

A Case Study Of Planning And Implementing Whole-School  
Reform At A Middle School

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Although attempts at school reform have been around for the past century, “little of significance has changed” (Lunenberg & Irby, 1999, p. 47). This appraisal underscores the repeated efforts by generations of reformers to alter the course of American education. Sarason (1991) argues that many school reforms have failed because of ineffective efforts to alter the culture of the school. Whole-school reform “seeks to improve school performance by simultaneously aligning all aspects of a school’s environment with a central guiding vision” (Hertling, 1999, p.1). Whole-school reform designs have swept through American education since the early 1980s (Odden, 2000; Slavin & Fashola, 1998a).

All such reform calls for programs that “affect all aspects of school functioning, including instruction, curriculum, governance, professional development, parental and community involvement, and support services” (Ross et al., 2000, p. 112). What is different now about whole-school reforms over prior efforts is that they all are supposed to be based on replicable, well-developed, and well-evaluated models that give a school staff assurances that the reform is likely to pay off, provide teachers with the tools to transform their daily instruction, and affect “just about everything schools do” (Slavin & Fashola, 1998a, p. 12), from administration to instruction. Another important potential of whole-school reform is that such reforms can change the discussion about reform in America’s schools: “If it is in fact possible to directly improve teaching and learning in thousands of schools . . . then we need not rely exclusively on the roundabout path to reform embodied in the focus on standards, assessments, governance and the like” (Slavin & Fashola, p. 4).

The push for replicable models raises concerns that prescribed solutions are incompatible with the nature of school systems. Some argue that design reforms are created by policy makers and business people from an inexperienced and non-theoretical perspective. They ignore the historic purposes of tax-supported public schools to promote democratic equality and shape citizens who contribute to society beyond being good workers. The narrow focus on raising test scores ignores empowering students with the civic, moral, personal skills and behaviors to live in a multicultural society. Replicable models present tension-filled dilemmas.

Cuban and Tyack (1997) talk about the persistent dilemma in public schooling between the two dominant trends in education, customization and standardization. They contend these two trends work against each other in balancing public schools' responsibilities to provide individual benefits, to supply the workplace with good employees, and to prepare students for citizenship. There is a widespread interest in customizing education, in creating schools that offer unique experiences for students in an era of standardization (Cuban & Shipps, 2000).

This case study investigated planning and implementing the micro-society whole-school reform model from the perception of administrators, teachers, and parents. The focus was to determine how change strategies fostered implementation of micro-society whole-school reform at School M, a public middle school in south Florida.

The micro-society whole-school reform design is the model used at the research site. The micro-society whole-school reform concept seeks ways to make the curriculum more relevant to everyday existence. The micro-society design attempts to build a community of lifelong learners by emphasizing the use of work settings in learning

situations (Strickland, 1996). In this model students create and manage business ventures that produce goods and services. They also run agencies that handle governmental functions. Students spend one class period each day at their jobs. They assume management or employee responsibilities in businesses, agencies, and nonprofits. In their work places, students apply technology, think critically about authentic crises, prepare and analyze budgets, resolve ethical issues, and develop cultural sensitivities. These experiences often raise issues such as the fairness of democracy, the rewards of entrepreneurship, cultural differences and similarities, the role of law in society, how to humanize institutions, and how much tax an individual should pay. When fully implemented, micro-society has six strands: technology, economy, academy, citizenship and government, humanities and arts, and heart (volunteerism and the ethical aspects of society). Students create a legislature that makes laws, develop a court system that administers them, and have students who enforce the laws. Students have the opportunity to apply concepts learned in the classroom in real situations (Richmond, 1973).

In recent years, the rapid growth and plethora of whole-school reform designs has gone largely unchecked. As of December 2000, there were more than 125 designs in operation (Berends, Bodilly & Kirby, 2002). Controversy surrounds research on the effectiveness of whole-school reform initiatives conducted primarily by creators and associates of the designs.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for the principal is how to develop a guiding vision and school culture that supports the new paradigm of change. Leadership “is a complex balance of conflicting forces and tension” (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002, p. xii).

