring groups of people together to improve schooling for students and prepare them for the future. It is not an easy job for the pressures are great, and the competing agendas from local, state, and national entities often create dissonance within an educational organization. Strangely, the work of the superintendent has been frequently overlooked by those studying reform, and many questions remain about what a

superintendent should do to create an organization that responds quickly to changes within the environment.

Learning communities may represent one way to create responsive organizations, thus the review also focused on learning communities. The review examined three aspects of learning communities—what they look like, how they develop, and the work of leadership in a learning community. While research to date has focused consistently on learning communities at the school level, there may well be parallels between a school and a district level.

Learning communities were characterized as places where interdependence of group members created a foundation for shared vision and there was shared commitment of the group to the work necessary to achieve the vision. School learning communities were found to be organized around relationships, ideas, and commitment.

Relationships within learning communities were found to move from congenial to collegial to shared practice. While it appeared that the transformation in the type of relationships in the community took time to develop, such a community of relationships was found to be critical to establish a foundation for the work. Through the development of sustainable relationships, group members sought ways to support both individual freedom and the need for one another.

Collective vision, or ideas of the future, represented another essential characteristic of learning communities found in the review. Development of clear purpose led group members to identity their shared values and further clarify the outcomes they were seeking. The function of shared decision making was found to be important to foster the commitment and resilience needed by group members over time.

Staying committed to and focused on the work was another important characteristic of learning communities. Development and communication of compelling goals was found to foster widespread ownership. Formal roles changed over time and

predetermined actions assumed less importance with an increasing focus on goal attainment.

The development of learning communities was found to be dependent on the right structural, human and social conditions. The most supportive environments for the development of learning communities included fostering interdependence across work practices, strengthening personal relationships, and extending collective areas of improvement over time.

At the most mature level, learning communities were found to have several characteristics. First, leadership in learning communities was found to be a shared responsibility between group members. Teachers were considered significant influences in both the work and direction of the school. Secondly, there was a strong commitment to the shared values of the group and the norms of the community. Finally, group members were willing to try new ways of working and to critically study their work.

Learning communities are not new. They do, however, remain illusive at a district level. There has been no research to address the development of learning communities at a macro, or district, level. What remains to be studied is whether district learning communities are possible and the nature of superintendent work necessary to create such communities.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the work of the superintendent in developing district level learning communities. Several specific areas of focus were identified to support the exploration of superintendent work in a learning community. Each area of focus provided a way to examine the target district with regard to the work of the superintendent in developing a learning community. Three areas of focus were reflected in the guiding questions for the study.

The first area of focus was an exploration of the change process in the target district. Specifically, this focus area examined the process of change in the teaching and learning mission of the target district as well as participant perception of change. Understanding the impetus for change, the kind of changes made, and the manner in which participants understood change provided a perspective about superintendent work.

Through the change process, the influence of superintendent work was made apparent, thus leading to the second area of focus. The second area of focus specifically addressed the work of the superintendent in improvement initiatives. Focus on the actions of the superintendent provided a way to examine the leadership aspects of the development of a district level learning community.

The third and final area of focus addressed the issue of school improvement. The focus on school improvement was designed to explore the improvement process in a target district and to consider how the process was both similar and different to the process used at a school level. A comparison of the similarities and differences between school and district level processes provided a way to glean dimensions of a district

learning community, and a way to consider the work of the district superintendent.

This chapter delineated methods and procedures used in the study to address the guiding questions. Included were descriptions of the research design, site selection, methods, and procedures of data collection and analysis. The chapter concluded with a summary of the study process.

Guiding Questions for the Study

Guiding questions were established for the study in three focus areas. Each set of questions contained a major question and several secondary questions which included:

1. How did change occur in the teaching and learning processes of a school district?

    a) What changes in teaching and learning occurred in the target district?

    b) Who initiated teaching and learning changes?

    c) How were the changes facilitated?

2. How did the superintendent influence improvement in teaching and learning in the district?

    a) How did the superintendent determine improvement was needed?

    b) What strategies were used by the superintendent to facilitate improvement?

3. What were the similarities and differences between the improvement processes at the school level and at the district level?

    a) What were the dimensions of the improvement process at a district level?

    b) How were these dimensions like those of a school improvement process?

Design of the Study

This study explored the connection between superintendent work and the development of a learning community. Three broad and general areas were first identified as guiding questions. These initial questions were intended as a springboard to begin exploration of ways the superintendent guides the direction of the district in improvement related to teaching and learning. After the first round of data were collected and organized, more specificity was needed to focus the study. At that time, sub-

questions were added. This allowed for a more concentrated look at the improvement process at the district level, the work of the superintendent, and their connection to development of a learning community.

A qualitative case study design was used for the study. Merriam (1994) defined a case study as, "an examination of a specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group" (p. 9). Case studies provide opportunities to study complex actions and interactions within a particular research setting. Because a case study is based on real life situations, inferences drawn from the research process allow deeper understanding of how study elements influence each other. Understanding garnered from a case study is usually rich in description and results in knowledge or tentative premises that can inform present practice and influence future research agendas (Merriam, 1998).

A case study approach was selected for two reasons. First, identification of a single case to facilitate a deep understanding of the development of a learning community as it related to the work of the superintendent provided a concentration on complex actions and interactions of study elements. While examination of a single case limited generalizability of conclusions, it was more important to understand the phenomenon deeply and, at a later time, look for additional confirming or disconfirming cases.

Second, the case study approach allowed for a holistic look at the phenomenon. Because leadership typically occurs within an organizational framework, it did not seem feasible to separate leadership from organizational context for the purpose of the study. To study either leadership or organizational context in isolation might have provided a fragmented picture of how the two elements work together in a school district. Thus, the work of the superintendent was studied within the context of a learning community. When it is impossible to separate the context from the study variables, as in this study, case study represents the best approach (Merriam, 1998).

Strengths and weaknesses are inherent in any research design. The strengths of

case study design also provide limitations. The complex nature of case study research is time consuming for the researcher. Because the researcher is the primary data collector for the study, the strength of the study rests upon the knowledge and skill of the researcher in gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data. If the researcher lacks appropriate skills and knowledge in these areas, the research design could be compromised. Details from the study might be exaggerated or oversimplified, thus causing readers to misinterpret the information (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1998).

Site Selection

Patton (1990) noted the importance of selecting an information-rich case for study. Selection of such a case is usually accomplished through purposeful sampling. Since the general purpose of the study was exploration of the work of the superintendent in developing a learning community, it was important to identify a relevant site where development of a learning community had been undertaken. A bellwether case selection strategy was employed. A bellwether case represents an *ideal* example of the phenomenon under examination. Selection of a bellwether case for this study involved developing a case profile relevant to the study and then locating a site closely matching the profile (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984).

Strategic selection of a site depends on identification of the key indicators that make the case most relevant (Patton, 1990). Key indicators for the study were drawn from the conceptual framework of the study and the literature review. Evidence of improvement on academic indicators and longevity of superintendent were used to identify potential research sites.

The first indicator was evidence of improvement on district level academic indicators. The conceptual framework for the study was based, in part, on an assumption that improving the core business of schools (teaching and learning) results in increased student learning. This was further supported in the literature (Schlechty, 2001; Sergiovanni, 2000). In order to fairly compare potential research sites for evidence of

increased student learning, common indicators of academic performance were identified

from the Georgia Department of Education Report Cards. The report cards are produced

annually for each public school and district in the state of Georgia, and are available to

the public on the Georgia Department of Education website.

Most commonly used academic achievement indicators were identified as the

Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS), the Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHSGT),

and the Scholastic Assessment Tests (SAT). District level data were captured and

compared for all Georgia districts for each of three years (1996-1997, 1997-1998, 1998-

1999). Improvement was defined as an increase in the percentile rank scores on the ITBS

in reading or mathematics, an increased passing rate on the GHSGT in English/Language

Arts or mathematics, and increased total scores on the latest Scholastic Assessment Tests.

Since all students in public school districts in the state participate in these assessments,

data were readily available to compare across districts. School districts not demonstrating

an increase on the indicators were eliminated from consideration for the study.

To increase the rigor of the sample, an additional component ensured that the

selected district was performing well when compared to other districts across the state.

Thus, district rankings on the selected indicators were included as part of the profile. For

consideration in the study, district test scores had to be in the top 25% of all Georgia

public school districts for two of the three years on each indicator. Rankings were

obtained from the Georgia Department of Education Report Cards. After data were

collected and reviewed, a list was compiled of districts meeting the criteria. At that time,

potential research sites were narrowed to districts meeting the profile.

Secondly, the literature review revealed that the average tenure of a district

superintendent has decreased in recent years to approximately 2.5 years (Carter &

Cunningham, 1997). The nature of the study looked at the impact of the superintendent

on the teaching and learning mission of the district. In order to effect large scale systemic

change, such as development of a district learning community, a superintendent would

need to remain in his/her position for a fair amount of time. Therefore, longevity of the superintendent in the district was felt to be critical to the study. Data regarding the tenure of Georgia superintendents for potential sites were obtained from the Georgia School Superintendent's Association. Any superintendent on the list who had been in their current district for less than two years was eliminated.

The next step of the process was the identification of constraints with the potential to impact data collection activities. Possible constraints were identified as availability of and accessibility to key participants. Key participants were identified as public school district level officials. Their availability is often limited because of many duties and responsibilities. Time constraints of the researcher were also considered. Because the researcher was employed full time in a professional capacity, the difficulty or ease of meshing schedules with district level officials in a district other than that of the researcher was a factor. To increase flexibility for key participants and the researcher, the distance from researcher to site location was considered. Selection of a case for the study was limited to a district located no more than two hours driving time from the researcher.

After the final list of districts was established, recommendations were sought from colleagues at professional meetings. Based on recommendations, profile information, and constraints, superintendents were contacted about their availability and willingness to participate in the study.

The superintendent identified subsequent participants for the study. Based upon his recommendations, the curriculum director, an elementary principal, and a classroom teacher were included in the study.

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

Data are bits of information collected from an environment and then pieced together to form meaning (Merriam, 1994). Different kinds of data provide divergent perspectives on the same phenomenon. Often different data presentations allow the

researcher to discover relationships between categories as tentative theory is generated (Strauss, 1987). Case study design is open-ended with flexible data collection methods. The nature of the study lent itself primarily to interviews, document review, and observation.

Interviews

Interviews are learning conversations intended to gather information about the study topic. They are based on an assumption that the perspectives of others are worthwhile and are able to be made explicit by participants. Patton (1990) noted, "the task for the interviewer is to make it possible for the person being interviewed to bring the interviewer into his or her world" (p. 279). Interviews may be the predominant data gathering process, or used as only a part of the overall data collection process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

In this study, interviews served as a primary data collection technique. The primary participant for the study was the superintendent but after the initial interview, other participants were identified for inclusion in the study. Identification of additional participants came from the superintendent. This snowballing technique resulted in interviews of an elementary principal, a central office administrator, and a classroom teacher. Each person participated in at least one interview session. As per Institutional Review Board procedures, participants signed consent forms. (See Appendix B for consent forms.) Participants were assigned a pseudonym to protect the confidentiality of information. Figure 3.1 listed the position, pseudonym, and the method by which the participant was selected for the study.

Figure 3.1 Participant Information

Position	Pseudonym	Method of Selection
Superintendent	Dr. Hayes	Upon contact, agreed to participate in the study

Curriculum Director	Elizabeth Davis	Recommended by superintendent
Elementary Principal	Stephen Richards	Recommended by superintendent
Classroom Teacher	Elaine Martin	Recommended by superintendent

Over a five-month period, all interviews were completed. The interview approach was a general one. Each interview session was approximately one hour, but varied slightly according to the participant. Interview protocols included open-ended questions and probes designed to elicit information about the district and the work of the superintendent. Interview questions ranged from broad topics to more narrowly focused ones. (See Appendix C for interview protocols.) These questions guided the interview, while allowing flexibility to develop themes emerging from the conversations. Upon completion of the interviews, the researcher wrote detailed fieldnotes. All interviews were audio taped and later transcribed verbatim for coding of themes. Participants reviewed transcriptions of their interviews to add notes or make corrections.

Document Review

Document review is a data collection technique that generally supplements data collection from interviews or observations (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Bogdan and Biklen (1998) noted document quality varies from simple statements of fact to rich and reflective descriptions. The technique often includes reviewing personal documents, official documents, and "popular culture documents" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 138). Through the process of reviewing documents, the researcher often obtains insight about the values and beliefs of participants. In addition, document review can sometimes confirm or disconfirm data from other sources (Merriam, 1994).

Because the purpose of the study was to explore the work of the superintendent in developing a learning community at the district level, document review for the study

focused on organizational documents. The superintendent provided copies of the district mission and vision statements, the strategic plan, and board policies. Other documents, secured from public domain sources, included the Georgia Department of Education Report Cards, the Council for School Performance Report Cards, and the Georgia Public Policy Foundation Report Cards for the district. Finally, school mission, belief statements, and policies were taken from the district website. The purpose for reviewing these documents was to seek patterns across data sources and to identify the degree of congruence between elements of a learning community delineated in the literature review and district documents. In addition, document review was used to triangulate data. (See Appendix D for sample procedures used to review documents.)

Observation

Marshall and Rossman (1995) defined observation as "systematic noting and recording of events, behaviors and artifacts (objects) in the social setting chosen for the study" (p. 79). Observation is a tool used by the researcher to enhance knowledge about the phenomenon under study. Observational data usually contain details about the setting, activities taking place, and the participants. Fieldnotes, or detailed information about the observation, are recorded and analyzed by the researcher (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Merriam, 1998). (See Appendix E for fieldnote format.)

It is important to understand the role of the researcher during an observation. There is a continuum of observer participation ranging from mostly observer to mostly participant. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) commented on the danger of the researcher becoming so involved with participants that the research goal is lost. Therefore, planning on the part of the researcher is critical to the success of capturing observational data. The nature of the study, the context of the research setting, and the theoretical orientation of the researcher affect how observations are conducted (Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Morse, 1994). In this study, the researcher engaged in participant observation.

Observations were conducted as part of the interview process to identify any recurring patterns or relationships. Fieldnotes were developed during and after the interviews and were included in the data analysis process.

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

Marshall and Rossman (1995) identified data analysis as "the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data" (p.111). It is a process of constructing meaning from the data. Qualitative studies generally combine data collection with analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). As the study proceeds, it is critical to continue to review the purpose of the study and the intended audience for the study as well as the guiding questions. Such review provides guidance in making decisions about the level of analysis needed and the final report format (Merriam, 1994).

The study used an inductive analytic approach. This approach begins with identification of an issue or a specific problem. As data are collected and analyzed, a descriptive model is developed that can serve to explain other cases of the phenomenon (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Throughout the study, guiding questions are refined as information is gathered and integrated into the model or theory.

The issue in this study was the work of the superintendent in developing a district level learning community. To narrow the focus of the study, guiding questions addressed different aspects of the superintendent's work as well as similarities and differences of the district improvement process to the school improvement process. Data collection included interviews with the superintendent and designated others, observations, and document review. The goal of the analysis process was to construct a conceptual picture of the development of a district learning community and the impact of superintendent leadership on such development.

Qualitative data analysis provides outcomes at one or more of three different levels, depending on the decisions made about the study (Merriam, 1994). At the first level is a simple description of data categories. Data analysis at this level focuses

primarily on organizing and developing a database with relevant information about the case. Most often, results are in the form of a descriptive narrative. The second level of analysis identifies themes or categories to interpret the meaning of the data. Generally, data categories are refined, reduced, and connected to each other to construct a tentative theory explaining the data. The third level of analysis involves connecting theory to a larger number of cases. Cross-site and multi-site studies commonly use this level of analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Merriam, 1994).

Categories, emerging as bits of data, are compared to each other for similarities and differences in a process called coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Coding is a way to organize, retrieve, and interpret data collected in the field. In this study, preliminary analysis included development of broad coding categories during the data collection process. Initial coding used several categories suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1998) and included setting, situation definition, subject perspective, processes, strategies, and social structures. Merriam (1994) noted that data placed in broad categories such as these provide a case record, or description of the study. (See Appendix F for Case Record Outline.) A matrix, or cross-classification scheme, helped to identify any missing data elements and thus inform data collection efforts (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). This first level of analysis resulted in a description of the situation and study setting (Merriam, 1994). Figure 3.2 provided the preliminary coding categories, definition, and sub-categories.

Figure 3.2 Preliminary Coding Categories, Definitions, and Sub-Categories

Coding Category	Definition	Sub-Categories
Setting	General information about the setting and research site.	Enrollment, achievement, staffing patterns, county statistics, graduates, workforce, economic indicators, population, physical description.

Situation Definition	Definition by participants of the county, district, or school.	Views of work, organizational purposes, and goals.
Participant Perspectives	How participants thought about change and work of the superintendent.	Internal and external change forces, philosophical orientation.
Processes/Strategies	Identification by participants of how the work was accomplished, their individual and collective roles, and the sequence of events.	Staff development, support, work at the school, work at the district level, vision, time, work views, activities.
Social Structures	Patterns of behavior among people.	Position perspectives.

However, the desired level of outcomes for this study was the second level as described by Merriam (1994). While preliminary data analysis began with broad coding of interviews, documents, and fieldnotes to identify important information about the case, a data refinement process immediately followed. The purpose of this process was to arrange data in conceptual themes connected to the study in order to begin consideration of the work of the superintendent in the development of a district level learning community.

Throughout the analysis process, guiding questions for the study were the frame used to direct coding and subsequent analysis of the data. Analytic procedures for the study included coding to link concepts and ideas across data sources through constant comparison. This constant comparative methodology provided a systematic way to review data for key issues or patterns (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As suggested by Seidel and Kelle (1995), three operations were undertaken in the coding process for this study: (a) identification of relevant concepts, (b) collection of representative instances, and (c) determination of similarities and differences. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) noted that the development of categories is intuitive and often influenced by the researcher's orientation

and understanding of the topic, therefore controls must be built into the study to ensure the reliability, or dependability, of the study.

Starting with a thorough reading of the data, simple conceptual categories were established. Key words, events, and processes helped to define relevant concepts while central premises, derived from the literature review, provided some pre-selected codes. Through this process, approximately twelve categories emerged. Conceptual categories for the study are shown in Figure 3.3. (See Appendix G for a complete listing of conceptual categories and primary codes.)

Figure 3.3 Conceptual Coding Categories

Leadership	Characteristics of Learning Communities
Change Process	District Improvement Process
School Improvement Process	Teaching and Learning
Superintendent Issues and Challenges	Design and Adoption
Developmental Stages of Improvement	Processes and Conditions
Assumptions about Schools and Schooling	Coordination and Support

However, such general coding did not provide enough analysis. Therefore, a second data review included an expansion of simple categories into more detailed sub-categories, or secondary coding. Generated from representative instances, similarities and differences, data were again coded using more specific categories nested within the more general ones. Characteristics of Learning Communities was a general conceptual category and contained many different kinds of characteristics. Derived from the literature, three key dimensions of learning communities were identified in the study: 1) development of relationships (Community of Relationships), 2) creation of a sense of purpose (Community of Mind), and 3) commitment to the focus (Community of Spirit). Considered primary coding categories within the conceptual theme, these three

dimensions were further expanded to secondary coding. Use of such sub-categories made comparisons easier and allowed themes to emerge more clearly. Figure 3.4 showed an expansion of the Characteristics of Learning Communities category.

Figure 3.4 Coding Categories for Characteristics of Learning Communities

Key Dimension	Definition	Secondary Coding
Development of Relationships (Community of Relationships)	Creating sustainable relationships over time.	Diversity and Cooperation
		Balance
		Networks
		Feedback
		Commitment to change
Creation of a Sense of Purpose (Community of Mind)	Establishment of collective values and a common sense of purpose.	Vision
		Shared values
		Shared decision making
		Guide for action
Commitment to the focus (Community of Spirit)	Keeping the group focused on the common work	Goals
		Stewardship
		Roles
		Partnerships

After coding was completed, a compilation of data across sources revealed emerging themes. This process of moving from data to meaning, or data transformation, represents a critical step in the study (Huberman & Miles, 1994). It is in this phase of the study that theory and data connect to each other (Strauss, 1987).

The refinement process included development of emerging themes into a set of statements about the study. In order to confirm these statements, a search through the data for confirming or disconfirming instances was completed along with an evaluation of the degree to which the theme was central to the study (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). For

example, a series of statements regarding the change from a traditional schooling model to a learning community model were developed based on the verbatim tapes of interviews with participants. (See Appendix H.) These statements, drawn from the analysis process, were then compared to the policy manual and strategic plan for confirmation. Where discrepancies existed, clarification was sought from other sources or from the participants themselves.

The final step of the analysis process included comparing the school improvement process to the district improvement process. The purpose of such an analysis was to determine similarities and differences between a smaller and larger unit of analysis. This analysis included comparing selected dimensions at the district level to those at the school level using the School Improvement Developmental Continuum developed by the researcher. (See Appendix A.) For example, one of the dimensions from the School Improvement Developmental Continuum was leadership. Data collected from participants, through observations, and by document review, revealed that this dimension was similar at both school and district levels, but a few minor differences emerged. (See Appendix I.

<div align="center">Trustworthiness Features</div>

The researcher has an obligation to report sufficient details about the research process so that others may judge the quality of the work. Throughout the study, research rigor must be addressed with regard to reliability, validity, and objectivity of the study. However, Lincoln and Guba (1985) redefined these constructs to fit the qualitative research paradigm. The four criteria are dependability, transferability, credibility, and confirmability. They have been called the criteria of soundness for qualitative research designs (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Consideration of these criteria provided opportunities for the researcher to ensure that systematic inquiry was rigorous and led to "truth value" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). Each dimension was addressed as it related to this study.

Reliability

An essential characteristic of research is the consistency, stability and dependability of results over time, or reliability (Rudestam & Newton, 1992). In qualitative research, the concept of traditional reliability is somewhat problematic; therefore, many qualitative researchers use the term dependability to address this issue (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). At issue is the degree of correlation between study results and data (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative research is context specific and often deals with human behavior. Neither context nor human behaviors are static; they are constantly changing. Thus, it is unlikely that any future replication of the study would result in the same or similar results. No matter the name—dependability or reliability—controls must be established as part of the overall study design to ensure a high degree of consistency between data collection, analysis, and study results (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

For this study, several controls increased the consistency between data collection and interpretation. First, an audit trail, as identified by Patton (1990), was used. This audit trail consisted of a detailed log including data collection and analysis details as well as decision matrices. Decisions about how to proceed with the study or the rationale for data collection procedures or subsequent analysis were recorded in this log. All data from the study are organized and available for review if requested.

Second, there was a constant checking and rechecking of data for confirming or disconfirming instances (Patton, 1990). Throughout the process, consideration was given to data not fitting into the pattern. The purpose of this strategy was to ensure that data included in the study were within parameters of the main patterns.

Finally, triangulation of data across data sources increased consistency. Triangulation, according to Marshall and Rossman (1995), is "the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point" (p. 144). This process involved comparing and cross-checking data across interviews, observations, and documents. Interview data were compared across participants to identify response patterns. The

district policy manual and strategic plan were examined in light of the district mission and vision. While there was an expectation of differences between data sources, the intent was to understand the differences and to identify consistencies within the overall pattern.

Validity

In research, validity is considered from an internal and external perspective. External validity is concerned with the application of study findings to other situations or groups while internal validity speaks to the fit between work done in the study and the findings. In the qualitative research paradigm, external validity is called transferability, while internal validity is labeled credibility (Merriam, 1994, 1998). Each is addressed separately in this study.

<div align="center">Transferability</div>

Transferability, or external validity, refers to the level at which findings from the study can be generalized to other groups or situations (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). In traditional research studies, the ability to transfer findings to other settings or groups is determined before the study because the researcher is seeking information about a sample in order to infer to a larger population. As assumptions are made explicit about the similarity between the study sample and the population, and sample size is determined, the researcher typically selects a level of significance at which broader generalizations can be made (Merriam, 1998).

However, in a qualitative research study, the researcher is not necessarily looking to transfer findings to a larger population. The decision to use a case study approach is made because the researcher wishes to examine one case in depth (Merriam, 1994). At issue is whether the results from a single case study can, or should, be compared to other, similar settings. There are several ways of thinking about this issue.

The degree to which the researcher is concerned with being able to generalize or transfer findings to other situations or settings must be considered (Bogdan & Biklen,

1998). If the researcher is more intent on developing universal statements about specific processes than in finding issues of commonality among settings, then the level of concern for transferability changes. Rather than seeking to establish the degree of transferability of study findings, the researcher begins to seek other settings and situations to which the study findings may be applicable (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Merriam, 1994).

Additionally, the scope of the investigation is considered and a determination made as to whether the study design documents details of a phenomenon or identifies where the phenomenon fits a schema. Some qualitative researchers desire only to describe things as they are and allow future researchers to explicate their anomalies. In other words, they simply are not interested in transferring the findings to any other situations or settings.

In this study, one of the purposes was to develop themes about the work of the superintendent in the development of a district level learning community. Primarily, the study sought to establish process descriptions at a single setting. There was no intent to generalize findings to other sites. However, should other researchers choose to apply study findings to other sites, two procedural controls were used in the study that should increase transferability of the findings.

These procedural controls included provision of sufficient detail about the research setting and conceptual categories as well as triangulation of data. Thick, rich descriptions of the setting can afford future researchers the opportunity to determine the extent of transferability. Trend data on community indicators were gathered and included in the description of the overall community of the research setting. A full description of the research process was detailed in the audit trail described in an earlier section.

Triangulation of data, also described in the prior section, was another control used to increase transferability. In order for transferability to occur, dominant patterns must be

verified through multiple sources. Such a verification process ensured that findings included in the study were indeed representative of the phenomenon.

<div align="center">Credibility</div>

Credibility is similar to internal validity in a traditional research paradigm and is the degree to which study findings match reality (Merriam, 1998). Correct identification of subjects and accurate descriptions of the topic are both critical to believability of the results. In this study, several strategies increased credibility of the findings. These strategies included careful selection and description of the research site, member checks, and peer review.

Early in the study, selection of an appropriate research setting was carefully structured. Marshall and Rossman (1995) noted that the criteria for selection must be systematically chosen and defensible. Procedures for sample selection influence who and what will be observed and ultimately what will be learned from the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Attention must be paid to obtaining a sample for the study representative of the phenomenon (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). A high degree of technical rigor must be applied at this critical stage (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

Selection of a research site for this study was done in a multi-step process. A profile relevant to the study was developed to include elements drawn from the conceptual framework and the literature review. The profile included use of multiple measures. Recommendations were sought from professional colleagues and, finally, constraints with the potential to influence the study were considered.

Secondly, accurate descriptions of the topic must be captured through the study and reported in the findings. It is through the researcher's descriptions that others will be immersed in the research setting and construct meaning from the results. As descriptions are generated, the researcher must apply intellectual rigor to develop working themes (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

This study used member checks and peer review to ensure that descriptions were accurately reported (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). The member check process was used when participants were asked to review interview transcripts and make corrections or add notes. Participants were also asked to review contextual descriptions and findings and provide feedback about the plausibility of study findings before publication.

Peer review was employed as the working themes were developed. Colleagues, or peers, were asked to critically question these themes for linkages between raw data, theory, and the real world. Critical friends examined the findings to ensure they were descriptive, relevant to the guiding questions of the study, and made sense.

Confirmability

The counterpart to objectivity in the traditional research paradigm is confirmability. It is the extent to which researcher bias can be controlled or removed as an influencing factor in study findings and implications. Researchers have an obligation to present findings reflective of the inquiry and not arising from researcher bias and assumptions (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Wolcott (1995) commented on the positive role that assumptions have in inquiry. When assumptions are explicit, they lend focus to the inquiry because they force the researcher to identify the perspectives being brought to the study. This criterion of soundness addresses questions about the role of the researcher in collection, analysis, and reporting on the study topic. The main concept for consideration is whether another researcher could review the data and reach similar conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The study process must include means to balance bias in interpretation (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). These strategies include explication of researcher bias and assumptions, maintaining a focus on the overarching purpose of the study, and actively seeking data that did not seem to fit the overarching themes.

In this study, the identification of assumptions and biases with the potential to impact the study began with a personal reflection. As study elements developed,

researcher perceptions, experiences and knowledge of schooling, district work cultures, and leadership could affect either study processes or content. These assumptions were broadly defined in the first chapter of the study. Awareness of operating assumptions often aids in the control for bias. To decrease the possibility of bias in the data collection process, a set of reflective questions were used as data were analyzed. These questions were:

1. Are the data collected neutral? Language used by the investigator is often reflective of the operating assumptions. This question afforded the opportunity to check for any instances where bias or personal assumptions may have influenced the study.
2. To what degree did fieldnotes contain value-laden language? The intent of observational notes is to describe the setting and what is occurring in the setting. Therefore, identification of evaluative language in fieldnotes might signal bias or unchecked assumptions of the investigator.
3. Could another investigator read the fieldnotes and identify any instances of either personal or theoretical bias?

