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School leader perceptions of acceptable evidence of parent involvement

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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Michael D. Smith

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2011

Abstract

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by

Michael Dennis Smith II

MA, Brigham Young University, 2006

BA, Southern Utah University, 1996

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Administrative Leadership for Teaching and Learning

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Abstract

A cultural shift occurring in education today calls for more collaborative interaction between school personnel and parents. Many school leaders and most parents, however, lack experience with this type of interaction for school improvement. The three questions which framed this qualitative, multiple-case study were: 1) What are school leaders' conceptions of fully engaged parents in school improvement processes? 2) What do school leaders offer as evidence of parental engagement? 3) What do visiting school leaders offer as evidence of parental engagement? The theoretical framework for this study was derived from the research-base on parent involvement and the application of social capital theory to parent involvement, which included asset, market based and school centric approaches. An archival document review was conducted to collect and analyze accreditation self-studies and visiting team reports from five high schools. Follow-up interviews with each of the visiting team chairpersons were conducted. Data were analyzed using content analysis, replication logic and comparative contrast methods. Substantial differences were found between what school leaders provided as evidence of full parental engagement and what visiting team members expected to find as evidence. While school leaders most often presented one-way communication activities as evidence, visiting teams were expecting to find evidence of meaningful, decision-making. These findings led to the development of a project to engage parents alongside school leaders in on-going, collaborative problem solving and authentic decision-making for school improvement. Implications of positive social change from this project are that common experiences such as these, which lead to shared understandings, effect a substantial improvement in the relational dynamics of the home and school partnership.

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Dedication

This is dedicated to my mother. She has been my hero throughout my life. She is the driving force that has allowed me to become the person that I am today.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the work done in my behalf by Professor James Thomasson. He has seen me through this project. I would also like to thank Professor Kimberly Strunk. For the many reviews, many thanks for Dr. LuAnne Forrest and Anna Smith. The most important acknowledgement is to my wife, Marcia, for her unwavering support that this day would someday come and to my children Mikell, Matt, Marshall, and Mason – you can all do this too.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

Schools are currently experiencing a cultural shift as evidenced by contextual characteristics such as a long tradition of isolation of people, fragmentation of ideas, and factory-style methods to more collaborative interactions and results-oriented operations (Hord & Hirsh, 2009). Many schools function as learning communities. Collaboration is at the heart of these learning communities (Conoley & Conoley, 2010; Med, 2010) and schools expect parents to play a significant role in this collaboration (Gordon & Louis, 2009). Consequently, parents are asked by schools and, in some cases state legislators, to engage with teachers, administrators, and students in ways unlike they have in the past (Joseph & Reigeluth, 2010; Spillane, Reiser, & Reamer, 2002; Stelmach, 2005; Stelmach & Preston, 2008). States and nations mandate schools, by law, to include parents as active members of teams investigating various school processes (Boylan, 2005; Dom & Verhoeven, 2006; Ho, 2006; Young & Levin, 2002) and in making decisions regarding school goals, curriculum, financing, and even teacher professional development (Abrams, 2002). Schools ask parents to consider matters which have been required of teachers and administrators and others in the field following years of scholarly training (Gordon & Louis, 2009; Stelmach & Preston, 2008). Many of the decisions parents are being expected to make on these teams involve educational activities and structures not in place when parents were themselves students (Boethel, 2003; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). With little or no training and preparation, parents are expected to engage in school

improvement processes with school personnel as experienced colleagues (Ferrara, 2009; Schlinker, Ophelan & Spall, 2008; Stelmach & Preston, 2008).

Definition of the Problem

The call for school improvement has been continual since the 1980s when a federal report, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), warned of the nation's precarious position in international politics because of educational limitations. Three decades of effort at educational reform has resulted in little change until a recent cultural shift (Lambert et al., 2002). Secondary schools that previously functioned in ways that favored characteristics such as the isolation of people, fragmentation of ideas, and bureaucratic relationships (Dufour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2005; Hord & Hirsh, 2009) are transforming into collaborative environments in which community problem-solving and shared leadership (Sergiovanni, 2005) are characteristic of a growing number of high schools. The traditional practice of making decisions based on majority vote and opinion with little supporting data has also changed. Now many schools are involved in collective inquiry by collaborative teams of teachers, administrators, and parents making educational decisions within a research-centered and results-oriented culture (Med, 2010).