The purpose of this case study was to explore the dilemmas of planning and implementing whole-school reform in a middle school from the perception of administrators, teachers, and parents. The central focus was an in-depth analysis of how change strategies fostered implementation of the micro-society whole-school reform at School M, a public middle school in south Florida. The question arises whether educational policy favoring certain whole-school reform efforts is appropriate given the absence of validated research.

The primary research question of this study was: What are the dilemmas of planning and implementing whole-school reform in a middle school from the perception of administrators, teachers, and parents? The potential contribution is to gain greater insight into how school leaders can promote continuous improvement and to inform policymakers regarding whole-school reform.

The process of whole-school reform is complex. The process involves creating a school culture that provides a supportive atmosphere where trust is pervasive. Fullan and Miles (1992) offered a new “paradigm of change.” They suggested systems must engage in continuous improvement. Systems must learn to view change as a part of everyday reality. In the paradigm of change described in the Fullan and Miles’ Model (1992), changing the culture of the institution is crucial. Change entails new ways to address problems and find solutions on a continuing basis. Educational systems are learning organizations and educators need to understand change (Fullan & Miles, 1992).

Whole-school reform involves inculcating teachers and principals with systems thinking and organizational learning.

Whole-school reform involves altering conventional practices of power over and embracing systems of power with. These reforms echo cultural norms apparent in organizational structures. Systems of power with reflect an organizational culture that values continuous learning, enhancing capacity to solve problems and respond to internal and external pressures and to adapt to new information and conditions. Bennett's (2003) three-dimensional model of schools as organizations visualizes the interdependency of power, structure and culture in organizational operation (Harris & Bennett, 2001). It provides a systemic action framework for the survival and growth of schools through collegiality and collaboration.

The literature on whole-school reform reflects various perspectives and contradictory research findings regarding outcomes. The dialogue among dissenting voices is somewhat harsh at times. Many school reforms have been short-lived. Some voices argue that schools that dedicate themselves to systematic, collaborative problem solving can continually develop and implement new ideas, thereby reculturing themselves. The literature reveals that teacher isolation, lack of time, and the complexity of teaching present significant barriers to sustained organizational learning. The majority of research on whole-school reform has been on elementary schools. A survey of past studies indicates that substantive changes in teaching practices are elusive. A vein of pessimism runs through the research on whole-school reform. Systematic evidence describing the conditions that foster and inhibit learning organizations is scanty. On the other hand, researchers identified schools in which entire faculties have become proficient in new forms of instruction, resulting in immediate impact on student learning. Monitoring data provides a good way of tracking the effects of change efforts. Some

studies suggest that change in the workplace is key to successful organizational learning. Change requires altering bureaucratic relationships of power and adopting collegial ways of working together.

The literature characterizes successful dialogue in which participants learn to share multiple perspectives that open the way to new types of collective learning. The literature implies creating a learning organization requires principals to see themselves as learning leaders helping schools develop the capacity to carry out their mission by cultivating and maintaining a shared vision. Furthermore, the daily quest for solutions can be enriched by alleviating barriers to collaboration, and making decisions democratically. In sum, attempting to change the behaviors and tasks of a large and diverse group in an organization is a difficult reform to accomplish.

The study was conducted at a middle school in the Broward County, Florida School District, one of the fastest growing districts in the nation with a unique urban and suburban mix of students. School M is located in a largely urban, high-poverty and high-minority zone. In addition, it is characterized by high student mobility and a high proportion of English Speaking Other Language (ESOL) students. School M is a sixth through eighth grade urban middle school that opened in August 2000. Since the 2001-2002 school year, School M received a grade of A from the State of Florida's School Accountability Report.

This case study utilized sample participants from School M's community. The sample consisted of administrators, teachers, and parents. The 9 administrators included: 1 principal, 2 assistant principals, 1 guidance counselor, 1 curriculum specialist, 1 exceptional student education specialist, 1 language arts specialist, 1 media specialist, and

1 magnet coordinator. The total sample was 28. These participants provided perceptions of people of different groups and roles.

Additionally, the sample included 15 teachers with representation across the three grade levels. The first set of 5 teachers was selected through the researcher's professional contacts. The principal was asked to recommend other teachers, including those known to be actively involved as well as those known to be resisters.