Data analysis procedures included checking and cross-checking data between various sources for any hint of bias and for data representative of negative instances. Such instances allowed the researcher to seek alternative explanations of data.

Chapter Summary

In summary, the nature of the study was examined in light of an appropriate research design. The study contained complex elements such as leadership and development of a learning community. It was important to consider these elements in a holistic fashion because to do otherwise would have provided only a partial picture of how a learning community develops at the district level and the impact of the superintendent's work on such development. Using a qualitative case study design allowed the researcher to look holistically at developmental patterns of building a learning community while providing flexibility to add or limit the framework as themes emerged.

Data collection activities included interviews, document review, and observations. The district superintendent and other key participants were interviewed using an open-ended approach. Before and after interview sessions, observations were conducted of district and school routines. Organizational documents were collected from a variety of sources for review.

The goal of the data analysis process was to construct a conceptual picture of the development of a learning community through the perspective of the superintendent. First, data categories were established through an inductive analysis approach. Next, connections between data categories were examined as they related to elements of the literature. Finally, tentative themes were identified for further testing and refinement.

Rigor of the data analysis process was examined through the lenses of transferability, dependability, credibility, and confirmability. Several procedural measures were included to ensure validity and reliability of the study. These measures included, but were not limited to, careful selection of a research site, triangulation of data, member checks, explication of researcher assumptions and bias, a search for confirming and disconfirming instances in the data, and development of an audit trail. All of these strategies increased the likelihood that future researchers would have a solid framework upon which to consider transferability issues and the credibility of findings.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the connection between superintendent work and the development of a district learning community. The study was framed around a set of guiding questions and secondary questions. The questions specifically addressed in this study were:

1. How did change occur in the teaching and learning processes of a school district?

   a) What changes in teaching and learning occurred in the target district?

   b) Who initiated teaching and learning changes?

   c) How were the changes facilitated?2. How did the superintendent influence improvement in teaching and learning in the district?

   a) How did the superintendent determine improvement was needed?

   b) What strategies were used by the superintendent to facilitate improvement?

3. What were the similarities and differences between the improvement processes at the school level and at the district level?

   a) What were the dimensions of the improvement process at a district level?

   b) How were these dimensions like those of a school improvement process?

This chapter offered the context for the study, findings as related to the research questions, and a summary of the findings. The context section contained information about both setting and participants. Next, three discussion sections were included. The first discussion section addressed the character of change within the school district, the second section examined the emerging dimensions of a district learning community, and

the final section addressed the work of the superintendent in developing a learning community. The chapter concluded with a summary of the findings.

Context of the Study

The study examined the work of the superintendent and the development of a learning community at the school district level. Therefore, it was important to identify a relevant site where development of a learning community had been undertaken. Selection of a study site was purposeful and based on a relevant case profile. The primary participant for the study was the superintendent, who identified subsequent participants for the study.

Abbington School District was selected for the study for several important reasons. First, an examination of academic achievement indicators revealed that the district was demonstrating improvement. Secondly, recommendations from professional colleagues suggested that changes within the district appeared to represent movement toward becoming a learning community. Finally, the superintendent had been in his position for a reasonable amount of time (2½ years) and was willing to become involved in the study. For these reasons, the district was selected as the site for the study.

The Community

Abbington County was located in the northern section of a Southeastern state. The mostly rural county had a population of roughly 35,000 residents. Overall, the population increased about 30% from 1990 until 2000. Changes in the population were attributed to migration into the county rather than an increase in the birth rate.

Census data show that as the population increased, so did the diversity. The 2000 census showed that the county had a non-white population of approximately 12%. This represented an increase of 9.3% from 1990. The fastest growing ethnic group was the Hispanic population. From 1990 until 2000, the Hispanic population grew 11%. Projections forecast that the county will continue to grow over the next decade, and the

diversity will continue to increase. About 5% of the population did not speak English and of those, 63% spoke Spanish.

During 1997, approximately 25% of new babies were born to unwed mothers and the rate of babies born to teenage, unwed mothers was 11%. Teenage pregnancy statistics showed that the vast majority of babies were born to girls between the ages of 15 and 19. About 8% of these babies were born with low birth weight. This rate changed very little from 1983 to 1997. Low birth weight is often an indicator of poverty.

Economic indicators showed that the overall poverty rate for Abbington was 12%, but the greatest percentage of the population in the poverty range was elderly (age 65 or older), young (age 0 - 17), or belonged to a minority group (Black or Hispanic). The percentage of children in poverty rose over the past decade to its current rate of 15%.

While the annual median household income for the county was $34,000, more than 20% of households earned less than $10,000 annually. Over a five year period from 1992 until 1997, the per capita income for the county rose from just above $16,000 to just above $21,000. This was slightly lower than the state, the southeast region, and the nation.

The unemployment rate in the county had declined in recent years to less than 4%. This rate was lower than the state or the nation. Approximately 25% of the workforce commuted to work outside the county. The workforce was primarily employed in agriculture or livestock production and over the past decade, there was an expansion of local industries. Most of these new industries were high tech in nature. The second largest employer in the county was the school district, with approximately 700 employees.

A review of the educational attainment of the county population 25 years of age or older showed that approximately 40% of students had not completed high school and more than 20% had less than a ninth grade education. The majority of students not completing high school were minority (55%). Approximately 12% of people older than

25 had a bachelor's degree or higher and 4% obtained a graduate degree. The educational community consisted of the public school district, three private schools, a post secondary technical institute, and a regional college.

Abbington County School District

The Abbington County School District operated 10 schools, serving about 5,600 students living within the 300 square miles of county land. The student population of the district was mostly white (85%) with slightly more males (52%) than females (48%). Overall, district enrollment grew moderately from 1994 until 2000. The number of Hispanic students in Abbington increased by a little more than 5% while other ethnic groups remained fairly stable. The free and reduced lunch rate for the district was 32%. During the period between 1994 and 2000, this rate ranged from 31% to 34%.

The district offered several programs to meet student needs. Program participation rates from the 1999 - 2000 school year showed that approximately 14% of students were served in the special education program, 6% in the gifted program, 3% in a special instructional program for students in grades 1 - 3, and 4% in a remedial education program. Interestingly, the percentage of students in two programs designed to assist students not achieving academic success (Special Instructional Assistance and Remedial Education) declined over a six year period with the most dramatic reductions occurring in the past two years. See Figure 4.1 for program participation rates.

Figure 4.1: Abbington School District Program Participation Rates

Program	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Special Education	12.29	12.97	14.02	14.49	14.69	13.56
Gifted	5.34	4.57	4.15	5.24	5.77	5.86
Special Instructional Assistance	5.68	6.26	8.11	3.80	2.59	3.14

Remedial Education	5.28	6.91	5.79	8.54	6.67	3.52

A program for students with limited English proficiency served about 4% of the students. When comparing changes in participation rates from 1994 to 2000, this program showed a modest increase in the percentage of students served from 1994 to 2000. These data coincided with information about increasing enrollment of Hispanic students and was further supported by an increase in the overall Hispanic population in the community over the past decade. The district superintendent related that the increase in the Hispanic population began about a decade ago in response to the need for laborers in the livestock industry. Since that time, the Hispanic workforce has moved into other types of jobs such as construction and other service related industries. The increasing number of Hispanic students has created a challenge for the district. At one school, more than 60% of kindergarten students who pre-registered for the 2001 school year were Hispanic and one study participant felt it would soon be incumbent on teachers to be able to communicate with students and their families in Spanish. Community perception among "long-timers" was that the Hispanic population was increasing greater than demographic data indicated.

Academic achievement of students in the district was relatively high. District scores on standardized testing were above the national average in reading and mathematics for the six year period from 1994 to 2000. When compared to similar school systems across the state, Abbington had more students scoring above the national median in reading and math at both the third and fifth grade level. For the most recent data, 1999 - 2000, Abbington students exceeded state averages at grades 3, 5, and 8 in reading and mathematics. Percentile rank scores in reading ranged from the mid fifties to the high sixties for all years across all grades.

Reading scores were highest at third grade and lowest at the eighth grade level. Third and fifth grade percentile scores were generally in the low to mid 60s, while eighth grade scores consistently remained in the mid 50s. Mathematics percentile rank scores at the elementary level were generally higher than reading scores, ranging from a low of 61 to a high of 71. While middle school math scores were higher than reading scores, the score range was a little broader, from 50 to 62.

At the high school level, the percentage of students achieving passing scores on the state required Graduation tests was high. Students were required to take and pass five tests, in the areas of English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and Writing as one requirement for graduation. The tests were criterion-referenced and were developed to measure the degree to which students were mastering the required curriculum for the state. Most of the tests showed district passing rates to be in the mid to high nineties. Over the six year period from 1994 to 2000, passing rates for Abbington steadily increased on four of the tests (English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Studies, and Writing). In the fifth area (Science), there was a mixed trend which was consistent with state level trends.

The district also participated in two other criterion-referenced assessments, the Middle Grades Writing Assessment at eighth grade and the Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests at grades four, six, and eight. Both assessments were intended to determine how well students were meeting grade level expectations identified by the state.

Results from the eighth grade writing assessment show that, on average, Abbington students were meeting expectations. The percentage of students meeting or exceeding the expected target was about 81%. When compared with the state, there were more students in Abbington on target than across the state.

The Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests were administered in Reading, Mathematics, and Language. Approximately 80% of students were meeting or exceeding

expectations in reading at grades 4, 6, and 8. However, more than 40% of eighth grade students were not meeting expectations in mathematics.

District officials indicated that, while scores were fairly high, they masked many of the problems facing the schools. When the system began to disaggregate data and look at the performance of different groups of students, they began to identify areas where improvement was needed. The superintendent noted that "test scores cover up a multitude of sins." An example was given about an elementary school with a high Hispanic population where average test scores appeared to be on target. However, when the data were disaggregated, the principal determined that 75 - 80% of students going to the next grade level were below grade level expectations in reading. By looking at and using this kind of data, the superintendent was able to create a sense of urgency for principals and for teachers across the system. Schools and central level staff had developed action plans to address areas of deficit.

Outcome data for Abbington students showed that more were completing high school on time. This indicator, called the completion rate, measured what percent of students beginning high school in the ninth grade completed the twelfth grade in four years. This was an area of concern identified by study participants and validated by community data. District officials were concerned that the reason students did not complete high school was because they saw little connection between what they were doing in school and the expectations from the outside world. The district had taken several steps to address the problem, and over the past five years, it had begun to see strong results. The percentage of students completing high school on time has increased nearly 12 points.

A complementary indicator to the completion rate, the drop-out rate, had been reduced by over half within the past five years. The drop-out rate shows the percentage of students leaving school without completing a high school education. The rate of students dropping out of school in Abbington was reduced from 11% to just above 5%.

Part of this reduction was attributed to an intervention implemented by the superintendent. In Georgia, school attendance is mandatory until a student reaches the age of 16. The superintendent hired social workers and took some parents to court in order to address attendance problems.

About one-third of Abbington students attended state supported colleges or universities after high school and about 10% entered public technical schools. In order to gain admittance to these post-secondary institutions, students usually take the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT). The percentage of graduates taking this exam increased over a five year period from 1995 to 2000, and average SAT scores for the district increased by 69 points. More than two-thirds of Abbington students were eligible for the HOPE scholarship and about 30% of students required additional support when they entered post-secondary institutions. The district conducted focus groups to gather information from graduates after their first year of college in order to identify ways to improve preparation for post high school years.

In 2000, district revenues were about $42,000,000 with major funding sources being local taxes and state Quality Basic Education Act monies. The community recently passed a Special Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) for school construction and had generally been supportive of past bond referendums. The district built two new elementary schools and, in 2001, was working on plans for another elementary school, a new middle school, and a new high school. Per pupil expenditure had risen over the past five years to the current rate of $5,500.

Across the district, there were seven elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. All schools were accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Accrediting Commission (SACS) and were accredited with quality by the Georgia Accrediting Commission. A few of the elementary schools had a student enrollment of less than 300. The concept of smaller, neighborhood schools was supported strongly by the community.

At the time of the study, the grade configuration was traditional, with elementary schools housing grades kindergarten through five, middle schools housing grades six through eight, and high schools housing grades nine through twelve. However, there was a plan to begin moving sixth grade back to elementary schools; to reconfigure middle school grades to include grades seven, eight, and nine; and to limit high schools to grades ten, eleven, and twelve. The reason for this shift was a belief on the part of the district and community that students would be more developmentally grouped and staff members would be better able to meet student needs.

Teachers in Abbington County, on average, earned about $45,000 annually and worked a 190 day contract. They were mostly white females with more than 11 years of experience. About 60% of teachers in the district held advanced graduate degrees. Staff development time was spent primarily in planning for school improvement and on school governance issues. Recently, the district developed Quality Councils at each school. These councils were intended to provide an open forum for all staff members to address issues ranging from the definition of quality work for students to the role each person had to assume in order to support the work of students.

Abbington County Schools were governed by a five member Board of Education. Board members were representative of five educational districts across the county and elected for a four-year term. The district superintendent served as the executive officer of the board. The current board was considered by participants to be supportive of district educational processes and to be well informed about the scope of education across the district. As a collective group, they were described as involved, willing to listen, and collaborative with district staff members. According to one participant, there was a good working relationship between the board and the superintendent.

District staff were organized into six departments. These departments were: Business, Curriculum, Nutrition, Special Education, Technology, and Transportation. Each department had a head, usually called the Director, who reported directly to the

Superintendent. Each was given the authority and responsibility to do their job, but each was encouraged to talk with the superintendent about specific issues or areas where critical questions arose.

During the 1998-99 school year, Abbington established a continuous quality framework intended to increase involvement of staff in decision making and to develop an instructional improvement plan. Staff members conducted classroom observations, student interviews, and reviewed student work and test data. Analysis of these data led the staff to determine that even though test scores were high, students lacked engagement in their work, did not persist when the tasks were difficult, and that teachers were often bored with traditional teaching strategies. Therefore, a new instructional framework was designed to focus on quality for students that would motivate them to meet or exceed scores of high performing systems. This framework required a reorganization of the instructional system, redesign of the teacher's role, and careful planning of staff development topics and resources to prepare teachers and for success as they implemented the framework.

<div align="center">Participant Profiles</div>

Participants for the study included the district superintendent, a central office administrator, a building principal, and a classroom teacher. The district superintendent agreed to participate in the study and recommended other participants. All participants were white, two were male and two were female. All participants held advanced graduate degrees. Interviews took place over a four month period. Interview protocols were developed and a few of the same questions were asked of all participants. Interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed for coding. This section provided a profile of each participant. In order to protect the confidentiality of information, each participant was assigned a pseudonym.

Participant 1: Superintendent

The primary participant for the study, Dr. Hayes, was the superintendent. He had been in the district for approximately three years. Previously, he had taught high school and had been a superintendent in another Georgia district. In addition, he had experience outside the education community as a sales manager, plant manager, and vice president of a company. He was described by staff as hard working, forward thinking, and committed to improving learning for students.

Dr. Hayes believed Abbington to be a district in transition. During his tenure there, he experienced changing student demographics, increasing mandates from the state, and most importantly, internal shifting in the strategic direction of the district. When he interviewed with the local Board of Education prior to his appointment, he talked with them about his vision for teaching and learning. That vision included creating a responsive organization focusing primarily on engaging students and pressing them toward a higher level of achievement. Acceptance of his vision has taken time and has meant a change in the perception of employees about the core business of the district.

Dr. Hayes considered himself to be a lifelong learner. His message to principals and other district leaders was, "If you don't read, you can't lead." His office contained a large number of books and professional journals on a variety of topics. He appeared to be familiar with much of the current literature about teaching and learning. For example, he was knowledgeable about topics such as informal reading assessments, performance assessment tasks, and flexible grouping of students. However, he was equally at ease discussing the concepts of total quality management for improving the organizational culture.

Student engagement was clearly a key issue for Dr. Hayes. For him, getting students to "buy-in" to work that was challenging and relevant would yield results such as improved attendance, increased high school completion rates, and an overall increase in student achievement measures. In the time he had been in the district, an increase was

realized in some of these indicators. While still not satisfied with the present level of student engagement at the middle and high school levels, Dr. Hayes indicated that his focus was primarily on the elementary level in order to build a "foundation for the future."

One participant identified Dr. Hayes as a "researcher." His use of data as leverage for change, his knowledge of current topics, and his tendency to visit classrooms to view the type of work being provided to students were a departure from previous district superintendents. One participant stated, "Dr. Hayes looks at the big picture, and helps the community and board to understand where we are going."

Visibility and involvement in the community were just a few of the ways Dr. Hayes "walked the vision." He often attended Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings and spoke to the community about the district vision and mission. For example, when the district was beginning implementation of a new approach to reading at the elementary level, he went to PTA meetings and presented local school achievement data to help parents and teachers understand why a change was needed and how it would benefit students. As a result, there was acceptance by parents and the wider community for the new model.

Dr. Hayes' visibility in schools is also important to understand. Dr. Hayes often visited school buildings after hours in order to get a sense of what was important at each school. His belief that school culture could be seen in the icons visible in the school is supported in the literature on organizational theory (Bolman & Deal, 1991). He also asked principals to visit other schools so they could begin to get a sense of the messages being sent to the community about each school.

When visiting classrooms during the school day, Dr. Hayes often asked questions of teachers about the purpose of work assignments and helped them to reflect on ways future assignments might be structured for a higher level of quality. He focused less on the instructional process and more on the responses of students. Dr. Hayes was openly

curious about whether students would persist with a difficult task until they reached a higher standard. Such questioning might appear to be intimidating, but both the classroom teacher and principal interviewed noted that his demeanor was more collegial than authoritarian and he encouraged open and shared dialogue.

Overall, Dr. Hayes appeared to have a strong sense of the district culture and had developed a plan to address identified gaps. He said, "Together we are learning to teach differently." By this, he meant that teachers, as well as principals and district administrators, were encouraged and supported to redesign their work to have more impact on student learning.

Participant 2: Central Administrator

Elizabeth Davis was the director of curriculum and had spent her educational career in Abbington County. Prior to becoming a central office administrator, Elizabeth had been a high school teacher. She began work in central administration as a special education director and had been working in the area of curriculum for sixteen years. In all, Elizabeth was in her thirtieth year in an educational capacity. Knowledgeable and articulate about issues facing the district in curriculum and instruction, she was openly supportive of the changes that had been made and excited about some of the results beginning to emerge.

Abbington was described as a child-oriented school system working to meet the needs of individual students. Elizabeth emphasized that the district had high regard for the professional judgement of teachers but indicated that this had not always been the case. Prior to the arrival of Dr. Hayes, the district was focused on management issues and independent teachers were "squelched" by an expectation that workbooks or worksheets were the primary means for instruction. However, over the past two years, the district had provided extensive training for teachers in decision making, and created a teacher appraisal process encouraging teachers to take an active role in planning their own professional growth.

Planning and providing staff development were critical aspects of improving student achievement, according to Elizabeth. Designing staff development to support the focus on students and improve the quality of work provided to them was one of the strategic objectives of the district. Abbington dedicated a large portion of grant funds for teacher professional growth (about $400 per teacher annually). These funds were used to send teachers for training or to hire consultants to come into the district and work with teachers on a variety of topics. As an example, both the principal and teacher noted that the district had provided many, different training opportunities for those involved in the literacy collaboratives in order to provide system-wide consistency for implementation of the instructional framework. In addition, during the 2000 - 2001 school year, the district provided early release days specifically designed to support school improvement efforts. On those days, students left school at 11:30 a.m., and teachers spent the remainder of the day engaged in training sessions or working on school improvement activities.

Teacher involvement in district curriculum work was seen as another avenue to improve student achievement. Elizabeth spoke of the development of math performance tasks and accompanying rubrics, creation of writing alignment guides, and establishment of local curriculum based on national standards as ways teachers were routinely involved in creating quality work for students. All of these activities engaged teachers across educational levels (elementary, middle, and high) and fostered a sense of collaboration between central administration and the schools.

Elizabeth considered Dr. Hayes, the superintendent, to be quite knowledgeable about curricular and instructional issues. She stated that he related easily to information that was shared with him and often offered suggestions to enhance the work being done. She also noted that he could routinely be found in classrooms across the district trying out new strategies with small groups of students or observing teachers working with students. According to Elizabeth, Dr. Hayes placed a strong emphasis on literacy across the system and was focused on results for students.

At least one important transition in leadership was identified by Elizabeth. She characterized it as a change in the role of the principal from manager to instructional leader. As an example, she discussed changes in staff meetings with principals. In the past, these meetings had been mainly focused on such things as impending dates for reports, preparation for upcoming activities, and other operational issues. Since the hiring of Dr. Hayes, staff meetings consisted more of developmental activities designed to engage principals in reflection on current research and to begin considering applicability of the research to their particular school setting. While the transition from manager to instructional leader had been somewhat "traumatic," Elizabeth felt that principals were now better equipped to support change in the instructional process.

Participant 3: Principal

Stephen Richards had been an educator in Abbington for 22 years, and he had been an elementary principal for eight years. Stephen was a middle school principal prior to becoming an elementary principal. His school, Shamrock Elementary School, had about 600 students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Measures of student achievement revealed that students performed well on standardized tests but, as principal, Stephen felt there was more the school could do to address student needs. The student population of the school was changing as more Hispanic students moved into the county, and Stephen saw this change as a challenge for teachers who had to modify instructional practices to meet student needs.

Stephen's school was inviting, and it was easy to see that character education was a school-wide focus. The marquee outside the school contained the "word of the week" and all the character traits were listed on cards hanging from the ceiling and visible to all who entered the front door. The school began implementing character education before required to do so by the state. Stephen noted that character education had helped improve the relationships between students and teachers and that translated into fewer office referrals for discipline issues.

Fewer office referrals allowed Stephen to be more visible in classrooms and to take a more active role in the instructional process. His example of spending part of a day helping a first grade teacher work with individual students on reading reflects the changing role of the principals in Abbington. In the past, much of his time was spent on administrative duties such as completing paperwork, but that has become a shared responsibility with the assistant principal, thus freeing both administrators to be in classrooms. There was an expectation by the superintendent that principals should be aware of what student results teachers are getting because of their instructional practices, and that the best way to do so was to observe or become an active participant in classrooms.

Stephen readily admitted he is reading more professional books and articles than ever and attributed that to higher expectations of the district superintendent. In the past, Stephen noted "somebody else made the decisions, and we just followed them." Now, principals have been asked to become leaders of both structural and cultural change. This expectation has meant that principals, such as Stephen, must grapple with more systemic issues such as how to support teachers in their implementation of new strategies, maintain focus on long term outcomes for students, and secure resources that appropriately match school-wide needs. He is being asked, at the school level, to do the same type of work that must be done at the system level if improvement is to occur and be sustained.

Today, teachers at Stephen's school spend their work days looking at student data and working in cross-grade study teams to identify expectations for student learning. The school has begun to increase expectations for students, especially kindergartners. Through professional dialogue about student achievement data, staff discovered that younger children could do much more than previously thought. Because this kind of teacher work was a departure from past practice, Stephen noted that not all teachers were comfortable, or willing, to engage in such tasks. However, high on Stephen's priority list

was the need for staff members to communicate and collaborate with each other about curricular and instructional issues.

Stephen identified a set of beliefs as crucial to the improvement process at both the school and system levels. At the system level, Dr. Hayes initiated a process to develop system-wide belief statements. A representative group of stakeholders facilitated development of the belief statements and then everyone had an opportunity to examine the statements and make recommendations for improvement before they were finalized.

Principals used the same process at the school level to develop school-wide belief statements. Stephen noted that, in the past, teachers had gone through the process of establishing beliefs for an accreditation visit, but those beliefs were not strongly connected to the day-to-day work of teachers. However, through this reexamination process, the statements had been narrowed to more clearly define a focus for the school and to become a guide for action.

Clearly, Stephen was working toward restructuring his work as principal to be more in line with the superintendent's expectations. By spending more time on instructional priorities, focusing on student results, and fostering collaboration among teachers at different grade levels, Stephen was positioning the school to become an active, cohesive unit focused on meeting student needs.

The working relationship between the school and district office was important, and both principal and superintendent noted the interdependent nature of this work. Stephen described his relationship with the superintendent as that of professional colleague, and he indicated that the superintendent spent a significant amount of time getting to know each principal and school community well when he first arrived. The superintendent noted his expectation that, over time, central office administrators would assume the role of coach and mentor to staff members in the local school to support the improvement efforts of the school and in order to also gain a broader understanding of the issues schools were facing.

Participant 4: Classroom Teacher

Elaine Martin was a third grade teacher at High Falls Elementary School. She had been teaching in Abbington for twelve years and had just completed her thirty-second year in education. She had previously taught in another Georgia county and had administrative experience.

The school where Elaine taught was a small school, with an enrollment of about 400 students. Nearly half of the students at the school received free or reduced lunches. Standardized test scores for the school revealed that average scores were lower than the system and that achievement across content areas was uneven over a four year period. Approximately 25% of students were served in remedial programs.

Elaine saw the role of the teacher as changing dramatically since the arrival of Dr. Hayes. She described the change as a "total change in philosophy" and noted that it had been difficult for some of the older teachers to "switch gears." Elaine believed the greatest change was in expectations for teachers. In the past, teachers had been expected to stay within the guidelines provided by district leadership, and now teachers were expected to make instructional decisions around the individual needs of students and to design work that would not only engage students, but also push them toward more thoughtful responses. For example, she cited the change from a basal reader to more flexible grouping. Use of a basal primarily allowed the teacher to be in control of traditional reading groups, but with the new reading program, students had more freedom to choose books, thus removing some of the control from the teacher. Such a change forced teachers to rethink how they could measure reading comprehension and teachers, such as Elaine, often felt uncomfortable with assessment techniques based more on observation than objective grading.

Apparently, for Elaine, there was an uneasiness associated with the change. While she indicated it was a positive change for the school and students, her level of concern was primarily personal about how the changes would impact her teaching style

and classroom. She stated that, "You had to kind of plan your own program, so it felt like a little control was leaving the teacher." Often the books students chose to read were unfamiliar to her, and she had to work on the type and format of questioning to determine whether students were grasping the necessary skills and knowledge.

Over the past two years, Elaine noted teachers had different opportunities for input at both the district and school levels and felt district leaders were moving the schools in the right direction. Opportunities to discuss the benefits of initiatives such as Writer's Workshop, Reading Workshop, and Literacy Collaboratives were provided at the school level during teacher workdays. Like Stephen, Elaine considered the increased dialogue among teachers to be helpful for both school improvement and professional development purposes.

Support for teachers to begin redefining their work was also a prevalent issue. Elaine felt the district was reaching out to help teachers by providing them with grants to return to school for additional training, providing literacy specialists at the school level to help plan new approaches to instruction, and providing more materials. At High Falls, Elaine stated that teachers spent an average of four hours per week, beyond contracted time, to "learn new strategies, perfect them, and talk about ways to implement them in the classrooms."

Section Summary

This section examined the context of the setting for the study. Abbington, like many districts in the state, was grappling with a number of issues. Changing demographics, rapid growth, increased expectations for schools, and dissatisfaction with the status quo were all issues seen in Abbington. Interestingly, Abbington chose to address these issues through empowerment of teachers to create student work that would be meaningful, and engaging, and would encourage students to persist, even when the work became highly challenging. Common themes across study participants included a focus on students, a commitment to learning for everyone, a reconceptualization of roles

for all district employees, and broader involvement of the community in the decision making process.

<div align="center">Findings</div>

The purpose of this study was to explore the work of the superintendent in developing a district level learning community. The overarching research questions were designed to look at the change process within a targeted district, the similarities and differences between the improvement process at the school and district levels, and the work of the superintendent related to teaching and learning in the district.

Data were collected primarily through interviews, document review, and observation. Interviews were conducted with the district superintendent, a central office administrator, a principal, and a classroom teacher. Document review included the strategic plan, district and school mission and belief statements, the policy manual, and a school handbook. Observations were conducted prior to and after interview sessions. The observations occurred in schools and at district offices of the participants.

Through data reduction and analysis procedures, themes across data sources emerged. Themes were grouped according to research questions and structured into three sections of findings. Sections included the character of change, the development of a learning community at the district level, and the work of the superintendent.

<div align="center">Character of Change</div>

One set of research questions addressed the overarching issue of change in order to better understand the broader context for teaching and learning in a targeted district. Beginning to understand what changes were made as well as procedural aspects of the change process guided thinking about the work of the superintendent to create a responsive organization that achieves results for students. Three facets of change were examined in this section and included: a) understanding the framework for change: b) looking at how the change process was facilitated, and c) considering participant perspectives on change. Key questions considered in this section included:
How did change occur in the teaching and learning processes of a school district?

a) What changes in teaching and learning occurred in the target district?

b) Who initiated teaching and learning changes?

c) How were the changes facilitated?