The prior lack of fundamental change and improvement in educational processes in Utah over the past 3 decades has prompted legislators to step in and create laws to ensure full engagement of parents in these processes. They see school community councils as a primary vehicle for this engagement. The Northwest Association of Schools

and Colleges introduced a new accreditation process to Utah high schools in 2000. This new process contained expectations that stakeholders within the school community participate in all steps of school improvement planning from creating the school's vision to the analysis of student learning data. This level of transparency was met with apprehension by administrators, suspicion by teachers, and confusion for parents who have been expected ever since to fully participate in these activities.

As part of this process, multiple groups of stakeholders investigate the business of learning throughout all areas of the school's educational program, review data about student learning, and in short, acknowledge their current reality (Utah State Office of Education, 2007). To determine this current reality, stakeholders analyze which groups of students are learning within the school's current education program and which students are not. The entire school community analyzes what they are offering students who are not getting it (content) and what they are doing for their students who already know it (content). These collaborative groups are tasked with creating action plans with goals and objectives that align with their community-created vision and address their students' identified learning needs.

The continuous school improvement process requires school personnel and parents to work together to study methods and create plans aimed at improving student achievement results. It requires direct representation and full participation of parents in the creation of a school-wide vision, the determination of student learning goals and the development of a school-wide improvement plan to meet these goals. The adage "it takes

a village" (African proverb) epitomizes the sociopsychological element underlying this culture shift.

Rationale

The idea of full collaboration (Tschannen-Moran, 2001) with parents has yet to materialize on a large scale throughout the United States. Currently, I work at a school in northern Utah where parental participation is very high; however, this participation is reminiscent of the more typical parental engagement of the past, like teacher recognition parties and thank you programs, student recognition activities, and booster clubs (Epstein, 2002). I have found this to be typical of other schools I have visited as a member of the state accreditation review team charged with assessing school improvement efforts throughout the state.

It is not uncommon for parents to feel overwhelmed by the new processes and their peculiar educational jargon (Epstein, 2008; Schnee & Bose, 2010). Little explanation or training has been offered to parents. As a teacher-leader at three secondary schools over the past decade, I have observed the hesitation of parents invited to become fully involved in the school improvement process. In such cases, a lack of understanding among parents, of educational concepts, and new expectations actually has created roadblocks for parent engagement with the schools.

My experience with community councils, school-based leadership teams, and day-to-day interactions with parents over the years has suggested that when parents' understanding about their role in the school improvement process increases, their

willingness and ability to participate increases (Knowles et al., 2005). When I have been in a position to make clear the expectations for parents' roles in the improvement process, many parents have become more involved and invested in the school's learning community.

Why this Problem

Just as a teacher can be knowledgeable, skilled, and successful in facilitating the understanding of a classroom of students and yet struggle as a teacher of adults, most school personnel are not naturally knowledgeable and skilled at meaningful collaboration with parents. There are many resources available for school personnel to help them understand and become more skilled at school improvement processes. These often include information on the importance of building collaborative relationships with parents for school improvement. There is little information for the other critical player in this collaborative partnership—the parents (Knowles et al., 2005).

Both Utah state law and the modern high school accreditation process require full and meaningful engagement of parents in school improvement processes but there is lack of a consistent, clear conception of just what that means among parents and school leaders (principals, leadership teams, state accreditation leaders, etc.) resulting in role confusion, lack of full engagement, and nonfulfillment of the law.Although considered vital to student achievement, full engagement of parents in school improvement processes is thwarted by many roadblock,s among which is a lack of common understandings between parents and school personnel of the concept itself.

I checked the conceptions of individual school leaders and stakeholders with those described by researchers, lawmaker, and visiting accreditation teams. A better understanding of how school leaders conceive of parents as fully engaged in school improvement processes will provide information to state leaders that may guide important training and the development of additional resources to help schools in their work to improve student achievement.

Definitions

Specialized terms used in this research project are defined as follows:

Collaboration: The activity of stakeholders working together to study and discuss together student learning and school processes (Fullan, 2004).