A sample of four parents included the PTA (Parent Teacher Association) president and the SAC (School Advisory Committee) chair. The guidance counselor was asked to recommend 2 additional parents, one known to be actively involved and one known to be resistant.

At least one recorded interview was held with each of the 28 participants. Interviews were divided into three consecutive sessions each one reflecting on the previous conversation. Interviews totaled approximately 40 hours. Strategically, interviews were conducted from the bottom up in terms of the hierarchy of power in the organization. The three separate interviews per participant were divided by the following seven sub-topics: (a) planning, (b) implementation, (c) mutual adaptation, (d) school capacity, (e) principal leadership, (f) parent and community involvement, and (g) federal and state context.

Observations were conducted in order to view the actions of administrators, teachers, and parents in regard to whole-school reform. Observations totaled approximately 400 hours. An observation guide was used to capture descriptive and reflective thoughts. The observations varied in length from approximately one to three hours.

Document analysis was used to verify or to dispute the information gathered through interviews and observations. Documents from school files such as the School Improvement Plan, and training materials, school website, and school and district databases were analyzed. Documents were compared and contrasted with information obtained through interviews and observations.

Analysis was guided by themes that emerged from the case study. Data analysis began with data collection. The data was triangulated to ensure validity of the processes. Themes from common terms or statements made by participants were extricated. Data were presented in matrices and networks. The methods of data collection and analysis that were used made the study more generalizable and valid by following generally accepted qualitative research methods.

The study resulted in three major findings: (a) The principal enhanced the organization's capacity for whole-school reform by balancing tensions and conflicts; (b) Implementing a high-stakes testing regime and reform design simultaneously contributed to teacher overload, and reduced the capacity of teachers to implement whole-school reform; (c) Learning communities had a pivotal role in fostering collaboration for whole-school reform.

During the first year of whole-school reform implementation, the time period of this study, School M was severely overcrowded with a student population of more than 2081 students in a school built for 1730 students. Student mobility was high. The principal added portable classrooms and hired more teachers. The majority of new teachers were from private industry and had little or no education or experience in teaching.

This study found that the principal enhanced the learning organization's capacity for whole-school reform by balancing tensions and conflicts. The principal met leadership challenges in the following areas: (a) sustaining a school culture conducive to staff learning; (b) managing the organization for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment; (c) acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner; (d) influencing the larger political context; (e) facilitating shared vision; and (f) collaborating with families and community members.

Planning and professional development was a collaborative process and teachers were scheduled according to teams. The principal's "rolling plan" allowed for flexibility in adapting professional development. She broke down teacher isolation through sharing in learning communities. Teachers learned to empathize with the problems of colleagues in a safe and non-threatening environment. In working closely with department heads, the principal enhanced the effectiveness of the learning organization.

The principal made it possible for the school to move forward in the reform process by guiding and supporting faculty and staff. The principal had a sense of moral purpose. She made a difference in the domain of work. The principal explained it this way:

My role has been the cheerleader, getting everybody involved. It's a lot of work for the teachers. It's like another whole added curriculum. The pressure of FCAT and growth in student achievement was challenging for them. They had to come up with ideas working with students on different business venture job related skills, even though there were materials given to them. Teachers knew their concentration had to be within the areas of FCAT. So, I think I've had to be more of a supporter this year by saying, "Come on we need to do it. You'll see, it's really going to pay off for the student. You are going to find your class time a little more user friendly" and so on. I think it's been a lot harder on me this year because of the frustrations involved in doing whole-school reform. There are peaks and valleys. Again, by having children out and about, making sure that we

have this and that going right, meeting with more groups of people, to make sure that their areas are running smoothly, has been more challenging. But, I feel like I needed to be more supportive also.

The principal promoted the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner. Her behavior demonstrated values, beliefs, and attitudes that inspired others to a higher level of performance. Mrs. A's demeanor served as a role model. She treated people fairly, equitably, and with dignity and respect. The principal routinely protected the rights and confidentiality of students and staff. She obligingly opened the school to public scrutiny. Furthermore, her prevailing custom was to appear on morning announcements addressing students in a friendly yet supportive manner.