Framework for Change

It is, perhaps, important to understand the framework for change in Abbington. According to participants, the district had a long leadership history that had been "command and control," had been focused primarily on operational aspects of schooling, and had been slow to react to the shifting nature of the student and community population. Abbington was not unlike many other districts across the state, and indeed the nation. What set Abbington apart from other districts was the manner in which the district staged the change process and the deliberate structuring of systemic support mechanisms to ensure continuation of change efforts.

Part of the impetus for change came from state expectations. Dr. Hayes explained the sense of urgency for change in the following way:

> We've got a governor and a legislature that's not doing anything differently than they've ever done, but they are talking about a different kind of result than we've ever been asked to produce before. Nobody's ever asked us to do that publicly before. I don't think that's unreasonable, but to do that, we can't continue to do what we've done because if we do, we'll just get what we've gotten in the past. We've got to do something differently here if every child is going to make a year's progress. We've got to organize and teach differently.

Sarason (1990) found that a singular focus on classroom change without regard to the structure and culture of the broader organization typically resulted in minimal improvement or an inability of individuals to sustain change over time. Anderson (1997) noted, "neither top-down system changes nor bottom-up school changes alone can lead to improvements in student achievement. What is needed is system change specifically targeted to support the improvement of classroom practice" (p. 48).

Early in the change process, district officials in Abbington made a critical decision to focus on student work. In the following example, Dr. Hayes explained how Abbington came to focus on student work as a force for change:

> We spend a lot of time in our system, in principal's meetings, talking about core business—if you get that wrong, it doesn't matter what you do after that. If you get that wrong, then it's based on the wrong premise to start with, so we talk about what our core business is — we discuss it. Our core business is something we want to control. There's no way our core business could ever be something beyond our control because then we have no way to improve it or change it. So, that's why we looked at student work. That is the one thing that teachers decide, day by day, what they are going to ask children to do. They have total control over that. We feel if they can put some quality into that and change the way they view the work they give students that eventually we'll get at some of the problems that manifest themselves at high school, like the drop-outs.

As the group began to define students as primary customers of the district, and talk about issues such as student attendance, the quality of student work, and student drop-out rates, it became evident that current practices were not creating the results that district officials wanted. As one participant stated, "We had to go back to ground zero, because the focus was never on children, it was on textbooks and covering material." As the focus shifted to meeting the needs of students at the classroom level, the superintendent also began to create a sense of urgency for central level administrators about the amount and type of support needed from a system perspective. In this study, participants readily identified changes at the classroom level and in the culture and structure of organizational practice. Identified changes were classified as change in strategy, change in structure, or change in culture.

Changes in strategy represent "first order" changes. Typically, first order changes in educational organizations affect services provided directly to students, primarily through curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Leithwood et al., 2001). Kanter (1997) described these kinds of changes as change projects and defined them as "discrete, specific streams of action designed to address a particular problem or need" (pp.4-5).

Figure 4.2 shows the most prevalent changes in teaching and learning strategies identified by the participants in the study.

Figure 4.2 Changes in Strategies Identified by Participants

FROM	TO
Paper and pencil tests.	Performance assessment tasks.
Whole group, lecture style teaching.	Instruction in small, flexible student groups.
Rigid, structured guidelines for lessons.	Choices based on student need and system curriculum.
Teacher directed instructional practices.	Student oriented instructional practices.
Recall questions to check for understanding.	Questions requiring application and synthesis.
Many curricular concepts.	Fewer curricular concepts, more depth.

Changes listed in Figure 4.2 were made in order to push students and teachers to higher levels of performance and were visible signs to the community that expectations were changing. Dr. Hayes expected teachers to "teach to higher standards, and structure the work in a way that causes kids to think." Some of the staff development provided for teachers was to help them "understand that what they've always done is teach at the knowledge level" but that they needed to think about the bigger concepts students should grasp and about how the work should be structured so students would be engaged in the work and persist even when it was hard. Elaine Martin, the classroom teacher, stated it this way:

> Reading has been a big concern for us. We had some very low readers, poor underachievers and it seemed that what we were doing wasn't making much of a difference. We wanted to see a difference in the whole county. We wanted scores to improve, but more than that, we wanted children to become better readers, to be more interested in going to the library to choose books they want to read. They (district officials) are expecting the work of students to be a better quality and expectations usually bring results. Quality work doesn't have to be perfection, but

shows that students know where they can go for help and what they do to become better.

The strategic plan included numerous examples of district plans for first order changes. Listed below are examples from the district strategic plan:

a) Develop standards based, results-oriented language arts curriculum.
b) Develop standards based, results-oriented mathematics curriculum.
c) Train teachers to develop and provide quality work for students.
d) Train teachers to design assessments to measure students' level of understanding.
e) Create quality work that is compelling and engaging for all students.

The second type of change, structural, has been called "second order" change. Second order changes are made in the structures, policies, or procedures and either support or detract from the services provided in first order changes (Leithwood et al., 2001). Typically, structural changes have organizational impact and success is dependent on how well changes are linked to each other to support actions of the organization (Kanter, 1997). Structural changes suggest the boundaries for decision making within the context of the environment (Fiol & Lyles, 1985). Figure 4.3 delineates structural changes identified in the study.

Figure 4.3 Changes in Structures Identified by Participants

FROM	TO
Random selection of materials and use of resources.	Focused use of resources aligned with goals.
Policy as narrowly written rules.	Policy as a broad framework for decision making.
Limited monitoring of student achievement.	Frequent monitoring of student achievement.
Role of support staff as inspectors.	Role of support staff as coaches and mentors.

Structural changes were identified by participants and then cross-checked against the district policy manual and strategic plan. For example, both the principal and the

superintendent remarked about the change in how policy was written and implemented,

but it was also addressed in the strategic plan. According to Dr. Hayes:

> Policy is there for a guide, not a Bible—it's not in stone—commandments
> that came down. It's there as a guide. I try to write policy broadly so that
> principals have the flexibility to deal with various issues within the context
> of the problem. Instead of trying to mandate specific actions (that's trying
> to pass the buck and somebody's not accountable), we are trying to create
> an organization of thinkers.

In the strategic plan, the following objectives addressed the changes in policy: a)
Eliminate barriers to all collaboration in policies and procedures.
> b) Review and ensure that policies and practices of the district demonstrate
> commitment to ongoing training and development for all employees in the
> district.
> c) Define existing limits and, where possible, create more flexibility within the
>   system and at the building level–as presented by existing policies, procedures,
>   programs, and practices.

Structural changes, as identified in the study, were primarily initiated at the central

level. These changes affected the work of the schools, such as the focused use of

resources and broadly written policy, but were intended to signal district employees that

the traditional way of doing business was changing and different results were expected.

The changes also suggested a shift in emphasis from "how to" questions to "why"

questions. For example, Dr. Hayes began to question purchases made by schools. He

instituted a procedure causing school principals to reflect on the connection between

acquisition of resources, school goals, and the research base. Stephen Richards, the

principal, described the process of justifying how funds were spent like this:

> He (superintendent) just will not fund something that is not in accordance
> with our beliefs. We have to justify how we spend our monies. Anytime
> we send in a request for funds, we have to justify how it is being used,
> how it meets our system goals and objectives, how it is going to benefit
> our students, and help us meet our school goals and objectives. What gets
> inspected is respected.

Dr. Hayes felt strongly about this change in the allocation of resources. He stated:

> I refuse to buy stuff that doesn't somehow stem from a goal or a belief.
> We don't have enough resources to waste them and if somebody hasn't
> clearly thought through what they are going to do with something when

they get it into a classroom, I'm not buying it. They've got to think through how they're going to use it, how it's going to improve what the kids are currently doing, and what difference it's going to make in the kid's work and communicate that to me.

These kind of changes helped district leaders communicate to school leaders how the system was changing to become more responsive but also that the level of accountability had increased (Schlechty, 2001).

As the third type of change, cultural change represents movement toward shaping, or reshaping, behavior within an organization (Conner, 1998). Cultural changes are generally few and infrequent as they tend to create a turbulent internal environment (Leithwood et al., 2001). Schlechty (2001) noted that cultural change can enhance the capability of an organization to embrace new and perhaps revolutionary concepts and beliefs and for individuals to work together in ways that have previously been unknown. Cultural change is essential when changes in strategy and structure are beyond what the current organizational environment can support (Zohar,1997).

Evidence of cultural changes were reported by participants in this study and were evidenced in the strategic plan. The following objectives from the district strategic plan show planned changes in the culture:

a) Create opportunities for staff to explore and develop concepts surrounding the role of teacher as inventor and designer of student work.
b) Develop and implement strategies for educating the community about the purpose of schools and about the roles in the family and community as guarantors of support for children.
c) Support efforts that improve the ability of teachers and building level administrators in learning new competencies and skills.

Dr. Hayes may have expressed cultural change when he stated, "We are changing our organization from one where people were inspectors and controllers to one where people are committed to working together to create quality work at all levels." In the past, the district had been able to obtain compliance from its employees, students, and the community but, according to Dr. Hayes, there was no real commitment to anything. He described the change in focus like this:

The focus for our system staff—we've changed from an organization where we were inspectors and controllers—to one of commitment. We could get compliance. In the past they had compliance to everything, but they had no commitment to anything they were doing. Now, we're trying to get commitment from our teachers and our kids that in the long run we think will influence student achievement.

The cultural change was gradual and made up of smaller changes such as valuing the input and involvement of all employees in decision making processes, creating responsive and flexible structures, allowing for experimentation with new instructional strategies and techniques, and attempting to restructure the roles and responsibilities of teachers and others.

Abbington's superintendent set out to deliberately establish a change agenda for the district, but he did not mandate change. As Elizabeth Davis, central office administrator, noted, "Time has had to reveal exactly what he is about." By this she meant that although the superintendent had not forced change, over time he had created conditions necessary for productive change to occur. The framework for change in Abbington was built on freeing employees to see the possibilities open to them, focusing the use of resources, providing opportunities for growth, and setting higher expectations across the organization.

Facilitation of Change

Procedural aspects of change were more difficult to pinpoint in Abbington. Facilitation of change was accomplished primarily through the work of the superintendent in empowering central staff, school leaders, and teachers to focus on students and determine the best way to proceed, based on documented research and data. Elizabeth Davis, the central administrator, noted that:

Dr. Hayes spent the first six months or so evaluating and sizing the system up and finding out what approaches were being used here. He slowly, but surely, began to work with central office staff members and with school leaders to help them understand that they have to be able to make decisions that are based on data, the best research available, and best practice research.

Empowerment of staff to focus on students began with opportunities for collaboration and shared decision making. Soon after his arrival, Dr. Hayes established a local school advisory council at each school in the district. Elizabeth Davis, the central office administrator, remarked on the evolution of these councils:

> One of the first things Dr. Hayes did when he came into our system was to establish a local school council. For that first year, anybody in the local schools who wanted to could be a part of those councils. Now there is a certain size and structure and teachers on these councils have been trained to be decision makers, so we are seeing a more collegial kind of working relationship.

Elaine Martin, the classroom teacher, saw the work of these local advisory school councils in a more practical fashion. She described their work in this way:

> They (school council members) look at different programs coming into the school and talk about whether they are being beneficial or not. Teachers had opportunities for input into whether we thought a program would be helpful to our students before we implemented it. For example, the group talked about Reading Recovery before it was implemented. They talked about the importance of reading and what was the best way to reach children in order to see progress. The group also looked at what quality work was and came up with what it looked like. Then that information went to the county and the county is coming up with what they feel, with input from everywhere, is quality work.

For Stephen Richards, principal, advisory councils promoted productive change through data work. According to him, the main focus for the council was school improvement and he described the work of the group in this way:

> They take data (like observation surveys and writing rubric data as well as test data), look at it, analyze it, and then they disseminate it back out to work teams and grade levels to get some input from them about where we need to improve. We have come to realize how powerful that group is in studying the school and looking at what we can do.

While each participant had a somewhat different view of the local school advisory councils, common themes were collaboration and empowerment. Van der Bogert (1998) suggested that collaboration often causes isolated individuals (such as classroom teachers) to stop leading separate lives and discover a common and compelling focus.

Through conversation and shared experiences, opportunities to frame and re-frame issues facing the group, can come the beginning of organizational learning necessary for a school or district to fully achieve its mission (Schlechty, 2001).

Leithwood et al. (2001) defined organizational learning as one "of sense-making in which information from the environment is first perceived, then encoded, interpreted, stored, and/or retrieved for application to some learning" (p. 32). In order to foster organizational learning, collaboration is important (Rosenholtz, 1989). While collaboration can take many forms, teachers and staff learn from each other as they work to define critical issues for the school and more importantly, as they begin to consider solutions that will help the group reach a higher standard (Schlechty, 2001).

In the case of Abbington, increased collaboration at the local school level occurred because of a district requirement for local school councils, but out of that requirement came a common focus on students and their work. The need to make changes in instructional practices and the development of a plan to support those changes became a driving force for subsequent actions taken by the district.

Empowerment of teachers was a second theme arising from participants about local school councils. Through local school councils Abbington was able to channel its people resources toward change-related goals. The superintendent wanted to make decisions that would create long term positive results for students and the district as well as increase the commitment of others to the decisions and changes that were made. Therefore, he empowered both individuals and groups by creating a climate and a process where they could help to shape the course of the district.

Empowerment is not a personal characteristic possessed by an individual or group, it is instead a process with two essential prongs. First, there must be receptivity for qualified input on the part of those making the decisions. Second, there must be a process whereby those who have valuable input can provide it to the decision makers (Conner, 1998). Because the superintendent fostered an environment where individuals

and groups felt their input was valued, there was a stronger sense of trust than had existed

before, and recognition by others that they could indeed influence the outcomes of critical

decisions.

Collaboration and empowerment of teachers at the local schools, by themselves,

were not sufficient to create the responsive district the superintendent had in mind.

Therefore, Dr. Hayes worked with the local Board of Education to develop a set of board

belief statements and to restructure the manner in which board members conducted the

business of the district. After the beliefs were developed, the statements were posted on

the wall behind the area where the board met each month and included the following:

> a) The primary purpose of schools is to create tasks that are intellectually
> engaging and that result in each student's learning content, knowledge, and
> skills that the community indicates should be acquired at continuously higher
> levels.
> b) Relationships among board members and between board members and the
> superintendent should inspire confidence among the public that the business of
> the school district is being conducted by thoughtful and responsible men and
> women who respect and trust each other and seriously consider each other's
> views, even when they may disagree.
> c) Teachers are leaders whose responsibility is to identify, create, and design
> activities that engage students and that result in students learning what it is
> intended that they learn.
> d) Principals are leaders of leaders and, as such, are expected to communicate and
> model to teachers and other staff who work with them the vision that guides the
> district and the specific mission that their school is charged with pursuing in order
> to realize this vision.

These belief statements provided a strong focus for board members in their work

each month and sent a powerful message to local schools and staff members about

expectations for teachers and school leaders. Using them as a frame began a

transformation in how time was spent in board meetings as well as the kind of topics

discussed. Dr. Hayes described the evolution this way:

> Our board has taken on a whole different atmosphere than it was at one
> time. It's more a learning environment, when they present, it is not a
> micro-managing environment. As things come before the board, they want
> to be able to answer the question at board meetings, "What have we done
> here tonight that makes any difference at all for student achievement and

in the work we give our kids?" If they can't come up with some answers
for that at our board meetings, then the question becomes, "Are we talking
about the right things or do we need to redirect our board meetings?"
While our outline may be the same because there are certain things we
have to do (when you do the minutes, when you pay the bills, when people
appear), the content and meaning has changed. A lot of that stuff used to
take an hour or two but now we do it in about, I would guess, thirty
seconds on a consent agenda. We talk regularly, and they see all that
ahead of time so we get into more substantive issues. I'm excited about
the change.

A focus on student work was the common purpose for the local board of
education as well as the local schools. At the local schools, the focus on student work
was directed toward engaging students in work that was meaningful and relevant.
Participants indicated that prior to the arrival of Dr. Hayes, students had not been
authentically engaged in the learning process and as a consequence, student attendance
had been less than acceptable and many students dropped out before completing high
school. One participant described authentic engagement as "work worthy of doing
because it has value." Elizabeth Davis, the central administrator, talked about the
rationale behind using student engagement as a compelling focus for change. Davis
elaborated:

We have become involved system-wide in an effort to create quality work
for students. We believe teachers have to be the inventors of that quality
work. There are too many children in our school system, and everywhere,
I suppose, that get in their cars in the afternoon and talk to their parents
about how bored they have been in school that day. We think it is our
responsibility to change that. In order to do that, we have to figure out
ways to create work that students will find challenging, that they will find
meaningful, in which they can be engaged, and in which they will persist,
even when it becomes so challenging that it is difficult.

According to Schlechty (2001), student work that is both compelling and engaging
results in higher levels of learning for students and a strong sense of student self-
satisfaction. Through the focus on student work, Abbington has seen an increase of 69
points on the Scholastic Assessment Test as well as an increase in the number of students
participating in the test. At the elementary level, students are learning to read much

earlier, and there has been a change in attendance, that the superintendent described this way:

> It is like night and day—to hear a child crying when their mom comes to check them out of school early because they don't want to leave. They don't want to miss this last writing exercise or whatever it was the teacher had them doing. That's different. In my first few months here, I noticed kids leaving early a lot. We still have some that leave early, but in classrooms where they are doing quality work, it's like pulling teeth to get them to leave. They are enjoying it, and I think that makes a difference.

By focusing on creating quality student work, especially in the area of literacy, teachers in Abbington needed different ways of thinking about their work with students and different ways to determine what results they were getting with students. Therefore, as local school councils began to focus on data from classrooms and consider the meaning of quality work, the district also began an initiative to align the curriculum with national standards, to train teachers in new ways to structure the instructional process, and to shift the emphasis for planning from teacher to student. For example, one area where the district focused its efforts was in writing. Elizabeth Davis shared the following about the changing focus in writing, and its far reaching implications:

> In the summer of 1998, we had 40 teachers who came together representing every content area K - 12. We worked with an outside consultant and developed a writing alignment guide so we would have some means of promoting writing in every content area, in every grade. We developed generic rubrics to be used in the assessment. We spent the whole first year writing and using the rubric to be sure that the way I use the rubric is the same way you use the rubric. Now it has developed into a full-blown project where we almost have a rubric specific to every assignment. But this was just the first step. Then we looked at how we can identify students who are struggling in reading, and how we can help them to come back on grade level–what we can do to help them gain where they are not gaining, and provide quality work that will engage them while they are attempting to catch up. All from a focus on writing! This has to be one of the most far-reaching of all the issues we have worked with.

Evidence of support for focus on student work was also seen in the district strategic plan. For example, several objectives demonstrated a commitment from the district to shift the focus to student work. The objectives were to:

a) Align all system resources and procedures to the commitment to focus on the activity of students and on improving the quality of work provided to them.
b) Design staff development to support the development to focus on the activity of students and on improving the quality of work provided to them.
c) Ensure that resource allocations are organized around the work and performance of students rather than around the work and performance of teachers and administrators.
d) Link training and development to providing students the quality of work that will result in students learning what the school, parents, and community value and respect.

The pace of change in Abbington was affected by three things. First, everyone in the community had to have a clear picture of the outcomes. Through development of local school councils and clarification of beliefs, a consistent focus on student work began to emerge. The district intended to push student achievement to a higher level through the development of quality work for students that was engaging, relevant, and challenging. This focus on students was evidenced in the interviews, the district strategic plan, and the belief statements of the board. As the outcomes became clearer, the work to be accomplished at the system level began and included such things as the development of board beliefs as a guide to action and the establishment of more rigorous procedures for obtaining resources at the school level.

Secondly, an understanding of why change should be pursued was critical to obtaining commitment from those within the community. Looking at different kinds of data, such as observation surveys and disaggregated data by student subgroups created a sense of urgency for change. These data revealed that all students were not achieving to a high level. Through the work of local school councils in identifying and defining quality work, and the work done at the central level in establishing different ways to look at student work, teachers and others were able to consider their present processes and strategies and begin to seek new instructional practices to better meet student needs.

Understanding why change was necessary and taking steps to target the change led

teachers to establish and implement writing rubrics and to focus on ways to help

struggling students get back on track.

Finally, the work of the superintendent and district in providing the resources

necessary to carry out the changes made a critical difference. Aligning resources to

ensure that allocations supported training and development and kept the focus on

students, not teachers and administrators, were part of the overall strategy to support the

change process. Use of grant funds to support professional development, changes in how

decisions were made to fund school requests, and rewriting board policy to provide

latitude for school leaders in resource allocation were evidence that the district was

working to support change efforts.

Perspectives on Change

Change was perceived as generally positive by participants but there was also a

level of frustration and uncertainty associated with it. Dr. Hayes described his feelings

about change like this:

> We can't hold a teacher or principal accountable until they understand
> what we want them to do that's different and it's greatly different from
> anything they've ever done before, which is frustrating for them and me.
> It's frustrating for me because it's going to take 7 or 8 years to get
> everybody up to where we want them to be. It's more than I can do in one
> lifetime's work, but I have to stay focused, keep moving, and know where
> I'm going.

From the classroom teacher perspective and from the principal perspective, the

changes created some uncertainty and possibly some resistance. Elaine Martin, the

classroom teacher noted:

> We feel it is a positive thing that is happening, although some of us don't
> always want to have to do what is coming, we are open to change. I think
> it is hard for the teachers to change, but I see a strong willingness for them
> to want to do it. They give up a lot of their time, after school, weekends,
> to become trained in this new way of thinking and way of teaching.

Stephen Richards, the principal, reinforced this willingness to change, but also noted some resistance to change. His perspective on the change process was:

> It has not been easy. We've gotten some static from the teachers but I have to say, overall, that they have been willing to give it a try. We have had some early success, and I think that has fostered the change. Without that success, we would have had problems. Because the teachers saw that the children responded to what they were trying to do, they were willing to continue. It's what teachers do with time that matters. Basically, until the district began to push this quality work issue, teachers hadn't changed the way they taught. Now, they're trying to change the way they teach. There is some resistance. Last year, we had a lot of teachers decide to retire but sometimes, that is what it takes.

The final comment on change came from Elizabeth Davis, the central administrator. Her sense of change in the district was more of an overall view of where the district was with relationship to change. She summed up the change process like this:

> You would just have to see how aligned the district has become. There is nothing going on here that is routine, every day brings something new. Everything we do is so fluid because the district is changing day by day by day. But it is not easy. I have seen a great change come over us, and I feel good about the progress we have made and know we are on the right track. Our biggest job now is to keep the momentum going and add to that critical mass of people who are on board with us.

Section Summary

There were many different aspects of the change process in Abbington. Clearly, students were the focus for change efforts. First, changes were being made at the classroom level in the teaching and learning processes of the district. Changes in the content being presented to students, changes in the instructional processes used by teachers, and changes in the ways students were assessed were all identified by participants. However, change was occurring at other levels also. By changing district policies and procedures, district staff were attempting to align systems to support the changes at the classroom and school levels. Changes in structure, and to a limited degree, changes in culture were occurring.

While changes were found to be frustrating by some participants, there were several things that appeared to influence the pace of change in Abbington. First, the degree to which individuals and groups had an understanding of what the outcome of the changes were to be was an influencing factor. Secondly, it was necessary to have a compelling rationale for change to increase the likelihood for full participation by all within the district. Finally, having access to resources (time, funding, training) smoothed the transition for change.

<div align="center">Development of a Learning Community</div>

One set of research questions addressed the issue of school improvement because it is through improvement processes that development of a learning community could be seen most clearly. Research questions were designed to explore the improvement process at the district level in Abbington and to consider how it was similar to the process used in schools. Key research questions addressed in this section included: What were the similarities and differences between the improvement processes at the school level and at the district level?

a) What were the dimensions of the improvement process at a district level?

b) How were these dimensions like those of a school improvement process?

Primary data sources for the questions included interviews with the superintendent and principal, a review of district and school mission and belief statements, and a review of the strategic plan. Through the analysis process, dimensions of a district level learning community emerged. Dimensions were then associated with one of three characteristics of learning communities identified in the literature. The three characteristics were: 1) ability to create sustainable relationships over time or a community of relationships; 2) clear sense of collective values and purpose or a community of mind; and 3) a commitment to staying centered on the common work of the group or community of spirit. This section provided a description of the improvement process in Abbington, presented key dimensions of learning communities found in

Abbington, and concluded with similarities and differences between learning

communities at a district and school level.

mprovement Process in Abbington

To better understand the district improvement process in Abbington, it was

necessary to first discern what the district perceived its role to be in the education of

students. Perceptions of role can usually be found in district mission and vision

statements. Mission statements serve as official statements of purpose for the district and

convey commitments the district is making to the broader community. Vision statements

express an ideal state the district hopes to achieve in the future. When used together, the

mission and vision statements explicate district values and long term outcomes the

district is seeking and provide impetus for planning and action (Leithwood et al., 2001).

Abbington's mission and vision statements were stated as:

> Mission
> The mission of Abbington County School System is to provide quality learning
> experiences for its students, employees and other stakeholders.
> Vision
> The Abbington County School System will be a learning organization that
> is open and inviting and composed of competent, caring individuals that
> value life-long learning and the worth and dignity of all people. It will
> deliver a rigorous, stimulating curriculum that is research-based, student-
> centered, and focused on results which will enable all students to reach
> their maximum potential and become productive citizens able to compete
> in an international community. Teachers will be empowered to be
> inventors and creators of student work, which is engaging, challenging,
> compelling, meaningful, and which results in high quality learning. The
> Abbington County School System will provide state-of-the-art, well-
> maintained, and safe facilities with those conditions and support systems
> that ensure optimal student learning experiences. It will cooperate with
> the family, social services, businesses, and government entities as they
> work together to meet the needs of children and to plan, develop, and
> evaluate educational programs and services.

The mission and vision statements of Abbington revealed several things about the

district. In the mission statement, the commitment made by the district was the provision

of quality learning experiences for different groups of stakeholders. Quality learning

experiences were further defined in the vision statement as "student work which is engaging, challenging, compelling, meaningful, and which results in high quality learning." The vision statement articulated who was to be involved in district efforts, what was to be done, and the expected results for district efforts.

The vision statement identified groups who had a role in the educational process in Abbington. It appeared there was an expectation that the entire community was to be involved in some way to achieve the district mission. The vision statement identified "teachers," "family, community, social services, business, and government entities" all to have a role in achieving the mission. While the role varied from "cooperation" to "inventors and creators of student work" to "plan, develop, and evaluate educational programs and services," it seemed that contributions of many individuals and groups were important to the district. This was borne out by the superintendent's expectation that everyone was to be involved in the attainment of district initiatives. Dr. Hayes, the superintendent, talked about his expectations that many have leadership roles like this:

> I see leadership as the key to everything–in the absence of it, there won't
> be any growth. I view teachers as leaders because they make decisions
> every day where kids either follow their lead or don't, and those decisions
> are critical in the lives of kids, even though they don't recognize it right
> now. I also found that kids have valuable information about their
> education, after all it is their education we're talking about, and we should
> tap into student leadership when we are planning what we are going to do.
> They can give you good answers straight up that can help you to improve.

In addition to who was involved in attaining the district mission and setting expectations for roles, Abbington's vision statement also asserted how the district intended to achieve its mission. Three ways to achieve the mission were identified in the vision statement and included delivery of a strong curriculum, provision of support systems, and provision of appropriate facilities. Mission and vision statements can guide the action of the organization because they can provide an evaluation filter for all the information typically coming to a district from both external and internal sources. The

mission and vision statements help those within the organization decide what they should pay attention to as they consider current and future actions (Leithwood et al., 2001).

Finally, mission and vision statements set expectations for the long term outcomes for students. According to the vision statement of Abbington School District, students were expected to become "productive citizens able to compete in an international community." Such an outcome is broad but necessary for the rapidly changing world in which students live. Expectations generally spur productive change in organizations because they provide a picture of what the organization hopes to achieve. It would be expected members of the organization and the broader community would have a common understanding of what constitutes a "productive citizen" in the setting described by Abbington and although this was not discovered in the study process, several school belief statements provided some clarification of this overall result for students. For example, one of the belief statements from Crestview School specified, " The kind of society for which we need to prepare our students is technologically and culturally diverse." From another school, a belief statement noted, "We should develop citizens who can function and work cooperatively in a democratic society and who can make decisions beneficial for self, home, and community."

Overall, the mission and vision statements of Abbington provided a direction for immediate focus in the district as well as addressed the future work role and growth of individuals. The district saw its role as providing students with meaningful, challenging learning experiences within a safe and nurturing environment that provided opportunities for student success.

Schlechty (1997) identified three critical capacities needed for organizations to promote and sustain improvement. These capacities were: 1) the capacity to establish and maintain a focus on the future; 2) the capacity to maintain a constant direction; and 3) the capacity to act strategically. Interestingly, Abbington's district strategic plan incorporated all of the capacities identified by Schlechty. Abbington's strategic directions included:

      a) Capacity to establish and maintain a future orientation.
      b) Capacity to establish and maintain direction and focus.
      c) Capacity to establish and maintain strategic action.
      d) Improve student performance.
      e) Increase the efficiency and effectiveness of all school operations.