Common understanding: Understandings created through shared learning experiences (Bruner, 1966).

Constructivism: The learning process theory that holds that new learning is connected to previous learning and the creation of new knowledge occurs through personal and group exploration and shared experiences (Bruner, 1966).

Expectation indicators: A set of indicators describing full engagement of parents (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004; Utah State Code R277-491, 2010; National Staff Development Council, 2003; National Study of School Evaluation, 1998; Utah State Office of Education, 2009).

Professional learning community: A school or team engaged in continuous improvement to reach common goals that include increased student learning and school improvement (Dufour et al., 2005; Hord & Hirsch, 2009).

Shared leadership: Leadership that moves power and decision-making from one person to multiple people or groups (Dufour et al., 2005).

Shared meaning: Meaning created among people who share a common understanding of a process, language, activity, or events (Spillane et al., 2002).

Utah School Improvement Process: Key stakeholders collaborating that includes (a) collecting and analyzing school data including student learning, (b) identifying gaps in student learning and clearly identifying who is learning and who is not learning in the building, (c) researching best-practices of success currently engaged in by schools of similar demographics, (d) selecting and implementing best-practices to improve student learning, (e) beginning again with step #1 in collecting and analyzing new student learning data (author, year). The culmination of the process includes the creation of a school improvement plan and a professional development plan (author, year). The accreditation process of Utah evaluates the effectiveness and quality of the process and plan for improvement (Utah State Office of Education, 2007).

Significance

Utah, like many other states, is attempting to lead a cultural shift from traditional school improvement planning processes that are usually conducted by a few isolated key administrators to a process with more transparency and full engagement by all

stakeholders. This study is pertinent to schools, parent groups, state education department officers, district administrators, and school boards. Results may serve as a catalyst for future dialogue between the state officers, legislators, and school leaders in regard to the role parents should play in this process, what full parental engagement should look like, and how to bring that vision to fruition.

The significance of fully engaged parents in school improvement processes is evidenced by its prominent inclusion in several sets of national standards including leadership (National Association of Secondary Principles, 2004; Epstein, 2008) and widespread training venues available to school personnel on topics related to the parent's role in professional learning communities (Epstein, 2008; Hord & Roy, 2003; Med, 2010; National PTA, 2004; Wright, Stegelin, & Hartle, 2007; Wellman & Lipton, 2004). Parents' engagement in school improvement processes is also an important element in modern accreditation processes (Utah State Office of Education, 2007) as well as legal requirements (Utah Administrative Code, 2011) that make this type of activity mandatory in Utah schools.

Guiding/Research Questions

The research questions that framed this study were:

1. What are school leaders' conceptions of parents fully engaged in the school improvement process?
2. What do school leaders offer as evidence of parent involvement in school improvement processes?

3. What do accreditation visiting teams accept as evidence of parents fully engaged in school improvement processes?

Review of the Literature

The focus of this literature review is on the participation of parents in modern, collaborative, continuous school improvement processes. The review included both an EBSCO search and an ERIC search of the following key word combinations: *parents and school*, *parent involvement*, *school improvement and parents*, *student learning*, and *parents and decision-making*. The research-base included many case studies, survey research, several robust literature reviews, commissioned reports, and professional literature on the effects of parent involvement in general and parent involvement in school improvement processes. The research-base also included descriptions of approaches, models, and types of parent involvement and the tools currently available to assist school leaders with parent participation in school learning communities.

This review first includes the difficulties inherent in the research, focusing on parent involvement and a review of findings which have established a consensus that a positive relationship exists between parent involvement and student learning. This is followed by a discussion of various approaches to parent involvement and the advantages and disadvantages attributed to them by researchers and theorists in the field. Capital theory is offered as a possible explanation for these advantages and disadvantages, especially as they relate to access and utility of social and cultural capital for families who make up the norm and for those who vary from the norm. Research focusing on

parent involvement in the more specific activity of school improvement is summarized along with a discussion of the tools and resources available to support it.