Mrs. A promoted the success of students by influencing the larger political context. The principal worked to change school district policies to provide quality education for students. For example, the principal mobilized district middle school principals to propose a unilateral change in district middle school schedules to allow for additional time for professional development. The school board approved the measure. The principal was able to revise the schedule allocating more time to professional development and the learning community. The principal overcame structural barriers to foster learning among adults. In this manner, the principal enhanced the learning organization's capacity for whole-school reform by balancing tensions of staff learning and scarcity of time, for student achievement.

Furthermore, Mrs. A wanted School M to sever membership from its current innovation zone and establish a new innovation zone spearheaded by the nearby new high school. Innovation zones function as "mini districts" dedicated to complimenting and

enhancing school improvement. School M was one of twelve schools that made up the largest innovation zone in the school district. The new innovation zone was approved. Mrs. A believed the new innovation zone would be better for School M for several reasons. It would afford the opportunity to attract, as well as to control, additional funding through private support. The new innovation zone would benefit School M by securing public/private collaboratives in its neighborhood. Furthermore, it would enrich the learning community of feeder pattern schools. The principal met with the new high school principal to discuss continuing the micro society whole-school reform initiative at the high school. Collaboration with a peer principal facilitated new ideas in a consultative, mentoring network. The principal fostered knowledge creation on a co-equal basis within the school and across schools.

The principal was flexible in adapting School M's structure to the real world concept of the micro society model by strengthening ties with a nearby university that hoped to become a leading research institution. A faculty member at the university conducted numerous workshops using technology at School M for teachers and others. Lifelong learning was modeled.

Cultural norms underscored collaborative work and the pursuit of continuous improvement. Teachers expressed it this way, "Very motivational, very positive. She wants to go. She's excited about it."

The principal spoke to faculty and staff and focused on new cultural norms that emphasized collaborative work and continuous improvement. A teacher commented, "The principal is a very sharing, outgoing person. She has weekly administrative

meetings. She has monthly conversations with teachers. She encourages us to go to conferences.”

The principal was the steward of a vision of learning. She explained:

I think that the whole-school will be reformed when we see all children acting as perfect citizens within our society. Our goal is that students live up to their code of ethics, by-laws, the Bill of Rights and the Constitution.

### Teacher Challenges

We lost an hour with micro society. We had to squish academics. It took me a month to get to math. Micro society is a third subject we have to squeeze in our planning. Parents have complained we’re not doing FCAT practice.

The kids who stay with us during micro time get more FCAT practice. I do writing prompts, reading and math. We’re technically still responsible for the FCAT scores of kids who go to micro society ventures during that time.

FCAT has taken away from micro society. They are so worried about losing our A FCAT grade, they don’t give us that extra time to really delve into it. We’re giving them extra reading instead.

The role of teachers in whole-school reform is pivotal. Implementing FCAT (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test) testing and the reform model simultaneously presented challenges relating to curriculum, scheduling, workload, resources, and time. Novice teachers found it especially difficult. The majority of teachers felt vulnerable, that is open to parent criticism and pressure.

### *Curriculum and Instruction*

Teachers are essential to implementing the whole-school reform model’s instructional strategies to improve student achievement, yet the study found that teachers at School M were uncertain how to balance the tension between standardized assessments and the curriculum and instruction of micro society. The state’s FCAT developers

encouraged adoption of specific curricular programs that focused on basic skills, which were in addition to the micro design model. Teachers changed what and how they taught micro society curriculum in response to the FCAT. The prescriptive FCAT curriculum conflicted with the whole-school reform design. The micro society curriculum was often abandoned in order to drill for performance on FCAT standardized tests. A teacher elaborated, “A challenge I am facing is finding curriculum for my students. The warehouse work does not keep all of them busy nor do they want to do academic work.”

Most teachers believed that simultaneous implementation of high-stakes testing and whole-school reform designs pressured them to teach in ways that contradicted their ideas of sound instructional practice. Adherence to high standards of methods used in the teaching profession conflicted with prescriptive curriculums and prescriptive instructional practices. This conflict challenged their integrity. The ethical dilemma diminished the capacity of teachers to implement whole-school reform. Teachers expressed it this way,

If you teach the Sunshine State standards you are going to be covering all the areas that are necessary. There's a fear that we have to practice for the FCAT. We are not showing the importance of a well-rounded education. Students have to learn how to think. I think this going to drive a lot of creative teachers out of the field.