The district strategic plan in Abbington provided a framework for the improvement process. Strategic plans usually define actions to be taken by a district to accomplish its mission. Bolman and Deal (1991) noted that a strategic plan can be either "a process to bring order and structure to an otherwise uncertain set of events or a ceremony that an organization must conduct periodically to maintain its legitimacy" (p. 177). District strategic plans represent the improvement plan for the district and are parallel to school improvement plans. Just as a school improvement plan outlines what the school will do to improve student achievement and how it will know when the goal has been met, the district strategic plan outlines what the district intends to do to meet its goals and how the district will evaluate the progress it is making toward meeting goals.

The strategic plan of Abbington School District included strategic directions, goals, objectives, sub-objectives and related strategies, an implementation time line, resources, person responsible, and results to date. In Abbington, the strategic plan seemed to be a force to drive productive change. Many of the objectives identified in the strategic plan were discussed by participants. While participants did not specifically mention the strategic plan, it was apparent that the actions they discussed were drawn from the strategic plan. For example, Elizabeth Davis, the central administrator, spoke of the change from prescriptive lessons to more individualized planning like this:

> We put great stress on the professional judgement of teachers. For that
> reason, you won't see a lot of Saxon phonics or mathematics or direct
> instruction, SRA, those kinds of programs in our schools. We don't
> believe that teachers are free to think about what children need, what can
> best accommodate the needs of students, if they are tied to workbooks, and
> worksheets, or prescriptive, scripted lessons they have to give to students.

In the district strategic plan, one goal and subsequent objectives stated that the district intended to promote a change in work for students like this:

<u>Goal</u>

Foster innovation and flexibility.

<u>Objectives</u>

a) Train teachers to develop and provide quality work for all students.

b) Create quality work that is compelling and engaging for all students.

Action steps to support both the goal and subsequent objectives included developing and sharing a bank of curriculum units, providing training to teachers in the development of rubrics, and conducting an evaluation to determine how resources were being used in the district to promote the work and performance of students. Clearly, Abbington was using the strategic plan as a guide for action.

According to Evans (1996), care must be taken not to let the improvement process overshadow the goal. Generally, a good process leads to the desired outcome, but it is easy to become entangled in the process and lose sight of the end result. Participants in the study had remarkably similar insights about what the district was doing, and although the district's strategic plan was not specifically mentioned, most initiatives identified by participants were able to be linked to the strategic plan. The data supported the notion that the district appeared more focused on the end result than on the process.

Key Dimensions of Learning Communities

Several key dimensions of learning communities emerged from the study of Abbington School District and were characterized as either development of relationships, creation of a sense of purpose, or staying committed to the focus. Dimensions were primarily observed through the strategic plan, district mission or vision statements, or were collected from interviews with participants.

The first characteristic of a learning community focused on an ability to create sustainable relationships (Sergiovanni, 1994). Sergiovanni (1996) noted that the development of a community of relationships is often difficult because it extends beyond congenial relationships found in most schools and requires change in the way individuals work together. A number of dimensions were identified in the literature regarding development of sustainable relationships and included: cooperation and diversity between

group members (Zohar, 1997); development of complex networks and use of interdependent feedback loops (Capra, 1996); and commitment to continuous change and improvement (Louis & Kruse, 1995). The dimensions were used in this study as a framework and further defined through the study to identify patterns that existed in the district. The dimensions of a community of relationships are shown in Figure 4. 4 along with the study definition and a representative example from the Abbington School District.

Figure 4.4 Community of Relationships in Abbington

Dimension Identified in the Literature	Definition Developed from the Study	Representative Example from Study
Diversity and cooperation between group members	Promoting or building relationships among different groups or individuals for the purpose of working together toward common goals.	Source: District Vision Statement Reference was made to the role that teachers, community groups (such as business, family, and government entities) have to help the district achieve the mission.
Balance between individual freedom and need for others	Encouragement of individuals and groups of individuals to work together for the purpose of fulfilling common goals, individual goals, or both.	Source: District Strategic Plan Objective: Develop an effective awards system that recognizes individual and team accomplishments.
Development of complex networks	Encouragement of opportunities to create relationships between individuals or groups for informational purposes, shared expertise, and continuous improvement.	Source: District Strategic Plan Objective: Encourage teachers, principals, and district level leaders to demonstrate collaboration at all levels in the system.

Interdependent feedback loops	Provision of feedback to the district, individual, or group for the purpose of improvement.	Source: District Strategic Plan Objective: Develop and implement an ongoing process for determining stakeholders' perceptions of how well the district is meeting its role.
Commitment to continuous change and improvement	Willingness of the district, individual, or group to engage in productive change.	Source: District Strategic Plan Objective: Ensure that staff development programs and staff performance expectations consistently emphasize the importance of incorporating new technologies in the work of students, teachers, and administrators.

A community of relationships was found to be emerging in Abbington. The district seemed to be working hard to create the type of relationships, both internally and externally, that would create a united group. While not completely established across all stakeholders, there appeared to be a plan to continue and enhance initial efforts. The foundation for creating sustainable relationships often resides in the level of trust across the community. While the strategic plan proposed actions the district intended to take to build that trust, there was evidence from participants that actions identified in the plan were being taken. Elizabeth Davis, central office administrator, talked about the trust issue in Abbington this way:

> You just don't change that (level of trust) overnight. It doesn't come easy. There is a lot of work for us to be at the level we need to be. But he (Dr. Hayes) is chipping away at it. A lot of it can be overcome if you start building a cohesive group and we chose to do that through the development of our beliefs. If you can establish what your beliefs are, and establish the direction you are going to take, then that is the first step in building the team to accomplish what you want to accomplish.

A second characteristic of learning communities focused around establishing collective values and developing a common sense of purpose for the group. Sergiovanni (1994) identified the collection of dimensions as a community of mind because when considered as a whole, the dimensions establish an ethic of how community members

interact in order to achieve the mission. Comprised of four dimensions found in the

literature, a community of mind included: clarification of what community members were

seeking to create (Sergiovanni, 1994); establishment of shared values and shared decision

making (Hullfish & Smith, 1961; Sergiovanni, 1994); and development of beliefs to

guide day to day actions (Wallace et al., 1997). Figure 4.5 listed each dimension of the

community of mind, provided a further definition as developed in the study, and then

identified a representative example found in Abbington.

Figure 4.5 Community of Mind in Abbington

Dimension Identified in the Literature	Definition Developed from the Study	Representative Example from Study
Clarification of what community members seek to create	Identification of the purpose for which the group or organization exists.	Source: District Strategic Plan Objective: Ensure that print and media materials explicate and clarify the meaning and implications of the beliefs.
Establishment of shared values	Identification of the common and central values of the group.	Source: District Strategic Plan Objective: Ensure that new hires have the skills, values, and commitments needed for the district to realize its vision.
Shared decision making	Identification of how and to what extent individuals or groups are involved in the decision making process.	Source: District Strategic Plan Objective: Clarify the kinds of decisions that should be made by teams at the local school as opposed to those made at the district level.
Development of beliefs to guide day to day actions	Provision of a decision making framework that leads the individual, group or organization toward actions that will increase the likelihood of goal attainment.	Source: Superintendent Interview Redesign of hiring practices to identify individuals who would be most likely to succeed in Abbington.

The development of beliefs to guide day to day action provides structure to the decision making process about improvement activities and plans. Dr. Hayes, superintendent of Abbington, used district beliefs to redesign hiring practices. Dr. Hayes described the rationale for using belief statements to help in the decision making process this way:

> We will continue to make a difference as we hire new people. Now we have a filter through which we can hire people–we know what questions to ask, we know what beliefs we'd like to see in the person, and we know whether or not they are a fit. If their basic beliefs don't fit with ours, we're just not going to change that person's beliefs. It's going to take too many years, so we believe that if we hire people who essentially believe in kids right up front and the work makes sense to them, then that's somebody we can work with and not have to fight tooth and nail to get them to go on this lifelong journey.

Abbington appeared to be in transition with regard to the development of a community of mind. Much of the work to establish collective values and to create a common sense of purpose began with the arrival of Dr. Hayes, the superintendent, but there was still much to be done. The involvement of stakeholders in the development of district belief statements and the creation of shared decision making structures were outlined in the strategic plan, and all participants referred to them in some way. For example, Stephen Richards, the principal, talked about shared decision making this way:

> There have been a lot of changes in procedures since his (Dr. Hayes) coming. We were a traditional top-down system prior to Dr. Hayes' arrival. Now, we are more shared decision making, and the schools have a lot more flexibility to do what is best for the school in our community, we don't all have to do the same thing. We are not expected to be clones of each other.

However, while Dr. Hayes felt that the district was moving in the right direction with the shared decision making structure and processes, he also noted that the district was not yet where he wanted it to be. Dr. Hayes shared his thoughts about the responsiveness of Abbington this way:

> Right now, we are not where I us to be in this organization. We are not responsive, especially at the high school level. Any time the environment

of an organization is changing faster than the organization itself, it's going
to die unless the organization can accelerate it's rate of change. I think
that is the job of leadership–to ensure that we know who our customers
are, define their needs, and then deliver them before they ever realize
they've got a need there. That, to me, is responsiveness.

Though the district was not at the level Dr. Hayes wanted, Abbington did appear to have a plan of action and had developed structures to help groups and individuals identify the collective sense of purpose needed to fulfill its mission.

The third and final characteristic of a learning community identified in the literature was staying committed to the work necessary to achieve the purpose established by the group (Sergiovanni, 1994). The key dimensions of getting, and keeping, the group centered on its work in the community included development of compelling goals, establishing a sense of stewardship, blending or blurring of roles, and increasing partnerships with the larger community (Hullfish & Smith, 1961; Sergiovanni, 1994; Wallace et al., 1997). Each dimension was related to defining what the group intended to do as well as how the group planned to work. When examined together, key dimensions of commitment to the group's work created a community of spirit. Figure 4.6 listed each dimension of a community of spirit, provided a further definition from the study, and identified a representative example found in Abbington.

Figure 4.6 Community of Spirit in Abbington

Dimension Identified in the Literature	Definition Developed from the Study	Representative Example from Study
Development of compelling goals	Establishment of specific statements of intent for the group, directed at attainment of the mission and vision.	Source: District Strategic Plan Goal: Develop structures for continuity.
Sense of stewardship	Creation of work plans that will be the most efficient, effective use of resources directed at goal attainment.	Source: District Strategic Plan Objective: Increase the efficiency of work schedules.

Blurring or blending of roles	Clarification or creation of roles needed to accomplish the goal directed work of the group	Source: District Belief Statement District Belief Statement: The rules, roles, and relationships that govern behavior between schools, between schools and the district office, and between schools and the community should be collaborative, based on trust and research with the goal of doing what is best for children.
Increased partnerships with the larger community	Involvement of the larger community in the entire process	Source: District Strategic Plan Objective: Identify an influential coalition of individuals who have the ability to ensure continuation of innovative school district initiatives.

A community of spirit was prevalent in Abbington, as evidenced by the many action objectives of the strategic plan. When analyzed according to the three characteristics of learning communities identified in the literature, more than half of the objectives were found to be in the community of spirit category. Figure 4.7 demonstrates the frequency and percentage of occurrence for each of the three major characteristics as identified in the strategic plan, participant comments, and the district mission and vision statements.

Figure 4.7 Frequency of Occurrence of Essential Characteristics of Learning Communities

Essential Characteristic	Number of Instances	Percentage of Total
Ability to create sustainable relationships (Community of Relationships)	27	29.7
Establishment of collective values and common sense of purpose (Community of Mind)	16	17.6
Keeping the group focused on their common work (Community of Spirit)	48	52.7

School and District Level Learning Communities

It was apparent from data in the preceding section that essential characteristics of learning communities, as identified in the literature, were present in Abbington. Because there has been so little research in the development of district level learning communities, this section addressed a comparison of Abbington's district improvement process to a set of descriptors for the improvement process by a school level learning community. The purpose of such comparison was: 1) to identify any similarities or differences in the descriptors of the two entities on selected dimensions, and 2) to consider whether or not Abbington appeared to be representative of a district level learning community. Understandably, the limited nature of the study precluded any final evaluation about the transformation of Abbington into a district learning community, but the findings offered a departure point for future research studies.

The basis for comparison came from descriptions contained in the School Improvement Developmental Continuum developed by the researcher. (See Appendix A.) The last developmental stage on the continuum was a Learning Community, complete with descriptions of sixteen dimensions. Primarily, data for the comparison were synthesized across the district strategic plan, mission and vision statements, and from comments by participants.

The comparisons presented are primarily focused in the areas of purpose/mission, vision, goals, actions, leadership, roles and responsibilities, and use of data. Each selected area was described from the perspective of a school level learning community identified in the continuum, then followed by any evidence of the dimension found in Abbington. Differences, if applicable, were also explicated. Finally, the section concluded with an overall consideration of whether or not each dimension appeared to be present or absent in Abbington.

For the first dimension, purpose, school level learning communities advance their mission as closing the gap between current reality and a future focused vision. High

standards of learning are expected of <u>all</u> students. In Abbington, the mission statement addressed primarily the creation of quality learning experiences for individual students, employees and others. There was no mention of closing the gap between current reality and a vision of the future, nor could it be inferred from the mission statement of the district.

However, actions taken by Abbington revealed that the district was pushing for a higher standard of learning and was beginning to see results. Increased test scores and reduction in the number of students qualifying for remedial education programs may have been indicators that the push for higher levels of learning was yielding results. The classroom teacher noted that students were being expected to be more thoughtful in their responses and that teachers were expected to ask higher-order thinking questions of students. Dr. Hayes, the superintendent, spoke to the issue of special education students and the quest for higher standards for all students in this way:

> We want <u>all</u> students reading on grade level before they leave kindergarten, first, and second grades and we're not using special education as an excuse. Some kids will always be behind because we're not all equal. I understand that, but I don't want to make excuses for them either, which has been done in the past. Special education was a great excuse to shut down learning, and I see it as absolutely no excuse. So, we're pushing hard in the early grades and what we've found in our pushing is that we're going to end up with fewer kids in special education as they go up because we're doing better first teaching than we have in the past. I have a personal bias that we cheat kids if we don't keep high expectations for their learning and then give teachers the tools and support they need to get that done.

There was some similarity between the process descriptor for purpose in school learning communities and what was observed in Abbington, but there were also a few differences. In school learning communities, expectations for high levels of student learning are widely understood and accepted by all community members. It was difficult to tell from the study whether the push for higher levels of learning in Abbington was in response to superintendent pressure, state accountability plans, or a true understanding of

what the learning for all purpose meant. The degree to which those within the broader district were accepting of the mission was unclear.

Vision, in a school level learning community, is created by all members of the larger community through a collaborative process. The vision is proactive in nature and establishes specific standards of excellence and equity. From the study, it was difficult to ascertain whether or not Abbington demonstrated the learning community concept as related to the vision. Some elements were present but could not be confirmed across data sources. For example, the district vision was developed by members across the community. Through establishment of system quality improvement circles, many groups were represented during the development of the mission and vision. However, representation does not always signal collaboration. Specific standards for equity and excellence were not readily visible within the confines of the study, but the district was focused on creating quality work for students in order to push them to a higher standard. In addition, the superintendent cited an incident where he had used disaggregated data to push a particular principal to begin thinking about the issue of equity. These two isolated examples could be representative of the culture in Abbington, but may also be only isolated examples. Thus, it was not completely clear whether Abbington did indeed meet the learning community criteria for vision.

The school improvement process in a learning community contains goals that demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement and advance an agenda for change biased toward the school's mission. There is a stronger focus on outcomes than on the means used to achieve the goal. Abbington's strategic plan demonstrated a number of goals. A sample of goal statements is shown here:

a) Develop a shared understanding for the need for change.
b) Develop structure for participatory leadership.
c) Develop structure for results oriented decision making. While not a complete

listing, these representative goal statements show evidence that Abbington had established an agenda for change directed at promoting their vision for the future. There

was also evidence that continuous improvement was becoming part of the culture of Abbington. Dr. Hayes, the superintendent, identified a specific instance where feedback was being incorporated into the changing practices:

> Parents give us feedback as well and that has led to teachers changing the way they are teaching. Now, it is not happening 100% of the time in 100% of classes in the district. Some people are just mimicking what they think they see but they are trying. They are now conscious of individual children, but when I got here they were not. Kids were part of a group, and they just threw out the same worksheets to everybody. Every kid was doing the same thing at the same time and if they got it fine, and if they didn't, fine, because the teacher moved to the next lesson the next day. We have had to give them a lot of tools and feedback. Because we have persisted, I think that we are finally impacting instruction.

Based on the strategic plan, the common focus on students identified by participants, and the work being done to address change, Abbington appeared to be on target with the learning community concept in the area of goals.

The action category on the School Improvement Developmental Continuum was also examined. In a school level learning community, high leverage strategies are selected for implementation based on careful study by members of the community. These strategies generally represent a level of work that crosses grade levels and disciplines. There were numerous incidences cited earlier about development of writing rubrics, work in curriculum development, and implementation of a new approach to reading instruction. All of these demonstrated Abbington's commitment to the identification and implementation of high leverage strategies. The dimension of actions, as demonstrated in Abbington, did not appear to be different from what was expected in a school learning community.

Another dimension examined was that of leadership. School learning communities have a shared leadership model, where expert knowledge is not assumed to be vested in a single leader or individual. There is more of a collective knowledge base and wisdom. The principal relinquishes traditional leadership roles in order to promote shared leadership among group members. The concept of shared leadership was

beginning to emerge in Abbington, but was not fully developed. For example, the superintendent discussed his view of the changing leadership role this way:

> I've got a great group of principals that were good managers and did a great job with all their schedules and the procedural things in school, but didn't have a clue about how to lead cultural and structural change in a school. We spend time working with principals to give them some tools and to help them understand how to tap the resources in their schools to share the leadership role. If we really want to do something about the problems we have, then we need to go to some people who really know the issues and can help us plan what we need to do instead of running around asking everybody in the country what to do. Teachers have an important leadership role and it's time the principals and all of us used it.

The classroom teacher indicated that while the culture had not always been supportive of teacher involvement in leadership roles, it was beginning to change. Elaine Martin, classroom teacher, stated it like this:

> I see the county is going more toward teacher professional opinion. Where there has been very little teacher consideration or teacher input, we've just kind of had things, you know, been told that this is what you do. But I see that changing, there's a whole lot more teacher input, therefore, teachers feel like they more of a say into what is done.

The kind of change required for a successful shared leadership model is cultural. Traditional school culture recognized a principal as the authority, or leader. The notion of followers assuming leadership roles requires a paradigm shift about leadership. Cultural changes takes a long time to develop, but, from the discussion by the superintendent and the classroom teacher, it appeared that the change was beginning in Abbington. Often, recognition and discussion of changes, such as changing roles and perceptions, precedes the actual change in behavior.

Another point of comparison was the dimension of roles and responsibilities. School learning communities create a balance between individual and collective actions. While there is a bias toward collective action focused on student learning, staff members constantly assess their own practices and actively seek better, more effective alternatives. Again, this dimension seemed to be present in Abbington. The perspective of the

classroom teacher provided insight into the dimension. Elaine Martin, classroom teacher, shared her experience in articulating with teachers at the grade level below like this:

> We talk about the techniques they are using and what would be most beneficial for us to use to continue the children in a particular learning style—so the children who are coming to us can continue to get better. It's kind of a different place to be in. So, we are trying to observe in the their classrooms and see what is happening. We have used those teachers as models and we can carry on from there.

Elaine also noted a change in the instructional process that left her feeling somewhat uncertain about how to proceed as a teacher. Apparently, the traditional role of teacher was changing and while rigid instructional guidelines had been provided in the past, there was a new expectation that teachers would use instructional systems geared toward individual needs. Elaine Martin, classroom teacher, described the change and expressed her feelings about the change in this way:

> It has meant a whole new philosophy, a whole new approach. It was very difficult for some of the older teachers to switch gears. We were used to structure, used to guidelines. Although these new expectations and programs have those, they are freer, there is more freedom. You are not totally standing with the textbook and doing the lecture type system, you have freer use of the materials. You had to kind of plan your own program, so it felt like a little control was leaving the teacher.

Increased autonomy for teachers in instruction, within flexible limits, provided an opportunity for Abbington's teachers to consider their collective actions but also caused them to consider change in their individual practice. In a learning community, finding the balancing point between collective and individual action is critical. While there was evidence that such changes were beginning in Abbington, it was difficult to ascertain the degree to which teachers at other schools were experiencing similar situations.

Use of data was the final dimension considered in the study. In a school learning community, data are considered leverage for change. Data are made public, discussed openly, and used to identify the impact of actions taken by the school as well as to determine the degree of excellence and equity in educational processes and programs. In Abbington, data were being used as leverage for change. There was evidence in the

district strategic plan that the data were being used to develop a shared understanding of the need for change. One strategic plan objective had an entire action plan devoted to the use of data and was linked to a another objective to develop a marketing plan. For example, some of the actions from the objectives are as follows:

a) Have requisite data and materials organized and accessible for review.
b) Identify different audiences to be addressed.
c) Prepare information regarding the forces driving change.
d) Hold community forums regarding the condition of education in the community.
e) Hold leadership briefings to discuss the data and the markets with system staff, school administrators, and teachers.

Evidence of a plan does not always translate into actions, but the comments of participants revealed that data were being used by the superintendent to ask critical questions to guide the thinking of principals. For example, the superintendent described his use of data in this way:

> My job is to ask questions when the principals bring in their school improvement plans which will cause them to think. Like, if you've been doing such a good job and you don't want to change—why are 34% of our kids dropping out of high school–we shouldn't have any if we're doing that good of a job. Cause them to think, golly, what have I been doing here? What should I be doing?

From the principal perspective, the use of data as leverage for change was beginning to occur in the classroom. Stephen Richards, principal, talked about the use of data at his school like this:

> In the past, we haven't been looking at data in the classroom like this. It is something new for us. I see it happening more at kindergarten and first grade than anywhere else. They utilize their data to make instructional decisions, especially if they see they are going in the wrong direction.

It appeared that Abbington was using data differently than it had in the past, but it was not possible to determine the extent to which the use of data drove change efforts.

Finally, consideration was given to whether or not each dimension from the School Improvement Developmental Continuum was present in Abbington. Figure 4.8 delineated each dimension, provided a brief description, and indicated its presence or

absence in Abbington, based on participant comment or document review. It should be noted that evidence suggesting presence of the dimension was not weighted, so it was not possible, nor was it intended, to determine the strength of the dimension. Also, some dimensions were not evident from the data collected in the study.

Figure 4. 8 Presence of Learning Community Dimensions in Abbington

Dimension	Dimension Descriptor for Learning Communities	Present in Abbington
Mission/Purpose	High standards of learning for all students. Seeks to close the gap between current reality and future focused vision.	Yes
Vision	Co-created by all members of community. Proactive orientation. Establishes standards for equity and excellence.	Yes
Values	Consensus on shared values to attain mission. Clear and compelling commitment to action. Collective responsibility for learning.	Yes
Goals	Commitment to continuous improvement. Change agenda biased toward mission. Focus on outcomes rather than processes.	Yes
Orientation to Change	Change is expected norm. Open dialogue about improvement initiatives and results. Solutions are sought to address conditions impeding learning.	Yes
Actions	High leverage strategies identified and implemented. Work crosses grade levels and disciplines. Strategies lead to quality work for students.	Yes
Leadership	Shared leadership. Formal leader relinquishes traditional leadership roles. Use of expert knowledge of staff and community.	Yes
Inquiry	Staff challenge old assumptions. Action research conducted to identify best practices. Findings are shared with others to improve practice.	Not evident in the study.

Professional Development	Connection between professional development and student achievement. Balance between personal and professional growth.	Yes
Roles and Responsibilities	Focus on collective actions directed at results for student learning. Balance between collective actions and individual actions.	Yes
Time Allocation	Time is flexible, linked directly to improvement needs. Focus for decisions about time is quality of work. Staff with responsibility for work have control of the way time is allocated for the work.	Yes
Resources	Resources are sought and secured to fund initiatives that support the core values.	Yes
Assessment/ Evaluation	Multiple tools and strategies are used. Monitoring focused on trailing and leading indicators.	Not evident in the study.
Frequency of Feedback	Constant monitoring of progress for students. Feedback gathered from multiple perspectives. Feedback provided regularly to community members.	Yes
Use of Data	Data are leverage for change, made public and discussed. Data used to identify impact of actions and to determine degree of excellence and equity.	Yes
Evidence of Progress	Consensus and clarity about expected outcomes and acceptable indicators. Success defined by what happens in the community as a whole.	Yes

Section Summary

There was evidence to suggest that Abbington was in the process of becoming a learning community. The improvement process identified the processes and actions being taken by the district to establish and maintain a constant focus on students and to identify and implement high leverage strategies. There was also evidence to suggest that district leaders and others were working to do things differently and to involve the

broader community in the educational processes of the district. The district strategic plan outlined the actions Abbington intended to take with regard to improving student learning.

When comparing the dimensions of school learning communities to Abbington, the data suggested that similar dimensions could be seen in Abbington. There were few differences, thus leading to the notion that there may be universal ways to describe learning communities.

<div align="center">Superintendent Work</div>

The third and final section of findings addressed research questions about the work of a district superintendent in developing a learning community. Research questions for the section focused primarily on the influence of the superintendent in teaching and learning processes, but led to implications for leadership in the development of a district learning community. Key research questions addressed in this section included:

How did the superintendent influence improvement in teaching and learning in the district?

- a) How did the superintendent determine improvement was needed?
- b) What strategies were used by the superintendent to facilitate improvement?

Primary sources for data included interviews with the superintendent, a central administrator, a principal, and review of the district strategic plan. While the research objective was to look broadly at the improvement process, what ultimately emerged through the data reduction process was a singular focus on core qualities for leadership in the development of a district learning community.

Just as principal leadership was key to the development of learning community at the school level, superintendent leadership was a key factor in Abbington's journey toward becoming a learning community. The leadership approach taken by Dr. Hayes

could be classified as transformational leadership. According to Roberts (1985),

transformational leadership:

> offers a vision of what could be and gives a sense of purpose and meaning
> to those who would share that vision. It builds commitment, enthusiasm,
> and excitement. In essence, transformational leadership is a leadership
> that facilitates the redefinition of a people's mission and vision, a renewal
> of their commitment, and the restructuring of their systems for goal
> attainment. (p.1024)

Transformational leaders recognize the critical nature of both context and

situation and adapt their leadership style and behavior accordingly (Leithwood, Jantzi, &

Steinbach, 1999). Transformational leadership is predicated on two types of authority,

professional and moral. Professional authority comes from the skill and knowledge of the

leader in his/her craft and can be said to be technical in nature (Sergiovanni, 1996). The

second type of authority, moral, rests with the integrity of the leader in establishing

reciprocal relationships with individuals and groups to work as a collective group to meet

organizational goals and objectives (Burns, 1979; Sergiovanni, 1996).

Dimensions of transformational leadership typically include developing a vision

of what must be done, developing and fostering group goals and acceptance to get the

work done, providing support to staff as they work to change their practices, and keeping

consistently high expectations through the change process (Podsakoff, MacKenzie,

Moorman, & Fetter, 1990). There were several actions taken by Dr. Hayes in Abbington

representative of these dimensions of transformational leadership. Each dimension could

be seen in a number of different of ways, depending on the context. In this study, the

dimensions were primarily evidenced through conversations with participants and the

district strategic plan.

Superintendent Vision

The first dimension, developing a vision of what must be done, was seen in the

superintendent's development of a personal vision, next in his work to develop a shared

vision, and finally in the use of data. Dr. Hayes came to the district with a strong vision

about teaching and learning and shared that vision with the board and staff. Dr. Hayes

talked about how he developed and then refined his vision this way:

> I developed a K-12 plan in my mind and on paper of what I thought
> needed to happen, depending on the context of the situation. Basically, I
> knew what good teaching was like, and what it should be, based on
> research, and I built my vision around that. Now that I've had a chance to
> implement that vision, I've been able to refine the vision over time.

Throughout the interview process for the study, Dr. Hayes referred to his vision

and how he used that vision to structure change in Abbington. For example, Dr. Hayes

noted:

> We've tried to give more freedom to the schools, more flexibility, fewer
> mandates from the system office. Our mandates come more in the form of
> vision and beliefs, and we talk about it a lot. Sort of keep them in front of
> everybody on a continual basis. I have a bias about teaching and learning
> and I share that with them. Why I think it is important, and what a
> difference it will make in the schools. I think I have to constantly talk and
> walk the vision–constantly talking about what I believe and holding people
> accountable for beliefs.