Parent Involvement Research

Although few would question the responsibility of the teacher to teach and the parent to parent, there are many questions around how and why to mix these two roles. The formal study of parent involvement in education has been challenging due to the complexities inherent in the task. Parent involvement is influenced by many factors, which makes isolation of its variables difficult and causal links nearly impossible. Experimental research is not an option for most research in this field, but modern technology allows some statistical control over variables leading Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) to believe that the highest quality research studies in this field are those that have employed this experimental research method. In addition to the challenge of many interrelated variables, some hidden and some that defy measurement due to their abstract qualities, the construct of parent involvement itself lacks common definition and clarification. What researchers use as outcome measures also varies making comparisons between studies, especially earlier studies, difficult. Complicating the issue further, some early researchers interpreted correlations inaccurately leading to faulty conclusions (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003).

Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) investigated researchers who had examined spontaneous parent involvement that was bottom-up, self-motivated, and self-sustained and was typical of high quality, by using large sets of data and objective measures,

although the data can be somewhat dated. The results of this research are consistent in its conclusions that parent involvement is typically related to social class, the mother's level of education, and the mother's psychosocial health (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Heymann & Earle, 2000) Parent involvement can be diminished by poverty and single parent status (Christie & Cooper, 2005). It diminishes with age, and increases with academic attainment (author, year). It is also influenced by the child (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Parent involvement intervention programs, in contrast, are initiated by an outside source to solve a particular problem. Findings from these studies are typically weaker with smaller samples, and after-the-fact, and are often subjective evaluations (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003).

Parent Involvement and Student Learning

Student engagement in learning activities increases as parents participate. Weiss et al. (2009) examined several decades of research focusing on the relationship between effective parent involvement and student learning and concluded that "parents and other caregivers have a strong influence over their children's learning and educational trajectories from birth through adolescence" (p.23). A significant research base also exists documenting consistent learning gains when parents participate in school centered learning activities (Epstein, 2008; Henderson, Jacob, Kernan-Schloss, & Raimondo, 2004; Patel & Stevens, 2010). There are not many researchers who have directly linked parent involvement with raised test scores, but there are several who connect parent involvement with other measures of student achievement such as grades, homework,

improved attendance, feelings of efficacy, and a decrease in dropout rates (Ferrara, 2009; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Lamy, 2003; Protheroe, 2010),

Parent involvement can mean many things from taking care of a child's health and helping with homework at home, to volunteering in the classroom and participation on school community councils. Delforges and Abouchaar (2003) pointed to parent involvement which occurs in the home as a key influencer to student learning gains. Home influences are the strongest indicator of school success. Sui-Chi and Willms (1996) conducted a large scale study, which included over 24,000 students, and found that the activities that make the biggest difference to student's success in school are discussions between parents and their children at home along with parents helping their children plan their education programming. While the emphasis on parental involvement conversations center on parents involvement at schools, parents involvement with students at home impacts student learning as well.

Researchers found that parent involvement is the strongest positive influence on school success, even over the influence of material deprivation (Sacker et al., 2002). Sacker et al. (2002) found, however, that this influence was reversed after about age 16. This suggests the relationship of parents and the levels of their school involvement changes with student age and grade in school. The Southwest Education Development Laboratory (2002) reviewed more than 200 research studies of which 80 were selected for further review. Fifty-one of these 80 selected studies identified many key factors affecting parent-school relationships and student learning. All 51 documented positive

results in student learning directly related to high parental interaction with the school. These findings suggest that when parents are actively involved in schools, student learning increases. Having parents become actively involved in the schools is the key. Jeynes (2003) added to this research in a study that reported an increase in student academic achievement based on parental participation. Jeynes also found that participation positively affected minority groups. Jeynes (2007) also found that participation of secondary students' parents had a significant influence on student achievement as well as a positive effect on student attitudes and behaviors. Other researchers found that parental activities, beyond the more traditional, such as simply helping with homework and attending parent teacher conferences, positively impacted student learning (Fan, 2001; Sheldon, 2003). Many different types of parental involvment increase student learning.

Environmental situations also impact levels of parental involvement. Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) reported that some of the influences on parent involvement are the mother's level of education, poverty, health, parental perception of their roles, parent's efficacy, and characteristics of the child as the more successful the student, the more involved are his or her parents. Additional studies should be engaged to measure more of the environmental influences that impact the level of parental involvement.