Novice teachers perceived whole-school reform as chaotic. They expressed fear, frustration, and isolation. They felt helpless to control changes in curriculum, scheduling, and student misbehavior. A novice teacher said, “I don't feel that I am prepared to teach micro society. I was clueless, to be honest with you. It's made me feel incompetent.” Novice teachers were particularly vulnerable to the pressure of the state assessments. They did not have either the curricular or the mentoring support to know how to prepare

students. Teachers hired as full-time substitutes were not eligible for a New Educator Support System (NESS) coach.

### *Parents*

Implementing high-stakes testing and the reform design simultaneously expanded the number of parent complaints. In addition to complaints regarding micro society, parents were concerned that micro society was infringing upon FCAT preparation for their children. Parents were cognizant that standardized test scores affect promotion, graduation, and college admission. A mother commented, “My daughter was told by her teacher that if you don’t pass the FCAT you won’t pass. This was discouraging. My daughter prayed in church to pass.”

### Learning Community Challenges

This study found that learning communities had a pivotal role in fostering collaboration for whole-school reform. Pockets of small collaborative groups working together made up the constellation of a powerful interdependent learning community that generated ideas for growth and change. School M was like an integrated circuit with intricate circuits etched into its surfaces. Most of the school leaders had been with School M since it opened. Computers, telecommunications, and e-mail supplemented structured school collaboration, which allowed learning communities to operate 24/7. Face to face interactions were complemented by unseen “chat rooms.” Teachers and administrators were not alone. Conflict gave way to cooperation through collegiality and collaboration. Although challenges were complex and there were complaints most faculty and staff were happy because the work focused on problems and not on individual faculty members. Learning communities transformed the work facilitating progress in quality

and performance over time. Grade level teaching teams, professional development teams A through D, team/parent conferences, curriculum teams, the Student Support Assistance Team, professional conversations with the principal, and the new innovation zone were key collaborative groups. The principal declared, “They’re learning communities.”

The principal, in conjunction with her administrative team, structured the groups and the schedule so that various collaborative groups took place every day of the school week.

#### *Grade Level Team Collaboration*

Mrs. A’s successful campaign to modify middle school schedules in the district provided one hour daily in the morning for team collaboration. Although some middle schools chose not to change their schedules, Mrs. A used the time for collaboration and sanctioned teachers coming together and engaging in problem solving.

#### *Teams A through D*

Teachers were divided into 4 groups, according to level of competency and experience, labeled A through D, which included “Rookies,” One Year Experienced School M Teachers, Veteran Potential Trainers, and Veterans That Need Help. Although teachers were not told the letter significance they surmised as much. The principal emphasized, “The groups are interchangeable and flexible. A teacher could join another group if they wanted.”

Group “A” was affectionately termed, the “Rookies.” This group was composed of teachers new to School M. Some had little or no education or experience teaching. A veteran teacher commented, “The new teachers are overwhelmed with our database, Grade Book, and CAB (Communicating Across Broward). New people don’t feel they’re

on the same page.” Another veteran teacher alleged, “New teachers need more support and training on the computer programs we use.” CAB was the new Broward County School District daily email and communications tool. It provided access to content from anywhere, anytime, from any computer on the Internet. The Group “A” Rookies sessions tended to run longer than the other groups. Rookie sessions included additional training related to Filemaker Pro, discipline, student information database, FCAT and scheduling.

Group “B” was composed of last year’s “Rookies.” They had one year’s experience teaching at School M. Group “C” were the Veteran Potential Trainers’ Group. They were knowledgeable about School M’s operation and how to use the database. Group “D” was composed of Veterans That Need Help. Teachers in this group needed assistance mainly with technology.

#### *Team/Parent Conferences*

Teachers, parents, guidance counselor, social worker, and student meet to deal with problems affecting the student’s performance in school. The principal explained, “Every Wednesday and Friday is set aside for Team Parent Conferences. They’re important.” The team, composed of teachers, parents, guidance counselor, social worker, and student, owns the problem.