In Abbington, Dr. Hayes was seen by participants as having a strong vision and

using his beliefs as a guide to take action. Consistently, the words used by participants to

describe the leadership style of Dr. Hayes were "focused," "good listener and

communicator," "knowledgeable," and "visible." Such descriptors speak to the

professional authority of Dr. Hayes. Both the central administrator and the principal

expressed the idea that the superintendent's vision and beliefs were key to the change

process in Abbington. Stephen Richards, the principal, discussed the superintendent's

vision and beliefs this way:

> We know what he (superintendent) stands for, his focus. Everything he
> does focuses on his beliefs. He has talked about them to teachers in
> general meetings and he has talked with us as principals about his beliefs
> and expectations. And when he comes to our buildings, he goes into
> classrooms and looks at what is going on in reading and asks questions.

Elizabeth Davis, the central administrator, shared her thoughts about the superintendent's

beliefs like this:

He has some strong, very hard held beliefs about a lot of things. He doesn't mind telling you what he thinks is important. He is very passionate about engaging students and creating quality work for them. He can talk sometimes, and just get the administrative crowd going with his passion.

Not only did the superintendent have a strong personal vision and set of beliefs to guide the direction of his work, he also developed a plan to work with district leaders to set beliefs and a vision for the district. His influence can be seen most clearly in one of the goals and subsequent objectives of the district strategic plan:

<u>Goal</u>
Develop shared beliefs and vision.
<u>Objectives</u>
a) Ensure that each of the district's operating units and schools have a clearly articulated set of goals that are consistent with the overall beliefs, mission, and vision of the district.
b) Seek stakeholder input concerning beliefs, mission, and vision.
c) Develop and implement an ongoing process for determining stakeholder perceptions of how well the school system is meeting is role.

Dr. Hayes also used data to identify where improvement was needed and to gauge the progress being made toward meeting goals and objectives embedded in the district vision. Dr. Hayes encouraged others on his staff to do the same, and he described his use of data and how he intended central staff members to use data as leverage for change this way:

If people don't see a need to change, they're not going to change. You first have to present data to them that what they're doing is not working for kids. We've been reluctant to present that data and look at it in the past. I think data gives us a lot of leverage—it's no place to get comfortable. It's helping teachers and principals to do what's best for kids and focus on children, using the data at hand to decide what it is we want to be doing. This is different from the past, basing our decisions on data instead of perception, because I've found since I've been here that there is usually 180 degrees difference between perception and reality. We can work off of data and we are slowly seeing some significant difference in the way we treat kids, in the way we organize for instruction, and what is happening in the classroom. Major differences from where we were 2 ½ years ago.

Development and communication of a personal vision, subsequent development of a district mission and vision, and use of data were strategies used by the superintendent to discern the need for improvement. Interestingly, in the strategic plan, there was a goal and set of objectives addressing the importance of data with a plan to market the vision and beliefs of the district. The goal and objectives were written like this:

Goal
Develop a shared understanding of the need for change
Objectives
a) Have requisite data and materials organized and accessible for review.
b) Develop and review a marketing plan.
c) Ensure that print and media materials explicate and clarify the meaning and implications of the beliefs.
d) Gather and utilize convincing and persuasive data that identifies the needs of children in the community.

According to Schlechty (2001), it is not sufficient to simply establish a need for change. Leadership must consciously and consistently understand who they are serving and the types of needs and interests that motivate them. This is similar to marketing research. By knowing and understanding the viewpoints of different groups, leaders are able to tailor their communication strategies. In the case of Abbington, it was necessary for the superintendent to have an understanding of the teachers and the way they viewed their work, how principals viewed their role, and what expectations the community had for the school system. Knowing and understanding the customer base allowed Dr. Hayes to develop appropriate strategies to work with different groups and to communicate his support for the efforts shown by teachers and schools as they implemented the changes.

Development of Goals

A second dimension of transformational leadership behavior demonstrated by Dr. Hayes was developing and fostering group goals and acceptance to get the work done. Schlechty (2001) noted that it is not always necessary or possible for everyone to be involved in the development of the mission, but it is important that everyone have an understanding of how their needs and views fit into the beliefs, and how contributions can

be made to attain the collective goals. Dr. Hayes worked on several levels to help others

develop their understanding about the direction of the district and the role of individuals

or groups. He described his purpose for working with different groups like this:

> Everybody in this system has to find a way they tie into the kids' work. If
> it's cutting grass, or maintaining a building – the question is – how does
> that tie back into supporting the work that kids do? We try to help them
> see that while their job might be keeping a clean environment for a child,
> the child benefits if they feel good about that environment. It can help
> them do better in the classroom and feel a lot more pride about their
> school.

Dr. Hayes worked with principals to develop understanding by district leaders of

the beliefs and mission. He explained his work like this:

> Principals are key for me and I spend a lot of time talking to principals,
> individually and in groups. We spend a good bit of money on leadership
> development, help them understand, essentially, my vision and then to
> develop their own rationale for why they think it's right or if something's
> wrong, to convince me and show me something that will work better.

Dr. Hayes also cultivated an influential group of individuals within the

community to establish broad based support for the work done in the district to achieve

the goals. Elizabeth Davis, the central administrator, talked about the superintendent's

work with the community this way:

> Just like you have the essential questions in the Understanding by Design
> model, he (superintendent) knows the essential people—the people he
> thinks can give him the kind of information or resources he needs to make
> it happen. So, he has cultivated some of those essential people to help us
> get information out to the community. If he wants to put something out to
> the community, if he wants to run an idea by some people, he has
> identified that core group he can throw it back out to.

Helping different groups understand what the district was trying to accomplish in

its mission was part of a systemic plan to develop common and compelling goals.

Embedded in the strategic plan was an action agenda to promote such development. For

example, the following goal and subsequent objective area offered:

<u>Goal</u>
Develop structures for participatory leadership and results-oriented decision making.
<u>Objective</u>
a) Clarify the kinds of decisions that should be made by teams at the local school as opposed to those that should be made at the district level.

Support for Change

A third dimension of transformational leadership was providing support to staff as they worked to change practices. Leithwood, et al. (2001) identified several leadership behaviors associated with providing support. These behaviors included challenging staff members to question assumptions about their work, providing training and support to learn new skills, and helping staff find the resources necessary for goal attainment.

In this study, evidence of these leadership behaviors came from the participants. Dr. Hayes used cognitive coaching as a strategy to challenge staff members to question assumptions about their work. Cognitive coaching is "a process of mediating, nurturing, and enhancing the intellectual functions, perceptions, and decision making processes of teaching" (Pajak, 1993, p. 264). Elizabeth Davis, central administrator, described an incident in which the cognitive coaching role affected her:

> One day he had gone to a training session outside of the system and came back to us all fired up. He felt the system was no further along than it had been–that we should have done this or that yesterday, we have to do this now, and it's taking so long. I said, "Wait just a minute. I was here in 1998 when you came and don't you tell me we haven't gone anywhere because I'll pull the data out and we'll look at it together." So, he kind of sat back in his chair. I think sometimes he is just waiting for me to do that because he sees me as a nice person who doesn't always challenge when I need to challenge and I think that's what he was trying to do–force me to challenge.

Dr. Hayes saw one of his jobs as asking difficult questions and challenging people to think. He considered this questioning process to be "building capacity." Dr. Hayes talked about questioning techniques like this:

> Part of my job is asking the right questions. Rather than trying to solve everybody's problems, I try to create problems–by creating dissonance. If people are comfortable, I have to create a sense of urgency that there's

something here we need to do differently. I've asked principals to go into classroom and make mental notes about questions like: "Are the kids engaged? Are they bored or off task? Could the teacher have structured the work in a way that would have caused more kids to be engaged or produce more quality?" These questions can help them work with teachers to change what goes on in the classroom. But first I have to get the principals thinking about what is going on in classrooms, what the kids are learning and what's important. I tell them, "Focus on the kids, not the teacher, to get the information."

Capacity building through the use of probing questions is supported in the literature on organizational development (Hedberg, 1981; Senge, 1990). Tough questioning and intense inquiry are strategies to help leaders develop an understanding of the current reality in order to diagnose the need for change and to help others develop similar understandings (Conner, 1998). Dr. Hayes modeled questioning techniques for principals in order to help them understand what to look for when they visited classrooms as well as to help them begin thinking about the operating assumptions of teaching and learning in their respective schools.

Training and support for learning new work skills is another important aspect of transformational leadership and in the development of a learning community (Leithwood et al., 2001). In Abbington, evidence of training and support was found on individual school websites, in the district strategic plan, in comments from participants, and in the teacher appraisal system.

For example, Crestview Elementary School used its website to share staff development courses in which staff members were engaged. Each teacher was listed on the website along with the professional growth activities or staff development courses in which he or she was involved during the year. A second source for training and support was found in the district strategic plan. Specific objectives were targeted in the design of staff development offerings and with provision of follow-up support for staff development activities. The following are examples of objectives for training or support found in the strategic plan:

a) Design staff development to support the development of the commitment to focus on the activity of students and on improving the quality of work provided to them.
b) Design staff development to ensure that it reflects the system's mission, vision, and beliefs.
c) Create opportunities for staff to explore and develop concepts surrounding the role of teacher as inventor and designer of student work.
d) Align staff development offerings with district beliefs that reflect the importance of, and commitment to, ongoing training and development for all employees in the district.
e) Ensure that staff development allocations and the budget reflect the commitment to training and development.
f) Establish an assessment system to use in judging the effectiveness of staff development and how it is linked to improving student work.

Elizabeth Davis, the central administrator, talked about the purpose for training and support in the system as such:

> We want to provide training opportunities for teachers so that if they don't already have the skills to work with the new approaches and initiatives, then we can equip them to do that. We think staff development is important. For that reason, when we received a grant that included $75,000 with a local match of $52,000, we used that money entirely for professional growth opportunities.

An additional support for teachers was found in the teacher appraisal system, developed under Dr. Hayes' guidance. During the 1999 - 2000 school year, about 30 teachers from across the district were selected to develop a framework for teacher evaluation to provide more support for teachers and their professional learning. Elizabeth Davis, central administrator, described development of that framework like this:

> Teachers from across the district were selected and they sat down and developed the core competencies they thought quality teachers ought to be able to exhibit. Then they developed a framework, in which teachers would sit down collegially with an administrator in their building and together they would arrive at a professional development plan the teacher would follow. Together, they would determine what evidence would be collected to show that they had met their plan, or were moving toward their plan. The framework included opportunities for the administrator to come in and check off the kind of activities that were going on in the class—not making any qualitative decision, because that was not the target of the system. There are so many different opportunities that teachers need to have in order to develop some of those core skills and the professional development plan would give them the opportunity to say,

"This is what I want to do, and this is how we're going to measure it." It was another piece of the initiative of putting back into teachers' hands the opportunity to develop professionally and to develop their involvement skills.

Assisting staff in finding resources was another way that Dr. Hayes supported the staff in learning new practices. When the district made a conscious effort to focus on student literacy, Dr. Hayes recognized that he did not have enough resources to fully implement the plans at all levels; therefore, he began at the elementary level. Dr. Hayes explained his rationale for focusing at the elementary level as such:

> My focus, while I am here, will be K - 6 grades because you cannot, just cannot, do everything at once. You wear people out and your resources run thin, so I'm trying to focus resources while at the same time planning for grades 7 - 12. We're focusing the resources at the early grades to change the way we're teaching there. I don't have enough resources to do the work at all levels. We don't have the resources, time, people or money to retrain everybody at once. I can do a small piece at the high school now, and let the next superintendent and staff tackle the next piece. All the time, the long range plan is in place for making it happen. This gives us time to get training to them and to put a time line on improvement rather than set an arbitrary time factor.

Deployment of resources seen in Abbington included dynamic planning of professional development, and provision of materials, equipment and/or time. Throughout the district strategic plan, references were made to professional development focused on providing quality work for students and re-framing the role of the teacher. The design for professional development, as outlined in the strategic plan, was supportive of comprehensive reform because it attempted to align training with the core initiatives of the district. For example, the strategic plan indicated that teachers should have opportunities to be trained in developing assessments to measure students' levels of understanding. This objective supported at least two reform issues identified by the classroom teacher: 1) how to measure reading comprehension through questioning of students and 2) how to switch from the traditional grading system to one more focused

on student products or projects. Alignment between professional development and reform initiatives affords the best chance for success with change (Schlechty, 2001).

Securing materials and equipment were also ways Dr. Hayes helped support schools and individuals. Stephen Richards, the principal, noted the change in reading programs had created the need for different kind of books and that the district provided funding to purchase those books. Interestingly, he compared deployment of resources at the district level to deployment at the school level:

> Our efforts at the school have been focused on using resources to support school improvement. If a teacher needs something, they come to me, and I find ways to get it for the classroom. Just like when I go to the superintendent for resources to support my work in school improvement.

Giving teachers time to practice new skills and ways of working together was yet another way in which resources were deployed by Dr. Hayes. During the school year, students were released early three days and teachers had the opportunity to work on district initiatives or participate in training. Elizabeth Davis, central administrator, noted the kind of improvement activities in which teachers were engaged on these early release days:

> They may be in a training session, or they may be developing a product. This year, one of the focal points has been mathematics, so we have had teams of teachers at each school working on developing performance tasks for mathematics and the rubrics to accompany those. So, at all schools, we might have had a portion of their faculty working on those and other groups might have been working on tabulating some results and putting some things together in a profile—those are the kind of activities that went on during those early release days last year. Next year, we will expand those days to seven.

One of the most critical resources in the improvement process was the allocation of time. In Abbington, through the early release days, the superintendent provided a window of time for teachers and school staff members to share their practices, develop new skills, evaluate the results of their work, and develop quality work for students. Use of such a strategy demonstrated the commitment of the district to link resources and results.

Another change in the use of time was the shifting focus for teacher work days. Participants noted that teachers were engaged in activities related to school goals on teacher work days. Elaine Martin, classroom teacher, described the work of teachers on work days like this:

> The first thing you would see is a general meeting and then teachers would divide up to meet with each other. Sometimes there are whole county inservices so some of us might be leaving to go to those meetings. You would see grade levels meeting together and sharing plans, talking ideas, and developing plans. You would also see teachers helping teachers make things, demonstrating new strategies, or generally discussing how the work is going.

Stephen Richards, the building principal, noted the change in teacher work days in his building like this:

> Now, you would see teachers looking at the data on their classrooms that they can generate. Looking at individual children and seeing what or how they need to shape instruction for those children. In the past, you would probably have seen teachers grading papers or making bulletin boards, but our main focus now is on school improvement and that is what we use those days for. We do cross grade meetings on those days, where the teachers can get with teachers in other grades and talk about their expectations and what they need to do to improve.

High Expectations

The fourth and final dimension of transformational leadership was keeping consistently high expectations through the change process. Behaviors to support this dimension can be simple, such as recognition of good performance, or more complex, such as helping staff to feel and act like leaders (Leithwood et al., 2001). In the study, it was more difficult to ascertain actions taken by the superintendent, but there were a few indications. For example, Elizabeth Davis, central administrator, noted:

> Teachers are excited about the changes because they see someone who is willing to focus on the things that really need to be done, but at the same time, know he is entrusting that responsibility to them. He said, " I will give you the training you need to do this, but you are going to be allowed to use your professional judgement to determine how to use it beyond the training and techniques. Since you have been shown how to use the

strategies, you're going to have to determine the best time and best place to use those strategies." Teachers are very excited about that.

The superintendent sent a message to teachers that their professional judgement was valued and while the district expected teachers to meet district expectations for students, it was also committed to providing training and then allowing teachers flexibility in the implementation of new practices.

Section Summary

Sergiovanni (1996) identified two factors as critical in the improvement process: 1) development of teachers and 2) creation of a culture supporting inquiry. In Abbington, the superintendent focused much of his effort on these two factors. Dr. Hayes, the district superintendent, communicated to teachers and to other staff members that he was expecting commitment from them to improve the quality of work for students and then he provided time, training, and other resources necessary for teachers to make the necessary changes. Most importantly, Dr. Hayes demonstrated his faith in the professional judgement of teachers by allowing them the flexibility to use new skills and approaches and by being visible in classrooms across the district to observe the engagement of students in their work.

Creation of a culture of inquiry was seen through the lens of transformational leadership in Abbington. Dr. Hayes, the superintendent, built capacity by asking questions and creating cognitive dissonance in individuals. He used data as leverage and spent a fair amount of time working with district leaders to help them learn to ask questions of themselves and other staff members to try and uncover some of the operating assumptions that could impede the change process.

Four actions taken by the superintendent in this study were considered to be representative of transformational leadership. First, the superintendent spent time getting to know the community and understanding the expectations for schooling within the community. Secondly, Dr. Hayes worked to help others understand the compelling need for change to improve the achievement of students in Abbington. Third, Dr. Hayes had a

strong personal vision, which he used as a guide for action. Finally, the superintendent was willing to use available resources and to seek other resources in order to meet the need for change.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a context for the study by describing both the setting and participants. Participants included the superintendent, a central office administrator, a principal, and a teacher. The perspective of each participant enriched the study by providing a rich and thick description of Abbington and the work being done to improve student achievement.

There were many changes in Abbington School District but participants generally felt that the changes were productive for both students and staff. Change efforts were focused primarily on students and carefully staged to ensure success. Systemic support was deliberately structured to assure continuation of change efforts. Cultural change, though difficult to discern, was seen primarily in the changing roles of individuals and increased understanding of individuals and groups about the direction of the district with regard to student achievement. The pace of change was affected by having a clear vision of the expected outcomes, a strong understanding of why change was needed, and a bias toward using or obtaining resources necessary to successfully carry out change initiatives.

The improvement process in Abbington was linked to the vision and mission of the district and aimed at providing quality work for students that was engaging and pushed them to a higher level of achievement. Many different actions were identified by participants and listed in the strategic plan to help the district achieve its mission. However, the improvement plan was actively used and not simply an academic exercise completed by district leaders to satisfy state or federal requirements. Participants were remarkably similar in their views about the work being done at the district level and the purpose for which the work was intended.

Several characteristics evidenced in Abbington were reminiscent of school level learning communities. Clearly, Abbington was working differently from the way it had worked in the past and was trying to establish a community of relationships upon which to base improvement efforts. By promoting and building relationships between diverse groups, encouraging collaboration, and actively seeking feedback for improvement, Abbington was positioning itself to create a community focused on meeting common goals. Development of a strong and common bond is critical to the development of a learning community.

However, Abbington was also taking steps to create a community of mind, where individuals and groups are focused on a common purpose. Establishment of shared decision making models, constant and clear communication about the district focus, and development of the strategic plan were some of the ways in which Abbington demonstrated its commitment to take action around a set of compelling goals. There was an expectation that individuals work together to achieve the mission and to borrow from one of the participants, "Expectations usually bring results."

Abbington was also reaching out to broaden the base of support for the efforts it was undertaking. A number of work plans to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of district operations were developed and communicated through the strategic plan, and there was a change occurring in the roles and responsibilities of individuals within the district. More involvement, dispersed leadership, and a sense of stewardship were found to be developing in Abbington and are important components of a learning community.

The similarities and differences between the improvement process used at the district level in Abbington were examined in light of the School Improvement Developmental Continuum. (See Appendix A.) Findings revealed that on some dimensions Abbington was not unlike school level learning communities. However, the findings were inconclusive about whether or not Abbington could be considered representative of a district level learning community.

Finally, the work of the superintendent in orchestrating the process of change toward a learning community was considered. The work of the superintendent was primarily viewed through the lens of transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is a specific leadership paradigm resting on the relationship between leader and follower (Burns, 1979). The nature of the relationship is that together, leader and followers pursue common goals representing the needs, wants, and expectations of both leader and follower. Several actions taken by the superintendent were deemed to be representative of the dimensions of transformational leadership. These actions, when combined with an understanding of learning communities, suggested that Abbington was well on its way to becoming a district level learning community.

CHAPTER 5

INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS,

IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the work of the superintendent in developing a learning community. This chapter presented an overview of the study, major findings, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

Review of the Study

The study used a qualitative case study design to explore the work of the superintendent in developing a learning community. Three specific objectives were undertaken in the study in order to: 1) explore how change occurred in a specific district, 2) investigate the work of the development of a teaching and learning mission of the district, and 3) identify similarities and differences between school improvement processes at the district and school levels. The following questions guided data collection:

1. How did change occur in the teaching and learning processes of a school district?

    a) What changes in teaching and learning occurred in the target district?

    b) Who initiated teaching and learning changes?

    c) How were the changes facilitated?

2. How did the superintendent influence improvement in teaching and learning in the district?

    a) How did the superintendent determine improvement was needed?

    b) What strategies were used by the superintendent to facilitate improvement?

3. What were the similarities and differences between the improvement processes at the school level and at the district level?

    a) What were the dimensions of the improvement process at a district level?

    b) How were these dimensions like those of a school improvement process?

Procedures

A case study approach was used for the study. A relevant study site was identified through development and review of a case profile and professional recommendations. Key participants were identified and data were collected primarily from interviews and pertinent district documents.

Data collection took place during the 2000 - 2001 school year. Consent was obtained from each participant and face to face interviews were conducted. Interview protocols included open-ended questions and probes designed to elicit information about the district and the work of the superintendent in creating a learning community. All interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed verbatim in order to code and identify themes.

Official district documents were also obtained for analysis. The district strategic plan, mission and vision statements of schools and the district, and board policies were collected along with information from public domain sources. Documents were analyzed to identify the presence of key characteristics of learning communities delineated in the literature and for triangulation purposes.

Starting with a thorough reading of the data, broad conceptual categories were identified. Next, these broad categories were expanded to more detailed sub-categories to pinpoint characteristics of learning communities and the work of the superintendent. Finally, data were triangulated across sources for overriding themes.

Demographics

The site for the study was a mostly rural district in the northern section of a Southeastern state. District enrollment was approximately 5,600 students, with

approximately one-third of students qualifying for free and/or reduced lunches. Academic achievement indicators showed evidence that students were achieving at high levels.   Standardized test results were above the national average on all measures. Over the past two years, the percentage of students completing high school increased.

Participants for the study included the district superintendent, a central office administrator, a building principal, and a classroom teacher. The primary participant was the superintendent, who subsequently identified other participants. All study participants were employees of the target district. All participants were white, two were male and two were female, and all held a graduate degree. The amount of time participants had been employed in the district varied from three to thirty years.

<div align="center">Interpretation of Findings</div>

The primary focus of the study was an exploration of the superintendent's work in developing a learning community. The preceding chapter identified major findings categorized according to the guiding questions of the study. Discussion and interpretation of findings are provided as they relate to the development of a district learning community.

Two major themes emerged from the study regarding the development of a district learning community. The themes demonstrated the cultural and systemic nature of change and were centered around transformational leadership evident in a learning community. The two themes were the role of vision and risk-taking.

<div align="center">Vision</div>

Vision in the development of a district learning community was found to be an overarching theme of the study. Leadership was considered to be instrumental in creating and implementing a vision of the learning community. A vision expresses an ideal state that an individual or group wishes to achieve in the future. Because a district learning community differs in at least one critical aspect from school learning communities, the role of vision may be more important in a district learning community than in a school

learning community. Members of a school learning community are usually located in the same physical location, making it somewhat easier to establish a pattern of shared practice and keep their collective sight set on the vision. Members of a district learning community are located in different physical venues; thus, it could be more difficult to bring the larger community together and keep it focused on the work to achieve the vision. Repeatedly in the study, participants discussed the importance of vision in their journey toward change. Both individual and collective vision were determined to be influential factors in the development of a district learning community.

Dr. Hayes, the superintendent, came to Abbington with a strong personal vision, but did not impose his vision on the district. Clearly, the superintendent was passionate about improving student achievement by creating quality work that would engage students but also push them to a higher level of learning. The central administrator in the study confirmed the strength of the superintendent's vision and noted his use of personal vision to inspire others and encourage them to consider embracing different ways to structure teaching and learning processes. Personal vision of the superintendent became a driving force to stimulate change in Abbington.

Using his personal vision as an evaluative filter, Dr. Hayes thoughtfully studied the district. He spent time getting to know each school community and becoming familiar with student and school performance data. After developing an understanding of the current reality of student achievement and school performance, Dr. Hayes concluded that new ways of thinking about teaching and learning were needed for improvement to occur. The superintendent also realized that his work was to make people want to change by helping them create a vision of what they could become.

Creating a desire in followers to want to change is at the heart of transformational leadership. Schlechty (2001) noted that transformational leadership calls for leaders to help others see connections between current reality and the vision of what they can become and accomplish. Transformation occurs when followers want to change, not

because of the leader, but because the purpose being pursued connects underlying values of the individual with purposeful action of the group or organization (Burns, 1979; Kouzes & Posner, 1987).

To move from personal vision to collective vision, the nature of the superintendent's work was initially one of building capacity. According to Shaw (1999), building capacity means "building the knowledge, skills, norms, habits, and values necessary to adapt, renew, rethink, and inform practice" (p. 150). Learning communities must grapple with how to build capacity because learning and change cannot be imposed on staff members. Learning and change require involvement, accurate diagnosis of present conditions, figuring out what to do, and then doing it (Shaw, 1999).

Transformational leadership concentrates on what is important to both leaders and followers. In Abbington, the superintendent consciously set out to create a sense of urgency that would stimulate an individual desire to want to change before leading the group to create a collective vision. Individuals must understand the necessity for change before setting direction, and such understanding usually begins with dissatisfaction of the status quo. There must be sufficient dissatisfaction with the present state of affairs, or individuals have no reason to invest the effort to make the changes. Evans (1996) found the more limited the investment in change by individuals or groups, the less willingness there was to make the initial change or sustain the change over time. Investment is developed by helping individuals acquire and then apply their own knowledge about the issues to set a course of action.

To create a sense of urgency in individuals and groups across the district, Dr. Hayes began to work at several levels and use different strategies. At the local school level, he went into classrooms, observed students, and asked questions of teachers about ways to improve the quality of work offered to students. Principals were pressed to observe in classrooms, evaluate the level of student engagement with the work, and to visit other schools to develop a sense of the messages being sent to the community. At

the district administrator level, Dr. Hayes presented different kinds of data and best practice research to stimulate thinking about how district staff could redefine their work with schools to focus on quality. Dr. Hayes also began to work with board of education members to develop guiding principles that would direct their work. Cultivation of influential community members was another technique used by the superintendent. By meeting with influential community members on a regular basis and sharing the direction of the system, Dr. Hayes was able to stimulate a desire for change in the larger community. When taken together, these strategies yielded a critical mass of individuals within the broader community that could spur productive change.

Development of the collective vision began with the creation of a district quality council in Abbington. The council was representative of different groups and guided by the superintendent to first identify shared values of the group. The council was presented with discrepant data such as the gap between achievement rates of subgroups, drop-out rates, and student engagement levels (persistence with learning throughout a lesson). As the group studied the data, the superintendent guided their thinking to help them understand why change was needed and the importance of connecting individual vision with district direction. As the shared values were brought together in a set of belief statements, a collective vision began to emerge and the district moved closer in becoming a more unified district learning community.

Shared values and common vision were identified in the literature as essential characteristics of school learning communities. Through the open and shared dialogue necessary to develop a collective vision, relationships begin to change from congenial to collegial and commitment to action is established (Sergiovanni, 1996; Louis & Kruse, 1995). It is important to note that participants in this study spoke as though with a single voice about increased opportunities and the necessity for open and shared dialogue in Abbington. Open and shared dialogue creates opportunities for individuals and groups to question, investigate, and clarify solutions to problems (Shaw, 1999). District culture

prior to Dr. Hayes' arrival did not allow for open, shared ideas among groups or individuals, according to participants. As one participant stated, "Somebody else made the decisions and we just followed them." An unintended benefit of the open and shared dialogue in Abbington may have been a rebuilding of the trust necessary for the operation of a learning community.

The process of developing a common vision was replicated at each school in Abbington. While most schools had vision statements prior to the arrival of Dr. Hayes as superintendent, participants indicated that the statements had been created as an academic exercise designed to satisfy external agency requirements. Now, however, vision statements were developed to create a mental image of what the school would look like when it attained its vision. Thus, a guide for action grew out of the vision at both the school and district levels.

Vision was used in Abbington to facilitate productive change and create an immediate direction for action. The nature of change was found to be systemic. The district vision was premised on a need to narrow the focus to students and develop quality work for them that was engaging, relevant, and challenging. Narrowing the focus to a few important areas allows people to better concentrate their energy and allocate resources in order to achieve the desired results. Clear and candid discussion about the issues, changes occurring in the environment, current performance levels, and the cost/benefits of taking no action are required to narrow the focus (Conner, 1998). Through the use of data for leverage, establishment of improvement councils at the school and system levels, and engagement of influential individuals in the development of district belief statements, Abbington established a unifying focus on the work of students. A consistent focus on student work allowed the district to identify specific goals and actions to be taken with regard to improvement.

While the focus for change efforts was students, the superintendent recognized the necessity of reorganizing existing systems to embed changes within district culture.

Transformational leaders not only recognize that change is needed, they also take strategic action to make the vision become a reality. Schlechty (1997) noted, "It is not enough to change the behaviors of individuals—what must be changed as well are the systems that encourage, support, and maintain present behavior patterns and discourage new patterns from emerging" (p. 16). In this study, the superintendent used his considerable professional expertise to identify and embrace programs or projects that were a reflection of district goals and values. Intentional changes were planned in curricular and instructional delivery systems, human resource systems, and governance systems.

Curricular and instructional delivery systems were streamlined in Abbington. Curriculum was aligned with national standards, and there was a narrowing of curricular concepts to provide more depth in the content presented to students. Teachers were given flexibility to choose instructional strategies that would best meet the needs of individual students and were strongly encouraged to move toward more student-directed instructional practices. Rubrics and performance assessments were developed to help teachers better understand whether students were learning and applying the skills and content being taught. Plans were developed to help struggling readers reach grade level standards while continuing to be engaged in the learning process. While most changes in instructional delivery systems were first order changes, they created opportunities for dialogue about best practices for achieving a specific result.

Human resource systems in Abbington were redesigned to support teachers as they learned and applied new skills in their work. A new teacher appraisal process was developed to provide choice for teachers in their professional development of new skills, knowledge, and habits of mind. Teachers were given the option to decide what they wanted to learn, how they wanted to structure individual professional growth activities, and how they wanted to be evaluated on their growth. Through local school staff development on early dismissal days and a restructuring of the type of work done on

teacher work days, teachers were given the time and tools to better reach individual and system goals.

Hiring practices for new employees were changed to help the district select teachers whose philosophical outlook was aligned with the direction of the district. Based on the district mission and vision, a set of interview questions emerged to help district administrators better determine whether a potential employee was likely to fit easily into the changing organization. In addition, a new employee induction program was created to help newly hired teachers understand both the direction of the district and the direction of the school and their role in achieving district goals.

Governance systems were altered in Abbington in two important ways. First, there was a careful devolution of authority to schools for resources and responsibility. Local school decision making was increased, and schools were given flexibility to make decisions based on the needs of the student population served. Teachers and other staff members were expected to participate in the decision making process as well as in the implementation process. When school quality councils were first established, anyone at the school could participate. Over time, membership was refined and training was provided to help principals and team members better understand how to use data and research to make collaborative decisions. Second, changes were made in the way the school board conducted its work. The superintendent worked with the board to redesign their roles to ensure they were supportive of the district vision and focus. The superintendent worked with the board to help them use their beliefs as a guide for decision making.

In summary, the role of vision was important to the development of a district learning community in Abbington for four reasons. First, collective vision expressed group values and provided an opportunity for open and shared dialogue among group members about what was important for the group to accomplish. Second, vision provided a mental image of what the community would look like when it was attained. Third,

vision established a clear focus for the work and finally, vision was used to drive productive change and create an immediate direction for action. Change in Abbington was not unlike change in other districts. What was unique to Abbington was an apparent understanding of the district superintendent about the transforming nature of using vision to stimulate productive change.

<div align="center">Risk Taking</div>

In Abbington, responsibility for implementing change was shared across teacher, school, and district levels, however, the superintendent held the pivotal role in guiding and facilitating the process of change. One striking theme from the study was the part that superintendent risk taking played in the development of a district learning community. Risk taking is more than willingness to try new things, it is instead a commitment to seek effective solutions to long term issues of importance and then engage in actions that will lead to achievement of the goal, even when the solutions require challenging the status quo. The work of the superintendent in developing a district learning community is complex and not always embraced by those in districts who are comfortable with existing structures and hierarchies.

In this study, risk taking was demonstrated by the superintendent in at least two ways. First, the superintendent sought to equalize power relationships across the district by changing the culture from "command and control" to one that was more collaborative. Next, the superintendent designed enabling structures and processes that created an interdependence between schools and the central office. Both risk taking endeavors of the superintendent led to a change in the district culture.

Cultural change challenges status quo through examination of basic assumptions and beliefs of individuals and groups. Cultural change generally creates turbulence in the organizational environment which can be perceived as threatening to the status quo (Leithwood et al., 2001). Over time, as individuals and groups learn to cope with change, develop new ways of looking at their work, and begin to create shared meaning, there is

usually an internal integration of change coupled with a deeper understanding of why certain things are done as they are in the external environment. However, at the outset, most individuals within an organization faced with multiple changes seek to return equilibrium to the system.

In Abbington, the superintendent challenged the status quo in ways causing both individuals and groups to re-examine operating assumptions about the purpose of schools and how the district was organized to accomplish its purpose. As a steward of the district vision, Abbington's superintendent was focused on teaching and learning, curious about student engagement, and asked tough questions that would challenge the thinking. Dr. Hayes continually asked essential questions of individuals and groups to make them reflect on <u>what</u> they were doing, <u>why</u> they were doing it, and <u>what results</u> they were getting. For example, when one principal brought in his school improvement plan, Dr. Hayes asked him to explain why so many students were leaving school before graduation if the school was doing such a good job that it did not need to change. By keeping the focus on teaching and learning, Dr. Hayes attempted to neutralize, or at least divert, the attention typically given to political issues in a school district.

Dr. Hayes sought to equalize power relationships across the district and used empowerment and devolution of authority to schools as strategies to do so. Participants indicated that, in the past, the district had been highly scripted and controlled from the central level and while individuals had been compliant to established policies and guidelines, there had been little commitment to anything. Thus, one way the superintendent sought to change the level of commitment was through empowerment.

Empowerment is a process that provides valuable input to decision makers from those most qualified provide it. There must be receptivity on the part of the decision maker to receive the input and there must be a process that allows for the input to be gathered. In Abbington, the superintendent empowered teachers and others to create a more collaborative network. Teachers were empowered to become reciprocal partners in

decision making through their work on local school and district councils and through their work with other teachers across the district to develop the teacher appraisal process, write curriculum, and develop writing rubrics. Strong teacher leadership began to emerge as teachers felt their input was heard and valued in the decision making processes of schools and the district. There was a recognition on the part of teachers that they could, indeed, influence the direction of the school or district.

Devolution of authority to schools was another way the superintendent attempted to equalize power relationships across the district. There was clearly a possibility that schools could have modeled the tightly structured hierarchy that had been a part of the district culture. However, the superintendent structured the process of devolution in a manner that tapped into the leadership emerging from the empowerment of teachers and coordinated the work with the development of the district mission and vision statements. At about the same time, local school quality councils were established and used the same process for developing school mission and belief statements. These local school quality councils were given the authority and responsibility to make decisions consistent with the school mission and vision. Schools were given the flexibility to make decisions about materials and resources necessary to meet their goals, about how to structure teacher work days, and how to plan professional growth activities for staff. Principals and teachers were empowered to become reciprocal partners in the decision making processes rather than act just as contributors.

The superintendent in Abbington designed enabling structures and processes that created an interdependence between schools and the central office. For example, as part of the strategic plan, the district sought to identify which decisions should be made at the central level and which decisions should be made at the local school level. By working through the balancing of centralization and decentralization of decision making functions, the district office became more of an enabler or facilitator for change processes and local

schools developed better understanding of and appreciation for the work done at the central level.

Interdependence in Abbington came from the collective vision, common values, and unifying purpose established by the district. These actions then helped the schools to frame necessary actions. There was a shared school and district responsibility to use data to make connections, find and analyze problems, and then to link data to action oriented decision making. For example, teachers from across the district came together to develop writing rubrics. However, as the group worked together, they began to talk about struggling students. As the group discussed the problem, a plan emerged about what could be done to bring those students back to grade level. The plan emanated from a central planning group and required district resources for implementation, but local schools had to be the owners of the plan for successful implementation. Such work demonstrated the interdependence between the local school and district office that the superintendent was attempting to create. Policies, procedures, and processes were redesigned at the central level to be consistent with a district commitment to continuous change and growth and to get out of the way of well planned change initiatives at the local schools.

In summary, risk taking in this study was found to be inherent in the work of a superintendent in developing a district learning community. Such development typically challenges the status quo and has the potential to create a turbulent environment. The superintendent in this study sought to equalize power relationships across the district through empowerment and devolution of authority to local schools and to create an interdependence between schools and the district office through the redesign of enabling structures and processes.

<div align="center">Implications and Recommendations</div>

The study was limited to a single case consisting primarily of the work of a county superintendent working to build a district learning community. Given the small sample

size, implications and recommendations are not intended to be generalized to other districts; rather, they are intended to be representative of the site studied.

Implications for Practice

Implications for practice were offered to be reflective of the work of the superintendent in the development of a learning community. However, implications included here could, perhaps, also be applied to leaders at other levels of an organization.

In this study, the superintendent took a number of calculated risks to create a different organization from that of the past. Being willing to seek solutions and take action beyond the status quo requires superintendents to have a strong vision of what a district can become and what it can accomplish. The superintendent in Abbington came to the district with a personal vision and used his vision to evaluate the current reality of schooling in Abbington. When the superintendent understood the current reality, he shared his vision with others as a starting point for change efforts. Thus, it is critical that superintendents have a clear personal vision and model commitment to their vision.

Personal vision must, however, give way to collective vision. The work of the superintendent in the development of a collective vision is largely capacity building. Superintendents must seek ways to build capacity that will help individuals acquire and then use their own knowledge to set an individual course of action and then work to set a collective course of action. Development of a collective vision requires an inclusive and collaborative process and that underlying assumptions about schooling and outcomes for students be reexamined. By acting as a process facilitator, the superintendent should ensure that data reflecting student needs and community expectations are used in the vision building process, that the group spends considerable time in open and shared dialogue to identify common and shared values, and that possibilities for the future are attainable yet rigorous.

Abbington's superintendent spent considerable time asking questions of individuals and groups. Using questioning as a technique, Dr. Hayes sought to help

others reflect on the underlying assumptions of practice in order to consider why change was needed. Superintendents and others might consider guiding thinking about change by asking "why" questions before asking "how" questions. "Why" questions can serve two purposes. First, they can help clarify thinking about the issue to be sure that the right issues are addressed and will target the specific problem, and that change efforts will fit appropriately with the direction of the system. Secondly, "why" questions often lead to consideration of alternative solutions. When the departure point is "how," individuals and groups are generally more concerned with the operational nature of the change than with making sure the best approach to the issue or problem is being considered. Compelling rationale for proceeding with change efforts generally results in stronger commitment to the initiative.

In the study, the superintendent used several strategies designed to help others examine issues. Strategies included questioning, presentation of discrepant data, and use of cognitive coaching. These strategies required the superintendent to be willing to openly and honestly discuss with others the issues related to taking risks based on the known, the context of the district and all of its working parts and processes, and, to a larger degree, the unknown. Due to the complexities of a district and the rapid amount of change encountered in a district, the unknown must be understood in relation to the only known, change.

Superintendents must have the ability to make an accurate assessment of the capacity of the organization in order to prepare for major change initiatives. In the study, the superintendent began his tenure in the district by getting to know individuals and learning the culture both inside the district and in the broader community. Individuals within the organization can absorb only as much change as they have the capacity to do so. If individuals within the organization are stretched beyond their capacity for change, there is greater likelihood that change efforts will not succeed. The more critical the nature of the change, the more important it becomes to evaluate not only the readiness for

change, but also the impact that change could have on the reprioritization of finite resources. Because access to resources is necessary to establish and sustain change efforts, superintendents should develop a plan for filling the gaps when resources must be shifted. In the study, the superintendent developed a plan for change, and spent time making sure system structures and resources were not overtaxed.

Superintendents must find ways to place responsibility and authority at the sources closest to the change needed, while at the same time, providing enabling structures and processes that will support the devolution of authority. In this study, local schools were given the flexibility and responsibility to make decisions based on the students within their school community. Superintendents need to help district staff and school personnel define and articulate the boundaries for decision making at each level.

Superintendents wishing to develop shared leadership should consider using empowerment as a strategy. When used appropriately, empowerment can build trust and confidence among individuals or groups, as was the case in Abbington. By structuring opportunities for teachers to become involved in the decision making process and by using cognitive coaching with individuals, Dr. Hayes was able to rebuild some of the trust with the broader educational community. Using empowerment means being able to identify those who can and should provide input for critical decisions or system direction and then developing a structure to obtain the input.

Finally, in this study, the superintendent understood that in order to sustain change, superintendents must be able to help others cope with change and create the resiliency needed to sustain efforts. Dr. Hayes was willing to pace change efforts and bring individuals and groups into the initiatives over time rather than try to do everything at once. The superintendent must be willing to tolerate occasional failures at the cost of learning and be patient with the rate of change, yet be persistent on the focus of change. Additionally, superintendents must ensure that systems remain operational even though

the district is undergoing a high level of stress, that people within the organization are physically and emotionally healthy, and that there is a bias toward action.

Implications for Superintendent Training

In this study, the focus was on the work of the superintendent in developing a district learning community. Therefore, several implications were identified relating to training for future or current superintendents. Implications were identified in the content and organization of training activities, in the delivery of those training activities, and in the outcomes for such training.

Beginning with the end in mind, implications for superintendent training included clarification of the outcomes for training programs. In this study, the superintendent was knowledgeable and skilled in areas that contributed to his ability to develop a district learning community. He was able to integrate his considerable professional expertise in curriculum, instruction, and assessment to address current issues facing the district. He also had a strong vision of how an educational system should operate in order to effectively serve all students. Training programs for superintendents should focus on helping potential superintendents use discipline based knowledge to solve significant education problems related to practice.

Dr. Hayes worked with educators in Abbington to create a community with a common sense of purpose that was focused on students and committed to taking necessary action to attain their collective vision. Such work involved helping individuals learn how to collaborate rather than compete with each other and how to build capacity for growth and change. Thus, another outcome for superintendent training could be an ability to build community.

The content and organization of training for future superintendents should focus, among other things, on the outcomes listed above. In this study, Dr. Hayes understood the change process and how to manage it, as demonstrated by his considerable ability to build a district learning community in Abbington. The superintendent understood the

nature of change, how to structure the process of change, and how to help others become committed to making change. Therefore, increased emphasis on understanding the change process should be provided at the graduate level and through professional development activities. Few individuals are completely comfortable planning or leading the kind of change effort needed to change cultural norms and foster growth. Therefore, a course in change management might, perhaps, assist potential superintendents in understanding the complexity of change and how to lead such efforts.

The change process identified in the study was comprised of two major components: a) the nature of change, and b) the factors affecting change. Training for superintendents or for potential superintendents should include a thorough understanding of the change process which includes: 1) development of a keen sense of why certain changes are imperative to the future of the organization and the consequences to the organization if the change effort should fail, 2) development of a clear definition of any changes to be made with a strong sense of vision for the desired results, 3) development of knowledge and skills necessary to accurately assess the impact that change efforts may have on commitment, culture, and resource deployment, 4) development of communication and commitment strategies so the target group will know change efforts are supported and legitimized from the top, and 5) development of an understanding of the difference between empowerment and delegation as strategies and how to build the kind of culture that supports the successful deployment of each.

Dr. Hayes was also well versed in curricular, instructional, and assessment issues involved in creating a quality educational system. He was familiar with analyzing data and transforming them into information to use as leverage for change and with locating and using best practice research. Dr. Hayes considered himself a lifelong learner and modeled the process of reflective practice in his day-to-day work with principals and teachers. He spent time observing in classrooms and talking with teachers, trying to understand factors that affected student engagement. He also invested time to read

journals and research studies and attend professional seminars. Therefore, training for superintendents should include exposure to best practice research in the core areas of curriculum, instruction and assessment, and training in how to conduct collaborative action research to address problems in practice.

The nature of the superintendent's work in Abbington was complex. Dr. Hayes had to design and coordinate change efforts, then provide support to sustain and extend change. He was able to accomplish this by weaving together theory and practice. Thus, delivery of training to potential or current superintendents should also be a tight weaving of theory and practice. Such delivery might be accomplished through applied research projects, reflective writing and discussion, simulations, and use of case studies.

Badaracco and Ellsworth (1989) noted that successful leaders " are not human chameleons, but people of distinctive personalities who behave consistently in accordance with that personality" (p. 208). In this study, the superintendent had a strong personal vision. He used his vision as a guiding force for change initiatives. Thus, superintendents should, perhaps, have professional opportunities structured around developing and using a vision. Having a personal vision means being able to articulate core values, having significant commitment to those core values, and exemplifying commitment through action. Training for superintendents and potential leaders could include activities to help superintendents clarify personal values and develop an action plan that supports those values.

Finally, training or professional growth activities for superintendents or potential superintendents should provide opportunities to examine processes that build school or district culture. In this study, the superintendent recognized that much of the work to build a learning community was dependent on his ability to build capacity for others to see a different future and then to take action to create the future. Thus, training for superintendents might focus on how to facilitate participation and decision making in building culture within the context of real school problems. For example, participants in

a seminar might select an issue and then study it for implications in student achievement, funding, and staffing.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of the study was to examine superintendent work in developing a district learning community. The broad nature of the study and the limited context for examination of the topic suggested that additional research was needed in three areas. First, research should be conducted to examine long term outcomes for students and staff members involved in district level learning communities. Next, studies to examine the development of learning communities should be conducted across multiple sites to validate or refute the findings of this study about the work of the superintendent in such a community. Finally, research is needed to compare the work of the superintendent in a learning community to the work of the superintendent in a traditional organization.

Studies designed to examine the long term outcomes for students and staff members involved in district level learning communities are strongly recommended. Learning community theory suggests that benefits will accrue to both students and staff members when the learning community is fully mature. The study did not examine benefits for either students or staff as the study site was not considered to be a fully mature learning community as defined by Louis and Kruse (1995). Identification of potential benefits for learning communities can provide evaluative information to practitioners who are seeking ways to change or improve organizations.

This study was limited to a single case and therefore, findings were not generalizable to other sites. It is suggested that multiple case studies be conducted regarding two topics. First, additional studies should be conducted to determine if the findings gleaned from this single case study were representative of the work of the superintendent in developing a district level learning community. Secondly, additional studies could confirm or refute the viability of district learning communities as a way to create responsive organizations.

Finally, the broad nature of this study was the work of the superintendent in developing a learning community. However, the study did not address how the work of the district superintendent in a learning community may be different from that of a superintendent in a traditional organization. Thus, research should be conducted to determine if significant differences exist between the work of superintendents in learning communities and in traditional organizational structures and the impact any differences might have on outcomes for students and staff.

Chapter Summary

Learning communities are not new phenomenon, however, most previous research focused on the development of such communities at a school, or micro level. This study addressed a gap between theory and practice by examining one district to determine if learning communities are possible at a macro level.

In the study, the role of vision in the development of a district learning community was found to be important. The superintendent came to the district with a strong personal vision, which he used to stimulate thinking about change. Dr. Hayes guided development of a collective vision through empowerment and shared decision making and then prompted change in supporting structures and systems. By having a collective vision, the broader community had a strong sense of direction for the future and a common purpose for their work, thus giving rise to strategic action to achieve the vision.

The work of the superintendent in the development of Abbington was transforming. The educational community was transformed from one where rigid, prescribed ways of working gave way to flexible, responsive actions based on a single focus. The superintendent took calculated risks to free individuals to see the possibilities of what Abbington could become, created a sense of urgency for change, and charted a course that changed not only the work but also how individuals thought about their work. Through shared leading and learning, he helped individuals and groups to reconsider both

the focus and direction for the work they were doing with students. The transformation was visible, although not complete.

Stories tell events, their meaning, and ways that those events shape lives. The story of Abbington was about schooling, relationships, change, leadership, and the desire to create a different future. Cutting across the themes of the study, one can conclude that development of a district learning community is possible and may well emanate from the work done by the superintendent. Vision and risk taking on the part of the superintendent were two characteristics that may be necessary to create and sustain district learning communities.

The past few years have brought changing expectations to public schools. Academic accountability, uncertainty about the future, and lack of public confidence in schools have left many leaders shaking their heads wondering how to create a responsive organization. Learning communities seem to represent one way of creating such an organization. However, the process of building a learning community is long and there are no easy solutions to the problems encountered along the way. Key to the process is the leader and his/her ability to guide the development of people, focus resources, and keep a strong sense of direction.

REFERENCES

Anderson, J. (1997, June 18). Getting better by design. <u>Education Week</u>, 16 (38), p.48.

Badaracco, J. L., & Ellsworth, R. (1989). <u>Leadership and the quest for integrity</u>. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Barnett, B., & Berg, J. (1998, April). <u>The school district superintendent: Attention must be paid</u>. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA.

Bateman, F. (1996). <u>Preparing the 21st century superintendents: Recommendations on the urban superintendency.</u> Norfolk, VA: Old Dominion University.

Bennis, W. (1989). <u>Why leaders can't lead; The unconscious conspiracy continues</u>. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Blumberg, A., & Blumberg, P. (1985). <u>The school superintendent: Living with conflict</u>. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (1998). <u>Qualitative research in education</u>. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (1991). <u>Reframing organizations</u>. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Bridges, E. (1982). Research on the school administrator: The state of the art, 1967 - 1980. <u>Educational Administration Quarterly, 18 </u>(3), 12 - 33.

Brunner, C. (1998, April). <u>The new superintendency: Power and decision-making</u>. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA.

Bryk, A. S., & Rollow, S. G. (1992). <u>The Chicago experiment: Enhanced democratic participation as a lever for school improvement</u>. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin.

Burns, J. M. (1978). <u>Leadership</u>. New York, NY: Harper & Row.

Caine, R., & Caine, J. (1997). Education on the edge of possibility Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Capra, F. (1996). The web of life. New York, NY: Anchor Books.

Carter, D., Glass, T., & Hord, S. (1993). Selecting, preparing, and developing the school district superintendent. Washington, DC: Falmer Press.

Carter, G., & Cunningham, W. (1997). The American school superintendent: Leading in an age of pressure. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Chance, E. (1992, October). The superintendency: Those who succeed and those who do not. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the University Council of Educational Administration, Minneapolis, MN.

Conner, D. (1998). Leading at the edge of chaos. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.

Creswell, J. (1994). Research design - Qualitative and quantitative approaches. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Crowson, R. L. (1987). The local school district superintendency: A puzzling administrative role. Educational Administration Quarterly, 23(3), 49 - 69.

Crowson, R. L. (1994, April). Leadership and the superintendency: A reform-minded perspective. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.

Cuban, L. (1985). Conflict and leadership in the superintendency. Phi Delta Kappan, 67 (1), 28 - 30.

Cuban, L. (1998, October 14). The superintendent contradiction. Education Week, pp. 43,56.

Cunningham, L. L. & Hentges, J. (1982). The American school superintendency 1982. Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators.

Dale, J. (1997). The new American school system; a learning organization. International Journal of Educational Reform, 6 (1), 34 - 39.

Evans, R. (1996). The human side of change. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Fiol, C. M., & Lyles, M. (1985). Organizational learning. Academy of Management Review, 10 (4), 803 - 813.

Fullan, M. (1993). Coordinating district and school development in restructuring. In J. Murphy & P. Hallinger (Eds.), <u>Restructuring schooling: Learning from ongoing efforts</u> (pp. 346-357). Newbury Park, CA: Corwin Press.

Fullan, M., & Stiegelbauer, S. (1992). <u>The new meaning of educational change</u>. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Gibran, K. (1923). <u>The prophet</u>. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf Publishers.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). <u>The discovery of grounded theory</u>. Chicago, IL: Aldine.

Glass, T. (1998, April). <u>Professional standards, preparation and evaluation of superintendents: Is there alignment?</u> Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA.

Glass, T. E. (1992). <u>The study of the American school superintendency: America's education leaders in a time of reform</u>. Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators.

Glass, T. E., Bjork, L., & Brunner, C. (2000). <u>The study of the American school superintendency 2000: A look at the superintendent in the new millennium</u>. Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators.

Glesne, C., & Peshkin, A. (1992). <u>Becoming a qualitative researcher</u>. White Plains, NY: Longman.

Goetz, J. P., & LeCompte, M. D. (1984). <u>Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research</u>. Orlando, FL: Academic Press.

Goldhammer, K. (1977). Roles of the American school superintendent: 1954-1974. In L. Cunningham, W. Hack, & R. Nystrand (Eds.), <u>Educational administration: The developing decades</u> (pp. 150 - 162). Berkeley, CA: McCutchan.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1981). <u>Effective evaluation</u>. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Hayden, J. G. (1986). Crisis at the helm: Superintendents and school boards in conflict. <u>School Administrator, 43</u> (10), 17 - 19.

Hedberg, B. (1981). How organizations learn and unlearn. In P.C. Nystrom & Starbuck (Eds.) <u>Handbook of organizational design: Volume 1. Adapting organizations to their environments</u> (pp. 106 - 135). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Heller, R., Woodworth, W., Jacobson, S., Stephen, L., & Conway, J. (1991). Disaster, controversy-Are you prepared for the worst? Executive Educator, 13 (3), 20 - 23.

Hodgkinson, H. (1985). All one system: Demographics of education, kindergarten through graduate school. Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership.

Hord, S. (1990). Images of superintendents' leadership for learning. Austin, TX: Southwest Education Development Lab.

Hord, S. (1997). Professional learning communities: Communities of continuous inquiry and improvement. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Lab.

Howe, W. (1994, April). Beyond garbage cans: An analysis of theory and research in educational leadership and recommendations for the future. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.

Huberman, A. M., & Miles, M. (1994). Data management and analysis methods. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), Handbook of qualitative research (pp. 428 - 444). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Hullfish, H., & Smith, P. (1961). Reflective thinking: The method of education. New York, NY: Dodd & Mead.

Jackson, B. (1995). Balancing act: The political role of the urban school superintendent. Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

Johnson, S. (1996). Leading to change: The challenge of the new superintendency. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Kanter, R. M. (1997). On the frontiers of management. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Kilman, R. H.,Saxton, M. J., & Serpa, R. (1985). Five key issues in understanding and changing culture. In R.H. Kilman, M.J.Saxton, and R. Serpa (Eds.) Gaining Control of Corporate Culture (pp. 1 - 24). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Knezevich, S. (1971). The American school superintendent. Washington, DC: American Association of School Administrators.

Konnert, M. W., & Augenstein, J. (1990). The superintendency in the nineties. Lancaster, PA: Technomics.

Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (1987). The leadership challenge: How to get extraordinary things done in organizations. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Kowalski, T. J. (1995). Keepers of the flame: Contemporary urban superintendents. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Leithwood, K., Aitken, R., & Jantzi, D. (2001). Making schools smarter: A system for monitoring school and district progress. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Leithwood, K., Jantzi, D., & Steinbach, R. (1999). Changing leadership for changing times. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. Beverly Hills, CA:Sage Publications.

Louis, K. S., & Kruse, S. D. (1995). Professionalism and community: Perspectives on reforming urban schools. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. (1995). Designing qualitative research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

McAdams, R. P., & Zinck, R. A. (1998). The power of the superintendent's leadership in shaping school district culture: Three case studies. ERS Spectrum, 16 (4), 3 - 7.

McCloud, B., & McKenzie, F. D. (1994). School boards and superintendents in urban districts. Phi Delta Kappan, 75 (5), 384 - 385.

McDonald, J. (1996). Redesigning school lessons for the 21st century. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

McKay, J., & Grady, M. (1994). Turnover at the top. Executive Educator, 16 (8),37 - 38.

Merriam, S. (1994). Case study research in education. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. (1998). Qualitative research and case study applications in education. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Miles, M., & Huberman, A. M. (1984). Qualitative data analysis: A sourcebook of new methods. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Morse,J. (1994). Critical issues in qualitative research methods. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration. (1987). <u>Leaders for tomorrow's schools</u>. Mesa, AZ: Author.

Norton, S., Webb, D., Dlugosh, L., & Sybouts, W. (1996). <u>The school superintendency: New responsibilities new leadership</u>. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Odden, A. (1992). School finance and education reform: An overview. In A. Odden (Ed.) <u>Rethinking school finance</u> (pp. 1 - 40). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Odden, A. (1994). <u>Including school finance in systemic reform strategies: Commentary</u>. New Brunswick, NJ: Consortium for Policy Research in Education Finance.

Ogawa, R., & Bossert, S. (1995). Leadership as an organizational quality. <u>Educational Administration Quarterly, 31</u> (2), 224 - 243.

Pajak, E. (1993). <u>Approaches to clinical supervison: Alternatives for improving instruction</u>. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers.

Patton, M. (1990). <u>Qualitative evaluation and research methods</u>. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Moorman, R. H., & Fetter, R. (1990). Transformational leader behaviors and their effects on followers' trust in leader, satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behaviors. <u>Leadership Quarterly, 1</u> (2), 107 - 142.

Roberts, N. (1985). Transforming leadership: a process of collective action. <u>Human Relations, 38 </u>(11), 1023 - 1046.

Rosenholtz, S. (1989). <u>Teachers' workplace</u>. New York, NY: Longman.

Rost, J. (1991). <u>Leadership for the twenty-first century</u>. New York, NY: Praeger Publications.