#### *Curriculum Teams*

There were 8 curriculum teams. There were 3 math/science and 3 language arts grade level curriculum teams. A typical team, the math/science learning community for grade 7, met every second Thursday of the month to share best practices regarding curriculum. A teacher offered the following, “It was relaxed. It was informal.” Another teacher asserted, “I feel I have a lot to share.” Participants discussed the new pre-algebra

text series. One teacher asked, “Is everybody still in Chapter 1? I’m only on 1.4 and this is really hard for my kids.” This teacher was using an advanced level book; however, her students were regular level. The dialogue led to a discussion of, “What’s important in teaching math?” Another teacher commented to her neighbor, “Your students told my students . . .” Participants began to take a closer look at curriculum.

Another example of a curriculum team was the language arts/social studies group. Language arts/social studies teachers in grades 6, 7, and 8 participated and the department head was the facilitator. Issues related to curriculum were discussed. A teacher commented, “We brainstormed regarding which novels were best.” Another teacher said, “We shared ideas for curriculum planning. We enjoyed it.” Teachers developed support and consensus.

The language arts/social studies learning community emphasized curriculum and instruction of *The 6+1 Traits for Successful Writing*. This curriculum aligned with the writing rubric in preparation for the state mandated standardized Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). The team dealt with tensions arising from high-stakes testing and accountability by focusing team efforts on instructional strategies that would enable students to meet high standards in writing on the exam. The team used data in tailoring instruction for individual students according to their identified areas of weakness. A veteran teacher commented, “I teach them that less is more in writing.” Another teacher asserted, “These are good writing skills they can use the rest of their lives.”

#### *Student Support Assistance Team*

The Student Support Assistance Team included the guidance director, three guidance counselors, the ESE Specialist, the school psychologist, and the school social

worker. Both the school social worker and school psychologist were itinerant members of the School M staff. Professional disagreements, jealousies and the “protection of turf” were areas of conflict. The underlying areas of conflict included: work overload, multiple demands, and prescriptive bureaucratic mandates compounded by the escalation in complexity of cases students presented. Furthermore, the guidance director conflicted with the ESE Specialist regarding duties, responsibilities, and issues related to use of space. The ESE Specialist chose not to participate in child study meetings led by the guidance director and limited support staff participation in staffings.

The Student Support Assistance Team was Step 3 in the Collaborative Problem-Solving process adopted by the Broward School District when instructional strategies utilized by the teacher with a student in need of assistance have not proven adequate. The Student Support Assistance Team had a dual function as the Threat Assessment Team. The guidance director typically distributed a list with 52 names for review at a monthly meeting that lasted under two hours. The three new assistant principals were known to submit an additional 10 students for consideration during the meeting.

The guidance director said she was pressured by administration to have students with behavioral problems undergo psycho-educational evaluations to facilitate their alternative placement. Furthermore, the guidance director was concerned that no Gifted testing was being done. The ESE Specialist aligned with the school psychologist in assigning a low priority to Gifted testing. The school psychologist shared her dilemma of insufficient time available to test the volume of students referred for testing. She was also concerned that required paperwork for the referral process was not being completed.

Furthermore, the school psychologist was concerned that the school was not following district procedures with students who make threats. The school psychologist was particularly sensitive to threat assessment. She had previously worked in the Colorado school district where the incident of school violence erupted at Columbine High School several years earlier.

A critical incident took place that would transform this group into a dynamic learning community. “Protection of turf” gave way to collective thinking. The increase in school violence across the country prompted the Broward school district to develop threat assessment procedures. Only the psychologist and social worker had received in-depth threat assessment training. An out of boundary student who had been admitted through microsociety presented a threat to others. The guidance director convened the Student Support Assistance Team to assess the threat.

Teachers and administrators joined the team. The case was presented. All required paperwork was completed. Tasks for a follow-up meeting were assumed by participants. There was the sudden realization that the guidelines were not specific. Furthermore, the school district’s Comprehensive Evaluation Process, which entailed the possibility of the student’s alternative placement, would take time.