Rudestam, K. E., & Newton, R. R. (1992). <u>Surviving your dissertation</u>. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Sarason, S. B. (1990). <u>The predictable failure of educational reform: Can we change course before it's too late?</u> San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Schein, E. (1992). <u>Organizational culture and leadership</u>. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Schlechty, P. (1997). <u>Inventing better schools</u>. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Schlechty, P. (2001). <u>Shaking up the school house</u>. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Schmoker, M. (1996). <u>Results</u>. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Seidel, J., & Kelle, U. (1995) Different functions of coding in the analysis of textual data. In U. Kelle (Ed.). <u>Computer-aided qualitative data analysis: Theory, methods, and practice</u> (pp. 52 - 61). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Senge, P. (1990). The leader's new work: Building learning organizations. <u>Sloan Management Review 32</u> (1), 7 - 23.

Senge, P., Kleiner, A., Roberts, C., Ross, R., & Smith, B. (1994). <u>The fifth discipline fieldbook: Strategies and tools for building a learning organization</u>. New York, NY: Doubleday.

Sergiovanni, T. (1994). <u>Building community in schools</u>. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Sergiovanni, T. (1996). <u>Leadership for the schoolhouse: How is it different? Why is it important?</u> San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

Sergiovanni, T. (2000). <u>The lifeworld of leadership</u>. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Shaw, P. (1999). Purpose and process in effective learning communities. In J. Retallick, B. Cocklin, and K. Coombe (Eds.). <u>Learning communities in education: Issues, strategies, and contexts (pp.149-170)</u>. London: Routledge.

Strauss, A. (1987). <u>Qualitative analysis for social scientists</u>. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics. (1994). <u>Digest of education statistics</u>. Washington, DC: Author.

Van der Bogert (Ed.) (1998). <u>Making learning communities work: The critical role of leader as learner</u>. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Wallace, R., Engel, D., & Moody, J. (1997). <u>The learning school: A guide to vision based leadership</u>. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Wheatley, M. (1992). <u>Leadership and the new science: Learning about organization from an orderly universe</u>. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.

Wolcott, H. (1995). <u>The art of fieldwork</u>. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press.

Yee, G., & Cuban, L. (1996). When is tenure long enough? A historical analysis of superintendent turnover and tenure in urban school districts. <u>Educational Administration Quarterly, 32</u> (Supplemental), 615 - 641.

Zohar, D. (1997). <u>Rewiring the corporate brain</u>. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.

APPENDIX A

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT DEVELOPMENTAL CONTINUUM

Dimension: Mission/Purpose

Traditional Model of Schooling	**First Generation of Effective School Correlates**
School seeks to create programs which address differences in the abilities of students. Students are guided into the proper program and/or curriculum.	Mission is clearly articulated and focused on the teaching process. School accepts responsibility for ensuring academic growth of students. Teachers present clear and engaging lessons. Responsibility for learning is placed on students. There is an understanding of and commitment to instructional goals, priorities, assessment procedures, and accountability.
Second Generation of Effective School Correlates	**Learning Community**
School mission is focused on learning. School provides for an appropriate balance between higher-level learning and basic skills. Content is delivered in a manner that is responsive to accountability demands and focused on results.	School mission seeks to close the gap between current reality and future focused vision. School exists to establish high standards of learning, provide support, and ensure that **all** students master a challenging curriculum.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT DEVELOPMENTAL CONTINUUM

Dimension: Vision

Traditional Model of Schooling	First Generation of Effective School Correlates
Vision has been created by an individual or a small group of people within the school and represents limited causes, interests, and aspirations of the group or individual. It is generally limited and focused on maintaining or restoring the status quo.	Vision has been created by a representative group of stakeholders from the school. It represents a realistic, credible future for the school but usually does not extend much beyond the status quo.
Second Generation of Effective School Correlates	**Learning Community**
Vision has been created by all within the school. It represents a move toward a preferred future and away from the status quo. Vision establishes clear direction for the school.	Vision has been co-created by all members of the larger community. It creates a future-focused, proactive orientation and establishes specific standards of excellence and equity. Vision is constantly evolving as new possibilities emerge.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT DEVELOPMENTAL CONTINUUM

Dimension: Values

Traditional Model of Schooling	First Generation of Effective School Correlates
Staff lack the knowledge base of professional practice. There is little evidence of shared beliefs or values.	There is consensus on the school mission. Staff members have the knowledge base to inform practice and are committed to improving their own individual performance. There has been minimal dialogue about shared values needed to achieve the mission.
Second Generation of Effective School Correlates	**Learning Community**
Common values to guide behavior toward achievement of the school mission are beginning to emerge from staff. Governing values are agreed upon by staff, and there is a commitment to and use of shared values as a guide to action. School culture is based on an ethic of responsibility.	There is consensus on shared values needed to attain the school mission. There is clear and compelling commitment to action by all members of the community. Staff are committed to practice in exemplary ways, have established high standards for all students, and take collective responsibility for learning in the school. School culture is based on an ethic of care.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT DEVELOPMENTAL CONTINUUM

Dimension: Goals

Traditional Model of Schooling	First Generation of Effective School Correlates
Goals are general, limited in scope and not necessarily related to the school's mission and vision. There is no clear direction for the school	Goals are related to the school mission/vision and the Effective School Correlates. They are clear and establish direction.
Second Generation of Effective School Correlates	**Learning Community**
Goals are related to school/district mission/vision and are linked to the Effective School Correlates. Goals are significant and establish an agenda for action.	Goals demonstrate an internal commitment to continuous improvement and advance the agenda for change biased toward the school mission. There is a results orientation, with a focus on the desired outcome rather than the means to achieve the goals.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT DEVELOPMENTAL CONTINUUM

Dimension: Orientation to Change

Traditional Model of Schooling	**First Generation of Effective School Correlates**
There is insecurity with change and focus on maintaining the status quo. School culture includes sporadic conversations about improvement issues. Most people in the school and community are unaware of improvement goals, strategies, and results. There is a lack of consensus about how the school is meeting student needs and limited planning for school improvement.	Change is encouraged. School culture values discussion among professional staff about school improvement efforts. Limited information is shared with the community at large about improvement goals, actions, and results. There is an awareness that the larger community should be included in the improvement process.
Second Generation of Effective School Correlates	**Learning Community**
Change is seen as growth. There is increasing dialogue between the school and community about improvement initiatives. Community members are encouraged to participate but professional staff set the improvement agenda and determine what information is disseminated to the community. There is little differentiation between "good ideas" and "imperatives", but staff are beginning to consider the potential impact of change initiatives/innovations before they are implemented.	Change is the expected norm. There is constant and open dialogue among community members about improvement initiatives and results. Conditions that impede learning may be identified/acknowledged by anyone in the community, but solutions are sought by all. "Imperatives" are defined and used to drive change initiatives. The Human Due Diligence process is routinely conducted before beginning a major change.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT DEVELOPMENTAL CONTINUUM

Dimension: Actions

Traditional Model of Schooling	**First Generation of Effective School Correlates**
Strategies/activities are unfocused and not necessarily goal related.	Strategies generally lack specificity and are program based. There is an effort by staff to align strategies with goals, but little effort is made to tailor the strategies to meet specific needs of students at the site. Implementation time line may be missing or incomplete. There may be too many strategies selected by the group.
Second Generation of Effective School Correlates	**Learning Community**
Strategies selected for implementation are based on an understanding by staff of the context of the school and needs of the students as they relate to established goals. Strategies generally delineate the role of teacher, learner, support staff, and others. There is an established time line for strategy implementation.	High leverage strategies are selected for implementation based on careful and critical study by members of the community and represent a level of work that crosses grade levels and disciplines. Strategies are designed to produce quality work by students that is rigorous and relevant. Process evaluation is linked to strategy implementation.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT DEVELOPMENTAL CONTINUUM

Dimension: Leadership

Traditional Model of Schooling	**First Generation of Effective School Correlates**
Principal directs efforts of the teaching staff. Teachers have little authority over decision making related to student achievement/school improvement efforts. Decisions are based on individual desires.	Principal observes in classroom, participates in staff development, provides resources for teachers, monitors student progress, and generally manages conflict resolution. Teachers have opportunities to provide input in decisions related to student achievement/school improvement efforts.
Second Generation of Effective School Correlates	**Learning Community**
Principal facilitate group processes, champions the need for data, and works with all staff to develop shared mission/vision. Principal seeks opportunities to empower staff in leadership roles and decision making.	Principal relinquishes expected leadership behaviors, supports and encourages school and community members as they inquire into questions and issues. School culture supports the use of expert knowledge of school staff and community members in decision making. Teachers question the status quo, seek and test new methods, reflect on results, and plan future actions. There is an increased understanding of how dissent, debate, and diversity enhance the improvement process. Leadership is reciprocal and based on democratic principles.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT DEVELOPMENTAL CONTINUUM

Dimension: Inquiry

Traditional Model of Schooling	**First Generation of Effective School Correlates**
Most staff do not recognize the connection between teaching and learning. Staff do not pose questions or seek new professional knowledge challenging current practice.	Most staff explore the connection between teaching and learning through casual conversations with each other. Staff occasionally share knowledge outside their immediate school setting. Staff generally do not seek knowledge that challenges the status quo.
Second Generation of Effective School Correlates	**Learning Community**
Staff members possess current knowledge about teaching and learning. Teachers seek to identify problem areas in daily practice based on data and attempt to collect and analyze data to determine the most effective teaching practices for their students. Staff members are open-minded and flexible when considering possible changes in the teaching/learning mission of the school.	All staff members seek to challenge old assumptions about teaching and learning while working with colleagues to conduct action research to identify best options to meet group and individual needs of students. Teachers routinely work with others to construct new findings and share those findings with others to improve practice. There is a broader and deeper sense of responsibility among staff members about their collective work.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT DEVELOPMENTAL CONTINUUM

Dimension: Professional Development

Traditional Model of Schooling	**First Generation of Effective School Correlates**
Professional growth activities are limited in scope and determined by a small group. There is little reflection by staff. Professional growth activities rely heavily on formalized training sessions. Risk taking is discouraged.	There are some choices and opportunities for professional/ personal growth. Reflection by staff is individual and usually private. Professional growth activities are designed to increase understanding of how to provide instruction. Risk taking is allowed.
Second Generation of Effective School Correlates	**Learning Community**
Most professional growth activities are directed toward achievement of school goals. Teachers are beginning to develop/clarify their sense of purpose. Staff members engage in reflection as a means to understand new knowledge about teaching and learning with the intent of altering their practice. Risk taking is expected.	There is a clear link between professional development and improvement in student learning, while maintaining a balance between personal and professional growth. Staff members choose and control professional growth activities. Reflection by staff members is public and collective and may take the form of peer coaching, collaborative planning or reflective writing. Professional growth activities provide opportunities to plan and practice new ideas, receive feedback, and make modifications in practice over time. Risk taking is assumed.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT DEVELOPMENTAL CONTINUUM

Dimension: Roles and Responsibilities

Traditional Model of Schooling	**First Generation of Effective School Correlates**
There is ambiguity and uncertainty about roles and relationships of staff members. Each teacher implements school improvement activities in his/her own way with little or no dialog about overall direction or expected results.	Communication is open, interpersonal relationships are emerging as staff begins to develop clear roles and responsibilities in school improvement efforts. There is emphasis on sharing and celebrating experiences. There is some confusion about what decisions staff members can and should make accompanied by some anxiety on the part of staff about their ability to make them.
Second Generation of Effective School Correlates	**Learning Community**
Staff members are open and trusting of each other. There is an enhanced ability to perform tasks together. Cooperative decision making and planning are beginning to become part of the school's culture, however, many of the issues are unrelated to improvement efforts of the school. Relationships are strong and teachers are encouraged and supported by administrators as they implement school improvement activities with colleagues.	Staff members establish and maintain a focus on collective actions directed at results for student learning, but there is a balance between collaboration and individuality. Staff members explore ideas, examine existing practices critically, seek better alternatives, work together to bring about improvement, and ultimately assess their worth. Roles and responsibilities are constantly changing and evolving to meet new challenges and demands. Conflict is negotiated in ways that protect ongoing working relationships.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT DEVELOPMENTAL CONTINUUM

Dimension: Time Allocation

Traditional Model of Schooling	First Generation of Effective School Correlates
Rigid deadlines are stipulated by those in authority with little flexibility for when specific actions are to be taken. Time allowed for agreed upon actions is closely guided by an artificial time schedule determined by those in positions of authority. Staff members have little control over the establishment of time lines.	Staff are involved in improvement activities but because these activities cannot be tightly controlled, a sense of frustration leads staff members to begin looking for ways to create greater chunks of time. Staff members have limited control over the establishment of improvement activity time lines.
Second Generation of Effective School Correlates	**Learning Community**
Staff members are beginning to develop control over time lines for improvement. There is increased involvement by staff in planning time lines. Staff are beginning to focus on quality of work and determine the amount of time needed to ensure quality. There is more flexibility in time lines.	Time is flexible and linked directly to school improvement needs. The focus for determining appropriate time lines is on quality of work. Time is assigned to activities in a manner that ensures staff members will be able to perform at optimum levels. Staff members charged with responsibility of the work have control of the way time is allocated for the work.

Dimension: Resources

Traditional Model of Schooling	First Generation of Effective School Correlates
Identified resources are not particularly related to improvement efforts.	Some identified resources are shifted to support improvement efforts.
Second Generation of Effective School Correlates	**Learning Community**
Identified resources vary and are directly related to improvement efforts.	Resources are sought and secured to fund initiatives that support core values of the school.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT DEVELOPMENTAL CONTINUUM

Dimension: Assessment/Evaluation

Traditional Model of Schooling	**First Generation of Effective School Correlates**
Student skill/knowledge is assessed in isolation from instruction and relies heavily on external tools such as NRTs. Assessment and evaluation are one and the same. There is no recognition of self-assessment.	A variety of assessment and evaluation practices is used, but the school is unable to distinguish between the two. Results from assessments are used to improve the instructional program and individual student performance. Student self-evaluation is used sporadically. Results from standardized testing are share with the community.
Second Generation of Effective School Correlates	**Learning Community**
School recognizes the difference between assessment and evaluation, uses more than one form of assessment but external tools (such as NRT) remain the primary evaluation source. Other tools may include alternative assessment techniques but are not widely known in the community. Student self-monitoring is increasingly important. Monitoring is focused on trailing indicators.	Multiple tools and strategies for assessment/evaluation are used which are student centered and focused on student self-assessment/ evaluation. Tools include measures of results, process measures, and measures of capacity. All three types of tools are known and accepted by the community. Monitoring is focused on both trailing and leading indicators.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT DEVELOPMENTAL CONTINUUM

Dimension: Frequency of Feedback

Traditional Model of Schooling	**First Generation of Effective School Correlates**
Feedback to students is sporadic. The school does not gather information from stakeholders or clients. There is no effort to gather information on school processes.	Feedback to students is provided through graded papers and tests. NRT information is shared with parents. School may conduct climate surveys, but results are not usually made public. School may begin to gather feedback on what processes are being used.
Second Generation of Effective School Correlates	**Learning Community**
There is frequent feedback of information and data to students, their parents and the community. Feedback is gathered in different ways (such as surveys, focus groups, etc.) and results are made public.	There is constant monitoring of progress of students. Feedback is provided regularly to all within the community in a variety of formats. Feedback is gathered from multiple perspectives and used in decision making.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT DEVELOPMENTAL CONTINUUM

Dimension: Use of Data

Traditional Model of Schooling	First Generation of Effective School Correlates
Data are seen as a barrier to change. Staff members do not gather, analyze or interpret data. Changes are made based on the "Cardiac Test".	Some data are collected by the school. Data collection efforts are unfocused and the school makes little distinction between collection and analysis of data. There is limited understanding by most staff about how to use data to target improvement areas. Only limited data are made available to staff members.
Second Generation of Effective School Correlates	**Learning Community**
Data are collected and analyzed on a routine basis. Data are used to target areas for improvement, although not all staff members are committed to the use of data in decision making. Staff is attempting to use data for both evaluation and assessment purposes. All data are made available to staff members, but only limited data is made available to the larger community.	Data are seen as a leverage for change. All data are made public and discussed. Data are used to identify the impact of actions taken by the school and to determine the degree of excellence and equity in educational processes and programs.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT DEVELOPMENTAL CONTINUUM

Dimension: Evidence of Progress

Traditional Model of Schooling	**First Generation of Effective School Correlates**
There is little discussion among staff and the community about what results the school is seeking and how it will tell if the results are forthcoming. There is little attempt to link actions with results. Results are not used to plan future initiatives.	The school focuses primarily on strategies/activities with considerable effort directed at helping students be more successful, but there is disagreement about how the efforts are affecting students. The use of results for decision making is intermittent. Success is defined by what happens in an individual classroom or grade level in a single area.
Second Generation of Effective School Correlates	**Learning Community**
Meaning is found primarily in the activities/strategies of improvement initiatives. Evidence usually consists of the evaluation of programs and the implementation of selected strategies/activities. Staff are beginning to look beyond individual classrooms or discipline areas, but have not developed benchmarks for progress.	There is consensus and clarity regarding what is to be achieved and what will be accepted as indicators/ evidence that the results are congruent with those intended. Feedback is linked to clear benchmarks of progress. The school seeks to determine whether the decisions they make are producing the results they desire. Results are fed back into the improvement process as future plans are developed. Success is defined by what happens in the community as a whole.

APPENDIX B

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE FORM

Dear _____:

My name is Judi Jones and I am a doctoral student at the University of Georgia in the Department of Educational Leadership. I am conducting a study on the work of the superintendent in developing a district level learning community and invite you to participate. Below are details of the study and a place for you to indicate your willingness to participate in the study.

Purpose. The purpose of the study is to explore the work of the superintendent in developing a district level learning community. Through the study, the following questions will be examined:

bb)   How does change occur in the teaching and learning processes of a school district?
cc)   How does the superintendent influence improvement in teaching and learning in the district?
dd)   What are the similarities and differences between the improvement processes at the school level and at the district level?

Procedure. I understand that information from the study will be collected from interviews, observations, and documents. I will participate in an interview (or a series of interviews) to explore the questions listed above. These interviews will take place between October, 2000 and June, 2001 and will be audio-taped. I will be given a copy of the interview questions ahead of time and after the tapes have been transcribed, I will be sent a written copy and given an opportunity to make any corrections.

Risks and Discomforts. No risks or discomforts are forseen as a result of my participation in the study.

Benefits. The primary benefit I will receive from this research study is the opportunity to reflect on my work as a professional educator and the opportunity to share my knowledge and experience with others. Benefits for the study will be a greater understanding of the impact that a district superintendent has on the development of an educational organization.

Appendix B (Continued)

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE FORM

<u>Confidentiality</u>. I understand that any information obtained about me as a participant in this study, including my identity, will be kept confidential. My identity will be coded, and

all data will be kept in a secure, limited access location. My identity will not be revealed in any publication of the results of this research. I understand that interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed for the purpose of data analysis. Only the researcher and major professor will have access to these tapes. Further, I understand that the tapes will be stored until completion of the study and when the final report is approved, the tapes will be erased. The results of this study will be confidential, and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without my consent unless otherwise required by law.

I agree to participate in the research titled T*he Work of the Superintendent in Developing A District Learning Community,* which is being conducted by Judi Jones, from the department of Educational Leadership at University of Georgia. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary; I can withdraw my consent at any time without penalty and have the results of the participation, to the extent that it can be identified as mine, returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the study, and can be reached by telephone at or

Please sign both copies of this form. Keep one and return the other to the researcher.

_____   _____

Signature of the researcher   Date

_____   _____

Signature of the participant   Date

Research at the University of Georgia that involves human participants is overseen by the Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding your rights as a participant should be addressed to Julia D. Alexander, M.A., Institutional Review Board, Office of the Vice President for Research, University of Georgia, 606A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-6514; e-mail address IRB@uga.edu.

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Superintendent

Interview Dates_____   **Interviewer** _____

Key Research Questions to be Explored
- How did change occur in the teaching and learning processes of a school district?
- What changes in teaching and learning occurred in the target district?
- Who initiated teaching and learning changes?
- How were changes facilitated?
- How does the superintendent influence improvement in teaching and learning in the district?
- How did the superintendent determine change was needed?
- What strategies were used by the superintendent to facilitate improvement?

Purpose of the interviews
To establish rapport with the superintendent, understand the district context, and begin exploration of the superintendent's role.

Interviewer Script
The research study is about understanding the work of the superintendent in relation to the core business of the district—teaching and learning. I hope to capture a sense of what your district is like and understand a little of what you do as superintendent here. I know there are many roles that a superintendent fulfills, but I am especially interested in the parts of your work that have to do with teaching and learning. I have identified some questions to ask as a beginning point, but feel free to add any additional information you think would be pertinent to the study. I expect this interview to last about an hour and I will be audio-taping the interview so I can focus on our conversation. Within a week, I will transcribe the tape and send you a copy to make any corrections. I am going to start with some questions about the district.

Interview Questions
1. Tell me about your district. (Size, enrollment, number of schools, diversity, staff characteristics, achievement levels, culture, etc.)

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Superintendent

<u>Elaboration Probes</u>

<u>Current description</u>. If I were to take a picture of your district today what would it look like? I'm beginning to get the picture so let me take this a step further.

<u>Perceptions of district focus</u>. If I were to ask the parents of students in your district to describe the district focus, what would they tell me? What answer would I get if asked the same question of teachers? How did you arrive at that focus?

<u>Issues</u>. What do you think is the most pressing teaching/learning issue in your district at the present? Would you elaborate on that?

<u>Changes over time</u>. What, if any, changes have you seen in the district during your time as superintendent? Let me ask you to think about what kinds of differences you noticed between classrooms in your district today and those when you first began your superintendency in this district. You've mentioned several changes. Let me ask your opinion about each of the things you've mentioned. What do you think about _____? (Ask about each change mentioned.)

<u>Anticipated future</u>. What do you think your district will be like in five years? What do you think will be the most challenging issue for the district within the next ten years? Can you say some more about that?

TRANSITION
Before we move on to the next set of questions, let me make sure I have the big picture of your district. You said that the district is _____ and I think you indicated that the focus for the district was _____. Before we move on and talk about your work as superintendent, is there anything else you want to share with me about the district to help me get the overall view?

2. Tell me about your work as the district superintendent. (Tenure in the district, educational background, major job responsibilities, daily activities, etc.)

<u>Elaboration Probes</u>

<u>Tenure in the district</u>. How long have you been superintendent? What other experiences have you had in education?

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Superintendent

Perceptions of self. If I asked school principals to describe you, what three words would they use and why? What if I asked central staff? Teachers? Parents?

Professional achievement. To date, what would you say has been your most significant contribution to this district?

Daily activities. Describe a typical day in your work as a superintendent. About how much of your day would you say is spent actually working with the teaching and learning business of the district? Can you elaborate on that?

TRANSITION
I'm sure that I haven't covered all the things you do in the district that are linked to teaching and learning. What have I left out? Can you share that information with me? I'd like to close our interview by asking a couple of specific questions about the focus of your work as it relates to organizational development.

3. Tell me about the connection between your role as head teacher in the district and the achievement of students.

Elaboration Probes

Improvement. Improvement and student achievement are the main focus in the governor's new reform act. This is not a new agenda for school districts because they have been working on improvement initiatives and strategies for a number of years. Tell me about how your district has been approaching the improvement focus?

Influence. Do you see yourself influencing the teaching process here? In what ways?

CLOSURE
This information has really helped me understand your district and a little bit about your role. Thank you for taking time today to talk to me about your district. Within the next week, I will send you a transcribed copy of our interview today.

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Central Office Administrator

Interview Dates_____   **Interviewer**_____

Key Research Questions to be Explored

- How did change occur in the teaching and learning processes of a school district?
- What changes in teaching and learning occurred in the target district?
- Who initiated teaching and learning changes?
- How were changes facilitated?
- How does the superintendent influence improvement in teaching and learning in the district?
- How did the superintendent determine change was needed?
- What strategies were used by the superintendent to facilitate improvement?

Purpose of Interview

To explore characteristics of learning communities as identified in the literature (ability to create sustainable relationships over time; clear sense of collective values and purpose; commitment to staying centered on the common work of the group), to seek understanding about the means used by as superintendent to improve schools, and to understand the improvement process at the school level.

Interviewer Script

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Your superintendent suggested that you would be an excellent source of information about several topics that I am studying and I am excited about the opportunity to talk to you. Let me tell you a little about the study and then I'd like to ask you a few questions. The focus of the study is understanding the work of a superintendent in developing learning communities. I am interested in your perspective as a central administrator responsible for curriculum and instruction. We will be talking about teaching and learning in your district and the processes and systems that support them. I have identified some questions to use as a beginning point, but please feel free to add any additional information that you think may be pertinent to the study. I expect the interview to last about an hour and I will be audio-taping the interview so I can focus on our conversation. Within a week, I will transcribe the tape and send you a copy to make any corrections.

Interview Questions

1. Let's start with some information about your district. Tell me a little about your district.

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Central Office Administrator

<u>Elaboration Probes</u>

> <u>Description</u>. Suppose I am a teacher about to start my first day of teaching here. If I asked you to describe your district, what would you tell me?
>
> What would my first day be like? What would you expect of me? What would the principal expect of me? What would the parents expect of me? How would you characterize the district?

TRANSITION

Let's switch gears a little bit and talk about the core business of schools–teaching and learning. I want to learn about some of the issues your district is facing, what processes you use for improvement, and ways that people work together.

2. Tell me your perceptions of the work that is going on in schools to enhance student learning.

<u>Elaboration Probes</u>

> <u>Teaching and learning.</u> Suppose I am the parent of a child about to enter kindergarten in a school in your district. What would you tell me about what I can expect for my child as she moves through your school system? What exactly are the expectations for students in this district? Whose expectations are they? How will I know that my child's school is providing a quality education for her? I read that your mission statement was _____. What exactly does that mean? How does it relate to teaching and learning? What would you tell me about the work to achieve your mission?
>
> <u>Relationships</u>. How would you characterize the relationship between teachers and the leadership team at _____School? What three words would you use to describe the staff there? The school environment? Why? How would you describe the roles of students in this school? What would you say is the driving force behind school improvement at this school? When I reviewed the data, I noticed that the test scores have (increased or decreased) at the school for the past three years in the area of _____. What do you think might have caused this change?

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Central Office Administrator

Joint work. If I were to visit this school and spend a teacher work day there, what might I find teachers doing? Would it look different on other days? How is this school different from other schools? What do you look for that signals teachers (or other school staff members) are working together to improve student learning? Is it different at different levels? How so? How important is it for teachers to work together on things like a) learning new strategies; b) looking at or grading student work; c) developing classroom profiles; d) evaluating new software or other materials? In what ways does your district support teachers who participate in these activities? OR What percent of teacher time is spent in these activities?

TRANSITION
I want to broaden this out a bit and look at the bigger picture. Is there anything else you think I should know about relationships between teachers (staff members) or the work they do together? Pause. Then, let's move to some systemic issues.

3. Tell me about curriculum and instruction in your district. I know you have a lot to offer in this area.

Elaboration Probes

Curriculum and instruction. What are your current curricular priorities? Tell me a little more about _____. Who determines the priorities?   By what process? About what percent of the professional staff would you say is involved in determining curricular priorities? How are they involved?

Issues. What has been the most pressing teaching/learning issues that your district has dealt with in the past two years? Can you elaborate on the issue? (Who, what, when, where, how) What steps have you taken to address the issue? Who has been involved in your district? Are you satisfied with the progress you have made on the issue? OR Are you satisfied with where you currently stand on the issue? OR How will you decide what to do next?

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Central Office Administrator

4. Tell me about the connection between school improvement and your superintendent.

Elaboration Probes

> Roles and responsibilities. What would you say is the main job of your superintendent? Would school principals agree with that? Why or why not? What does your superintendent do to promote increased student learning in your district? How does he communicate expectations to the professional staff about priorities for the district? In what ways does he provide feedback to the community about student learning? To the principals about their school performance?

> Change efforts. Tell me about a recent change that was made successfully. It could be one of the new requirements for HB 1187 or anything else. What would you say was the most important thing your superintendent did to make the change effort successful? (Probe for who, what, when, how, etc.)

> Strategies. What are some strategies that your superintendent has used to improve schools? Where did the ideas come from? What group has been the primary target for improvement strategies? How were the improvement strategies explained to the group? Were they accepted? How do you know? What results have you seen because of the improvement strategies?

> Feedback. How could a parent or other community member provide feedback to you about how you are doing as a district? In what ways does your district work with the community to establish expectations for student learning?

> Influence. Do you think your superintendent influences the teaching process here? In what ways? Can you give me an example of how he is involved in the day to day improvement work?

CLOSURE
We have talked about a lot of different issues today. Is there anything else you would like to share with me that would help me to better understand how a superintendent works with the teaching and learning mission of the district? Thank you for taking time today to

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Central Office Administrator

talk to me about your district. If you think of anything else that would help me to better understand the work of the superintendent in improving student learning, feel free to call me. Within the next week I will send you a transcribed copy of our interview today.

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Principal

Interview Dates: _____   **Interviewer:** _____

Key Research Questions to be Explored
- How does change occur in the teaching and learning processes of a school district?
- What changes in teaching and learning occurred in the target district?
- How does the superintendent influence improvement in teaching and learning in the district?
- How did the superintendent determine change was needed?
- What strategies were used by the superintendent to facilitate improvement?
- What were the similarities and differences between the improvement processes at the school level and at the district level?
- How were these dimensions like those of a school improvement process?

Purpose of the Interview
To explore characteristics of learning communities as identified in the literature (ability to create sustainable relationships over time, clear sense of collective values and purpose, commitment to staying centered on the common work of the group), seek understanding about the way a superintendent improves schools, and understand the improvement process at the school/district level.

Interviewer Script
Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study. Your superintendent suggested that you would be an excellent source of information about several topics I am studying about and I am excited about the opportunity to talk to you. Let me tell you a little about the study and then I'd like to ask you some questions. The focus of the study is the work of the superintendent in developing learning communities. I am interested in your perspective as a building administrator. We will be talking about teaching and learning in your district and school and what the superintendent does with regard to them. I have identified some questions to use a beginning point, but please feel free to add any additional information you think is pertinent to the study. I expect the interview to take about an hour and I will be audio-taping the interview so I can focus on our conversation. Within a week I will transcribe the tape and send you a copy to make any corrections.

Interview Questions
1. Tell me a little about your district. What do you think is the most outstanding characteristic of your district and why?

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Principal

<u>Elaboration Probes</u>

> <u>District focus.</u> What is the focus for the district? What does this focus mean for students, staff, and parents at your school? Do you think this is common across other schools in the district?

> <u>Change over time</u>. How long have you been in the district? What do you think have been the most significant changes while you have been here? You mentioned _____. Can you elaborate on that issue and describe it a bit more. What impact, if any, has that had on student learning in your district? Why do you think so?

TRANSITION
I'm beginning to get an overview of what your district is like, but hope to understand a bit more about the core business of teaching and learning in your school through this interview process, so I'd like to switch gears a little bit and talk about your school. A little later in the interview, I'm going to ask you some specific questions about the work of your superintendent in teaching and learning. But, before we start talking about your school, is there anything else you'd like to share with me about the district to help me understand the overall view?

2. Tell me about the work that is going on in your school to enhance student learning. What does school improvement mean to you as a principal?

<u>Elaboration Probes</u>

> <u>Improvement work.</u> The governor's reform bill has had implications for all schools in Georgia. As you reflect on your school, what do you see as the improvement work you are facing? Can you tell me more about that? (Who, what, when, how). How does this improvement work at the local level fit into the district focus?

> <u>Teaching and learning.</u> If I were the parent of a student in your school, what could I expect from your school as my child moves through? What exactly are the school's expectations for students here? Do you think that is consistent district-wide? How do you know students are meeting expectations? How would I, as a parent, know my child was meeting expectations? What do you do for students who don't meet expectations?

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Principal

Relationships. What if I were a new teaching joining this staff? What three words would you use to describe the staff?   What is the role of students in the school here?

Joint Work. What would I see in this building on a teacher work day? What kind of work do teachers do on teacher work days? Do you think this would be common across the district? Across other levels (elementary, middle, high)? What do you, as the principal, look for to tell you that
teachers are working together toward the improvement of student learning? Do you think it is important for teachers to work together on things like: a) learning new strategies; b) looking at or grading student work; c) developing classroom profiles; d) evaluating new software or other materials; e) planning units of instruction; and f) developing curriculum? In what ways does your school (and district) support teachers who are engaged in these activities? OR What percent of teacher time is spent on each activity? Are you satisfied with the collaborative work that teachers do? What other ways could this collaborative work be enhanced?

Collective values. How did your school develop the improvement agenda? Who was involved? How has this changed over the years? What do you think is the most important thing to teachers in this school? What indicators would I see in the everyday work that the improvement agenda is being carried forward by teachers?

TRANSITION
There's a lot to talk about in this area and I'm sure that I haven't covered all the issues. Are there other things about school improvement that would help me to understand how this process goes on in your school and district? Could you share that information with me? I want to move to the last section of the interview and talk a little about the work that your superintendent does to improve schools.

3. Tell me your perceptions of the connection between school improvement and your superintendent.

Elaboration Probes

Roles and responsibilities. What would you say is the main job of your superintendent? Would your peers agree with you? Why or why not?

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Principal

What does your superintendent do to promote increased student learning in your district? How does he communicate expectations to the principals and central office administrators about the priorities for the district? In what ways does he provide feedback to the community about student learning? To you, as a school principal, about your school's performance?

Change efforts. Think about a recent change in your district that was made successfully. It could be one of the new requirements for HB 1187 or anything else. What would you say was the most important thing your superintendent did to make the change effort successful? (Probe for who, what, when, how, etc.)

Strategies. What are some ways that your superintendent has gone about improving schools? Where did the ideas come from? What group was the target group for improvement in your district? What results have you seen because of these strategies?

Feedback. How are teachers and local school administrators included in the feedback loop about performance? How could a parent or community member provide feedback to the district about how you are doing as a district? In what ways does your district work with the community to establish expectations for student learning?

Influence. Do you think your superintendent influences the teaching/learning process here in your district? In what ways? Can you give me an example of how he is involved in the day to day improvement work?

CLOSURE
We have covered a wide range of topics today, from district to school and back again. I appreciate your time and expertise in this area. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me that would help me to better understand how a superintendent influences teaching and learning and the improvement work that goes on at the district and school levels? If you think of something else that would help me in developing my understanding, please call me at _____. Within the next week, I will send you a transcribed copy of our interview today for corrections.

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Classroom Teacher

Interview Dates: _____ **Interviewer:** _____

Key Research Questions to be Explored
*   How does change occur in the teaching and learning processes of a school district?
*   What changes in teaching and learning occurred in the target district?
*   How does the superintendent influence improvement in teaching and learning in the district?
*   What strategies were used by the superintendent to facilitate improvement?
*   What were the similarities and differences between the improvement processes at the school level and at the district level?

Purpose of the Interview
To explore characteristics of learning communities as identified in the literature (ability to create sustainable relationships over time; clear sense of collective values and purpose, commitment to staying centered on the common work of the group), seek understanding about the way a superintendent improves schools, and understand the improvement process at the school/district level.

Interviewer Script
Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study. Your superintendent suggested that you would be an excellent source of information about several topics I am studying about and I am excited about the opportunity to talk to you. Let me tell you a little about the study and then I'd like to ask you some questions. The focus of the study is the work of the superintendent in developing learning communities. What I am hoping to learn from you is the perspective of the classroom teacher on the improvement process that has gone on at your school and in the district. I have identified some questions to use a beginning point, but please feel free to add any additional information you think is pertinent to the study. I expect the interview to take about an hour and I will be audio-taping the interview so I can focus on our conversation. Within a week I will transcribe the tape and send you a copy to make any corrections.

Interview Questions
1. Tell me a little bit about your school.

Elaboration Probes

> School focus. What is the focus for the school? What does this focus mean for students, staff, and parents at your school?

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Classroom Teacher

Change over time. How long have you been in the district? What do you think have been the most significant changes while you have been here? You mentioned_____. Can you elaborate on that issue and describe it a bit more. What impact, if any, has that had on student learning in your district? Why do you think so? What do you think your school will be like in five years? Why?

TRANSITION
I'm beginning to get an overview of what your school is like, but hope to understand a little bit more about improvement through this interview process. A little later in the interview, I'm going to ask you some specific questions about the role of your superintendent in the improvement process and teaching and learning. But before we start talking about the improvement process at your school, is there anything else you'd like to share with me about the district to help me understand the overall view?

2. Tell me about the way your school addresses improvement in teaching and learning. How do you approach the topic?

Elaboration Probes

Improvement work. How do you decide what to focus on at the school? Who is involved? Probe for specifics on the process and ask about results.

Teaching and learning. If I were the parent of a student in your school, what could I expect from your school as my child progresses through? What exactly are the school expectations for students here? Do you think that is consistent district wide? Whose expectations are they? How do you know that students are meeting your expectations? How would I, as a parent, know my chile was meeting expectations? What do you do for students who don't meet expectations?

Relationships. What if I were a new teacher joining your staff? How would you describe your school? What is the role of students here?

Joint work. What would I see at your school on a teacher work day? What kind of work do teachers do on teacher work days? Do you think this would be common across the district? Across other levels

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Classroom Teacher

(elementary, middle, high)? Do teachers in your school work together on things like a)

learning new strategies; b) looking at or grading student work; c) developing classroom profiles; d) evaluating new software or other materials; e) planning units of instruction; f) developing curriculum? How does your school support teachers in these activities? OR what percent of teacher time is spent on each activity?

Collective values. How did your school develop the improvement agenda? Who was involved? How has this changed over the years? What do you think is the most important thing to teachers in this school? What indicators would I see in the everyday work that the improvement agenda is being carried forward by teachers?

TRANSITION
There's a lot to talk about in this area and I'm sure that I haven't covered all the issues. Are there other things about school improvement that would help me to understand how this process goes on in your school and district? Could you share that information with me? I want to move to the last section of the interview and talk a little about the role that your superintendent plays in the improvement work of schools.

3. Tell me your perceptions of the connection between school improvement and your superintendent.

Elaboration Probes

Roles and responsibilities. What would you say is the main job of your superintendent? What does your superintendent do to promote increased student learning in your district? How does he communicate expectations to the teachers about district priorities?

Strategies. What are some ways that your superintendent has gone about improving schools? What results have you seen because of these strategies?

Feedback. How do you get feedback about how the school is doing? How could a parent or community member provide feedback to the district about how you are doing as a district?

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Classroom Teacher

Influence. Do you think your superintendent influences the teaching/learning process here? In what ways? Can you give me an example of how he is involved in the day to day improvement work?

CLOSURE

We have covered a wide range of topics today. I appreciate your time and expertise in this area. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me that would help me to better understand how a superintendent influences teaching and learning and the improvement work that goes on at the school level. Within the next week, I will send you a transcribed copy of our interview today.

APPENDIX D

PROCEDURES FOR DOCUMENT REVIEW

Strategic Plan

Notes
- Defines actions to be taken by the district (or school) to accomplish the mission.
- Serves to integrate the work across systems and lessen the impact of external forces.
- Planning is both a leadership and management function.
- Depending on the organization, it can be either a) process to bring order and structure to an otherwise uncertain set of events or b) "ceremony that an organization must conduct periodically to maintain its legitimacy" (Bolman & Deal, 1991, p. 177).
- Broad participation is needed.
- Plan is often considered a symbol of change.
- Process allows those involved to obtain a concrete reality of the work to be done.

Analysis Process
1. District strategic plan was obtained from the superintendent. At the time the document was obtained, the strategic plan was in development and was not complete, thus analysis is somewhat limited.
2. Portions of the School Improvement Developmental Continuum were evaluated to determine the feasibility of including them in the analysis of the document.
3. Frame detailed by Leithwood et al. (2001) to monitor the planning process was examined to determine which, if any, components might guide analysis of the strategic plan.
4. Planning processes were examined in light of systemic-strategic organizations and compared to those of technical-rational organizations. While strategic planning is based on a model within the technical-rational model, it was important to understand the processes and expected outcomes for the level of planning required of complex organizations in order to remain future-focused
5. Key components of strategic plans were outlined and differences between how components might look in the two types of organizations were defined.
6. Each criteria was defined and a rating scale established.
7. Analysis worksheets were designed to aid in the review of the strategic planning document.
8. Worksheet # 1 served as a data collection worksheet—outlining the strategic directions, goals, and objectives from the strategic plan.

PROCEDURES FOR DOCUMENT REVIEW

9.   Worksheet # 2 was used as an initial data analysis worksheet to identify pervasive themes from the strategic plan.
10.   Worksheet # 3 examined the components of the strategic plan in relationship to the developmental characteristics from the school improvement developmental continuum.

<u>Resources</u>

Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (1991). <u>Reframing organizations</u>. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Jones, J. (2000). School improvement developmental continuum. Unpublished work.

Leithwood, K., Aitken, R., Jantzi, D. (2001). <u>Making schools smarter</u>. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Zohar, D. (1997). <u>Rewiring the corporate brain</u>. San Francisco, CA: Brett-Koehler Publishers.

PROCEDURES FOR DOCUMENT REVIEW

Strategic Plan Criteria Definition

Strategic Direction Degree to which there are clear and compelling linkages between district beliefs, mission, and the strategic direction.
Goals/Objectives Degree to which goals/objectives are aligned with district beliefs and provide a guide for action.
Assessment and Evaluation Degree to which the district has systematic processes for monitoring achievement of goals.
Professional Development Degree to which professional development encourages a broad range of activities directed at goal attainment for staff members at different levels of expertise.
Action Strategies Degree to which there is alignment between the identified strategies and the goals.
Results Degree to which indicators for monitoring progress are congruent with intended outcomes.
Timeline Degree to which timelines are consistent with the overall plan of action.
Resources **Degree to which resources are allocated to support the core values of the district and the defined goals.**

PROCEDURES FOR DOCUMENT REVIEW

Strategic Plan Review
Worksheet # 1: Data Collection

<u>Strategic Direction</u>

<u>Goals</u>

<u>Objectives</u>

PROCEDURES FOR DOCUMENT REVIEW

Strategic Plan Review
Worksheet # 2: Pervasive Themes

Theme 1

Theme 2

Theme 3

PROCEDURES FOR DOCUMENT REVIEW

Strategic Planning Analysis
Worksheet # 3

Strategic Goals**:**

Indicators	1	2	3	4
Strategic Directions				
Goals				
Assessment and Evaluation				
Professional Development				
Action Plans				
Results				
Timeline				
Resources				

Rating Scale (Drawn from the School Improvement Developmental Continuum)

1 = Indicative of Traditional Model of Schooling
2 = Indicative of the First Generation of Effective Schools Model
3 = Indicative of the Second Generation of Effective Schools Model
4 = Indicative of a Learning Community

PROCEDURES FOR DOCUMENT REVIEW

Mission Statements

Notes

- Official statements of the purpose of the school (or school district)
- Conveys commitments that the district or school is making to the stakeholders/customers.
- Used by members of the organization to help them understand and evaluate information coming to them from both internal and external sources.
- Serves as a grounding instrument to help group members decide what to pay attention to, what expectations might be set, or what actions might be taken.

Analysis Procedures

1. District mission statement was obtained from the superintendent.
2. School mission statements were obtained from the school websites.
3. Central office mission statements were obtained from the district website.
4. Mission section of the School Improvement Developmental Continuum (developed by the researcher) was evaluated for its feasibility in the analysis.
5. Frame suggested by Leithwood, et al. (2001) to monitor district and school mission statements was examined by the researcher to determine which, if any, components might be helpful in the analysis.
6. Characteristics of learning communities included in the literature review were examined to determine which, if any, components might be helpful in this analysis.
7. Analysis worksheets were designed to aid in the process.
8. Each mission statement was thoroughly read.
9. Key components or commitments were identified for the district, individual school, or central office department and listed on Worksheet 1. Belief statements obtained from the schools were also listed on the worksheet along with the slogan or motto for the school.
10. A combination of the School Improvement Developmental Continuum and the frame suggested by Leithwood et al. were used to identify evaluative criteria for Worksheet 2.
11. Each mission statement was analyzed separately to determine the degree of congruence between district and school.
12. A spreadsheet was developed to look for overall patterns in the data.
13. Statements of finding were developed for overall use in the study.

PROCEDURES FOR DOCUMENT REVIEW

<u>Sources</u>

Holcomb, E. (1999). <u>Getting excited about data</u>. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
Jones, J. (2000). School improvement developmental continuum. Unpublished work.

Leithwood, K., Aitken, R., & Jantzi, D. (2001). <u>Making schools smarter</u>. Thousand
Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Schlechty, P. (2001). <u>Shaking up the school house</u>. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

PROCEDURES FOR DOCUMENT REVIEW

Mission Analysis Worksheet 1
Commitments

School _____   Level   E   M   H

Statement:

KEY COMMITMENTS

NOTES:

PROCEDURES FOR DOCUMENT REVIEW

Mission Analysis Worksheet 2
Evaluation

Statement:

Indicators	1	2	3	4
Clarity of Purpose				
Immediate Focus				
Long Range Focus				L
Congruence: Mission/Beliefs				
Congruence: School/District				
Value-Based				

NOTES

DOCUMENT REVIEW PROCEDURES

Mission/Belief Statements: Criteria Definition

Clarity of Purpose Degree to which the mission/belief statements address the reason for the school's existence.
Immediate Focus Degree to which the mission/belief statements provide an agenda for productive change.
Long Range Focus Degree to which the mission/belief statements are oriented toward defensible long range outcomes for students.
Congruence: Mission/Beliefs Degree to which there is agreement between the mission and beliefs about the purpose of the school.
Congruence: District/School Mission Degree to which the mission statement of the school is aligned with the district mission statement.
Value-Based Degree to which the mission/belief statements express a set of fundamental values.

Rating Scale (Drawn from the School Improvement Developmental Continuum)

1 = Indicative of Traditional Model of Schooling
2 = Indicative of the First Generation of Effective Schools Model
3 = Indicative of the Second Generation of Effective Schools Model
4 = Indicative of a Learning Community

APPENDIX E

FIELDNOTE FORMAT

Date_____	Location: _____

Observations	**Observer Comments**

APPENDIX F

CASE RECORD OUTLINE

I. County Information
      A. Population
      B. Work Force and Economics
      C. Vital Statistics

II. Educational System Information
      A. Enrollment Patterns
      B. Achievement Patterns
      C. Staffing Information
      D. Graduates

III. Participants
      A. Participant 1: Superintendent
      B. Participant 2: Central Administrator
      C. Participant 3: Principal
      D. Participant 4: Teacher

IV. Data Collection Tools
      A. IRB Paperwork
      B. Consent Forms
      C. Interview Protocols
      D. Fieldnotes Format
      E. School Improvement Framework
      F. Document Collection List
      G. Observation Checklist

V. Artifacts
      A. DOE Report Cards, CSP Report Cards, GPPF Report Cards
      B. District Strategic Plan
      C. Policy Manual
      D. Mission/Vision/Belief Statements
      E. District Goals
      F. School Mission/Vision/Belief Statements
      G. School Handbook

CASE RECORD OUTLINE

VI. Data
  A. Uncoded, Verbatim Transcripts
  B. Fieldnotes
  C. Observations
  D. Reflective Memos
  E. Participant Demographic Information Forms

VI. Data Analysis Files
  A. Coded Transcripts
  B. Coding Categories List
  C. Descriptive List of Coding Categories
  D. Mission/Vision Analysis
  E. Strategic Plan Analysis
  F. From....To Statements
  G. SI Process Mapping

APPENDIX G

CONCEPTUAL CATEGORIES AND PRIMARY CODES

Conceptual Category	Primary Coding	
Assumptions about Schools and Schooling	Purpose of schools Community role Role of teacher Role of principal Role of superintendent	Student role in school Future Connections between school and real world Community expectations
Change	Process of change Kinds of change Pace of change Sustaining change Wanting to change Learning to change Perspective on change Assumptions about change	Supporting change Resources for change Implementation of change Teacher role Principal role Central adminsitrator role Superintendent role Benefits for students
Characteristics of Learning Communities	Development of relationships Commitment	Creation of a sense of purpose
Coordination and Support	Staff development Funding for staff development Staff development topics Allocation of resources Flexibility	Professional appraisal cycle Focus Role of policy Human resources Time Systemic issues
Design and Adoption	Role of central office Options for schools Incentives	Authority of staff Timing Solutions
Developmental Stages of Improvement	Traditional Schools First Generation Effective Schools Correlates	Second Generation Effective School Correlates Learning Community

APPENDIX G (CONTINUED)

CONCEPTUAL CATEGORIES AND PRIMARY CODES

Conceptual Category	Primary Coding	
District Improvement Process	Strategic plan Actions Shared decision making	Purpose Collaboration Beliefs Role of Board
Leadership	Teacher as leader Student leadership Building capacity Learning to lead	Empowerment Delegation History Transition Actions
Processes and Conditions	Hiring Teacher appraisal School organizational patterns Teacher turnover Quality improvement circles	School design Core business Succession plan Accountability Critical questions Changing demographics
School Improvement Process	Plans Goals Involvement of others	Use of data Mission Vision Results
Superintendent Issues and Challenges	Perspectives on issues Strategies Actions Views of self Views of work Influence Expectations for staff	Expectations for students Expectations for principals Expectations for teachers Vision Roles Moral responsibilities Professional responsibilities
Teaching and Learning	Classroom instruction Quality work for students Student engagement	Observations in classrooms Strategies for teaching

APPENDIX H

FROM..........TO.......... STATEMENTS

The following statements represent a summary of the changes in Abbington from the
perspectives of the study participants. Data for these changes were drawn directly from
verbatim transcripts of interviews.

Superintendent Perspective

FROM	TO
Command and control organization	Commitment from staff
Random purchases	Targeted use of resources
Ritually compliant students	Authentically engaged students
Highly scripted system	More flexibility in decision making
Principals as managers	Principals as leaders of cultural/structural change
Board focus on management	Board focus on quality for students
Less curriculum coverage	More curriculum depth
Narrowly written policy	Broadly written policy as guide
School Improvement Plans as ritual	School Improvement Plans as living document
Focus on teachers and administrators	Focus on students
Whole group instruction	Individual planning for student needs
Lack of input from students	Focus groups with students
Support staff as inspectors	Support staff as coaches and mentors
Development of beliefs and mission as administrative activity	Development of beliefs and mission as a guide for planning
Use of perception for decision making	Use of data for decision making
Expectation that some kids would be reading on grade level	Expectation that all kids would be reading on grade level

APPENDIX H (CONTINUED)

FROM..........TO.......... STATEMENTS

Central Office Administrator Perspective

FROM	**TO**
Stable community	Community of rapid growth
Lots of programs, initiatives	Identification and use of what is best for students
Top-down approach to leadership and organizational development	Site based approach to leadership
Principal as authoritarian figure	Principal as instructional leader
Teachers working in isolation	Teachers working collaboratively
Limited involvement of teachers in decision making	Expectation for and expanded involvement of teachers in decision making
Struggling readers	Student success in reading
School Improvement Plans developed primarily for accreditation purposes	School Improvement Plans as driving force for change
Expectation of teacher role to follow prescribed guidelines	Expectation of teacher as expert planner for instruction
Superintendent with limited knowledge of curriculum, instruction, assessment	Superintendent with expert knowledge in curriculum, instruction, assessment
Limited opportunities for professional growth for teachers	More flexibility and choices for professional growth for teachers

APPENDIX H (CONTINUED)

FROM..........TO.......... STATEMENTS

Principal Perspective

FROM	TO
Traditional, top-down system	Shared decision making
Role of principal as manager	Role of principal as instructional leader
Limited professional reading, study	More reading and evaluation of professional materials
Limited opportunities for collegial work for teachers	Expanded opportunities for teacher collegial work (study groups)
Homogenous student population	Ethnically diverse student population
Primary focus on test scores	Use of classroom data for instructional decision making
One-way communication with superintendent	Two-way communication with superintendent
Horizontal teaming at grade levels	Vertical teaming across school
Thinking about school improvement	Strong focus on actions for improvment
Faculty meetings centered on operational issues	Faculty meeting focused on instructional strategies
School making decisions based on feelings	School making decisions based on data
Teacher work days focused on administrative work	Teacher work days focused on identifying problems and planning for individual students
Limited involvement in system-wide planning	More coordinated effort for involvement
Limited expectations for kindergartners	Higher expectations for kindergartners
Limited monitoring of student achievement	More frequent monitoring of student achievement
Limited, general information for parents about student learning	Specific focus on student strengths and weaknesses
Belief statements as shelf documents	Use of belief statements as guide to action
Role of teacher as nice, supportive person	Role of teacher to impact and improve student learning
Use of basal texts for reading instruction	Use of leveled books for reading instruction

APPENDIX H (CONTINUED)

FROM..........TO.......... STATEMENTS

Teacher Perspective

FROM	TO
Limited opportunity for input	Many different opportunities for input
Structure, rigid guidelines	Choices and decisions for classroom instruction
Teacher control of learning environment	Teacher and student shared responsibility for learning
Objective grading	Subjective grading
Use of single source for grading	Use of multiple sources for grading
Recall questions for comprehension	Higher-order questions for comprehension
Basal reading texts for instruction	Leveled books for instruction
Limited horizontal articulation	Expanded horizontal and vertical articulation
Superintendent as authoritarian leader	Superintendent more as peer
Traditional lecture teaching	Student centered learning
Traditional staff development	Staff development as, modeling, demonstration, observation
Student as receiver of knowledge	Student as creator of knowledge
Teaching as solo work	Teaching as shared responsibility
Absence of data	Disclosure of data

APPENDIX I

COMPARISON CHART
SCHOOL LEARNING COMMUNITIES AND ABBINGTON SCHOOL DISTRICT

The chart below lists selected dimensions of the School Improvement Developmental Learning Continuum, provides an abbreviated description of the dimension in a school learning community, and then lists evidence of the dimension found in Abbington. The letter(s) in parentheses refers to the data source for evidence, as listed below.

Source of Evidence

S = Superintendent interview   CO = Central office administrator interview
P = Principal interview   T = Teacher interview
SP = Strategic plan   DM = District mission statement
DB = District belief statement   O = Observation
PM = Policy manual

DIMENSION: MISSION/PURPOSE

School Level Learning Community	Abbington School District
1) High standards of student learning for all students. 2) Seeks to close the gap between current reality and future focused vision.	✓ Special education students included in definition of <u>all</u> students. (S) ✓ Increased expectations for kindergartners. (P, T, CO) ✓ Definition of quality work for students. (T, S, CO, SP) ✓ Use of disaggregated data to identify students not performing. (S, P) ✓ Board focus on quality for students. (S, T, DM) ✓ Individual planning for student needs. (S, T, P)

COMPARISON CHART
SCHOOL LEARNING COMMUNITIES AND ABBINGTON SCHOOL DISTRICT

DIMENSION: VISION

School Level Learning Community	Abbington School District
1) Co-created by all members of community. 2) Proactive orientation 3) Establishes standards of equity and excellence.	✓ Improvement councils at school and district levels. (S, CO, P, T, SP) ✓ Development of beliefs/mission/vision by representative stakeholder groups. (CO, S, SP) ✓ Increased opportunities for teacher input and involvement in decision making. (T, CO, SP) ✓ Vision statement as policy. (PM)

DIMENSION: GOALS

School Level Learning Communities	Abbington School District
1) Commitment to continuous improvement. 2) Change agenda biased toward mission.	✓ Feedback from parents. (P, SP) ✓ Strategic plan goals, objectives linked to achievement of mission. (SP, P) ✓ Development of marketing plan. (SP)

DIMENSION: ACTIONS

School Level Learning Communities	Abbington School District
1) High leverage strategies identified and implemented. 2) Work crosses grade levels and disciplines. 3) Strategies lead to quality work for students.	✓ Identification of high-yield strategies for struggling readers. (CO, T, P, S) ✓ Development of rubrics for writing by district cross grade teams. (CO) ✓ Use of Literacy Collaboratives at elementary level. (T, S, CO) ✓ Use of performance assessments for gauging student learning. (S, T) ✓ Vertical and horizontal teaming at schools. (T)

COMPARISON CHART
SCHOOL LEARNING COMMUNITIES AND ABBINGTON SCHOOL DISTRICT

DIMENSION: LEADERSHIP

School Level Learning Communities	Abbington School District
1) Shared leadership. 2) Formal leader relinquishes traditional leadership roles. 3) Use of expert knowledge of staff and community.	✓ Principals as leaders of structural, cultural change (S) ✓ Principals as instructional leaders. (CO, P) ✓ Opportunities for teachers to develop math performance assessment activities. (CO) ✓ Training with writing rubrics. (CO) ✓ Changes in expectations for teacher role. (D) ✓ Recognition of superintendent knowledge in curriculum, instruction, and assessment. (CO)

DIMENSION: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

School Level Learning Community	Abbington School District
1) Focus on collective actions directed at results for student learning. 2) Balance between collective actions and individual actions.	✓ Shift from compliance to commitment. (S) ✓ Restructured teacher appraisal process. (S, CO) ✓ Teacher as decision maker for instructional decisions for students. ✓ Shift focus from teachers to students (SP, S)

DIMENSION: USE OF DATA

School Level Learning Community	Abbington School District
1) Data are leverage for change, made public, and discussed. 2) Data are used to identify impact of actions and to determine the degree of excellence and equity.	✓ Data presented to school communities to explain need for new reading program. (T, S) ✓ Data used by classroom teachers to change instructional practices. (T, P, S) ✓ Superintendent observation of classrooms and questioning teachers about practices. (T, P, S) ✓ Superintendent questioning of principals about school improvement plans. (S) ✓ Changes in procedures and guidelines for obtaining resources. (P, S) ✓ Collection of data on impact of programs, initiatives. (CO)