At first, team members began to discuss the case within the framework of their own disciplines. Psychological, social work, counselor, exceptional student education, teaching, and administrative perspectives began to be shared. Participants began to listen closely to each other. Reflection led to inquiry. People began to ask questions to clarify perceptions. Members started to increase their respect for the opinions of others. Teachers felt safe talking about their unique dilemmas in regard to this uncomfortable and

potentially dangerous situation. Through subsequent meetings, participants developed empathy for one another. Gradually, the assessment team focused on the mutual purpose of containing the threat of violence. The team was committed to keeping the school safe and free from violence. Through group interaction, support staff, teachers, and administrators transformed their collective thinking. The collective energy created by this partnership increased their power and seemed greater than each person's power individually. Learning to understand interdependency paved the way for participants to develop systems thinking applicable to other situations encountered. Collaboration ignited the emergent transformation of power relationships. Support emerged from a common problem. The work culture began to adopt a partnership system of power.

The student in question was eventually placed in an alternative program for students classified as Severely Emotionally Disturbed. A higher level of service was provided than available in the traditional school setting.

The team made changes after collectively dealing with this student. Additional time was allotted to work and reflect together. The team engaged in dialogue that emphasized listening, suspending judgment, and searching for common understanding. The group examined assumptions and shared varied perspectives that cleared the way to a new kind of collective learning. Furthermore, the small group provided support, a sounding board, and professional assistance. Trust had been established. The guidance director and ESE Specialist negotiated duties, responsibilities, and use of space. The ESE Specialist began to participate in child study meetings and encouraged greater participation in staffings. Child study meetings were rescheduled on a weekly basis. The

referral process to child study was revamped. Furthermore, additional staff training in classroom interventions facilitated a sharp decline in the number of cases referred.

Three major conclusions can be drawn from the findings of this study: (a) Principal leadership is vital to successful whole-school reform implementation; (b) The crucial challenge of principals in whole-school reform is forging a network of strong relationships within and across staff work teams and the community through the development of learning communities and professional development; (c) Whole-school reform must be balanced with and adapted to the accountability system if it is to have a chance of succeeding.

The study recommends: (a) Whole-school reform should focus on developing learning organizations and ongoing professional development within the context of learning communities; (b) Districts need to provide support to schools in the form of leadership backing, trust and cooperation, and school autonomy; (c) Future research should investigate how different model designs impact whole-school reform; and (d) A longitudinal study can examine changes in the model design over time.

In closing, principal leadership is crucial for whole-school reform to be successful. School principals can use the power inherent in their role to craft a process by which others define and actualize whole-school reform in practice. Collaborative groups that are empowered can make decisions in adapting curriculum and instruction and will foster teacher ownership that sustains whole-school reform. Partnership power is a way of working through the micropolitics at the school level and mediating policy changes to positively affect curriculum, the school's operation and access to resources. Partnership power promotes collaboration in the school and with the community. Teachers are more

willing to openly share their practices, noting successes and failures. Principals, in turn, can negotiate with the district using their leverage to effect changes in policy. Building support at the district level is vital to implementing and sustaining whole-school reform.

Lessons learned from this investigation will help policymakers and those seeking to undertake whole-school reform. Successful change requires that those in leadership positions remain comfortable with the conflict and tension of harmonizing the internal needs of the school with external accountability measures. By facing conflict rather than avoiding it, leaders move forward head-on to create learning organizations.

By addressing external mandates through relationships established and efficacy teachers develop, school leaders can forge a network of strong relationships within and across staff work teams. Teacher ownership is critical to both implement and sustain whole-school reform.

At the same time, changes to external mandates are an avenue to pursue. Often, accountability measures are based on quantitative student test results in reading, math, and writing skills on mandated, standardized tests. The results of this study suggest that the accountability system could be improved by broadening the focus to include more of the public's goals for education.

Whole-school reform is more than a particular model design. The creation of a learning organization is fundamental. Whole-school reform involves changes that occur in individuals and how they relate to one another. A confident outlook on external accountability demands and the ability to remain comfortable with the tensions, which often result from these demands, are a requirement of leadership in schools undergoing whole-school reform. That same confidence leads to partnership power and collaboration,

fostering teacher ownership that sustains whole-school reform in practice, not just theory.

Leaders must consciously overcome structural and normative barriers to unleash

knowledge sharing on a co-equal basis within the context of learning communities.

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