Approaches and Types of Parental Involvement

Multiple definitions and conceptualizations of parent involvement have made it difficult for researchers attempting to generalize findings (Schnee & Bose, 2010). For

many years, parent involvement was conceptualized as parents helping with school celebrations and assisting individual teachers in classrooms. The parent's responsibility in this conceptualization was to support the school, which held all power and authority in education matters such as curriculum, instruction, assessment, attendance, and deportment (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). While many school leaders and parents continue to hold these conceptions, the researchers have reported several shifts in thinking about parent involvement that better reflect the social, cultural, and political complexities of modern society.

There are several approaches to parent involvement. These approaches include assets approaches, political approaches, market-based approaches, and school-centric approaches (Auerbach, 2002). The asset approach looks at parent involvement in terms of assets and is based on the idea that families have much experience and knowledge that should not only be respected but actually be considered a resource to the school (Auerbach, 2002).The asset approach is reflected in the family empowerment model, introduced by Chávez (1994) and Collier (2008). This model is focused on four important concepts for educators and administrators to incorporate into their parent involvement programs: genuine sensitivity, which involves greater knowledge and appreciation for diversity; and real concern for today's changing families, advocacy, and parent training. This model charges the school with the responsibility to accommodate family's difficult schedules, when needed, so that parents can participate more, and to encourage parents, particularly parents of the minority culture to participate on school councils and Parent

Teacher Associations (PTA) (Collier, 2008). It also advises schools to offer training in topics that would assist parents to participate more fully in the school's activities. This model, and others like it that take an asset approach, assume that power lies in the family's ability to participate in school activities. Power is perceived as shared between the school and parents.

Asset approaches tend to be community-based. Comer and Haynes' school development model is an example of a community-based approach (Comer & Haynes, 1991). Comer and Haynes' model is a psychological model that looks at the home-school relationship from a systems perspective through the lens of child development. School programs and activities are designed to optimize the child's development. The school is conceptualized as a resource to parents and vice versa and the relationship between parents and the school is a partnership based on mutual respect. Power is conceived, in this approach, as balanced throughout the system.

Although considering the parents and schools as resources and deserving of respect and equal status as is the case with the asset approach, the political approach adds an expectation of social activism (Auerbach, 2002; Christie & Cooper, 2005). A market-based approach encourages parents to be involved in their children's education by choosing the best options, which may not be the public school option (Fuller, 2000). Parents are encouraged to choose schools for their children in which they feel more comfortable, or in which the family's habitus is more congruent with the school's field. This approach is meant to assist families in areas where the neighborhood school may be

low-functioning. The thought is that if the parent chooses a better school, they have greater opportunities for their children (Fuller et al., 2008). The market-based approach positions the parent as a consumer and the approach emphasizes accountability. There is concern, however, that instead of equity school choice may actually result in a culture imbalance as families move to schools that offer them a better fit between habitus and field. It seems probable that parents in charter schools are more involved than parents in public schools, but for most parents that is not the case. Many do not go beyond the actual initial choice to attend a charter or private school (Fuller, 2000; Fuller, Burr, Huerta, Puryear, & Wexler, 1998).

School-centric approaches are the most traditional and still the most common. Parent involvement expectations, from this approach, involve traditional activities such as participation at parent and teacher conferences and volunteering in classrooms (Epstein, 1987). The school is perceived as central to student learning and the school holds the power, which is then extended to parents as they take advantage of the school's invitations to participate.

Researchers working with families of lower socioeconomic status (SES) have found reason to doubt the effectiveness of school-centric approaches for disenfranchised, marginal populations. The approach has been called Eurocentric as it might be the least effective for families experiencing a culture difference (Lee & Bowan, 2006). White, middle class students are the most involved in traditional types of school-centric parent involvement (Lee & Bowan, 2006; McNeal 1999). Jeynes (2003) found that traditional

types of involvement including activities like communication with school, checking homework, and encouraging reading benefitted African American and Hispanic American students as well.

Certain forms of parent involvement may be affected by social class. McNeal (1999) found that traditional approaches worked best for those students from higher SES homes. Other researchers found positive effects mostly for white, middle class families (Lareau & McNamara, 1999; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Ream, 2003; Ream & Palardy, 2008). Just who benefits from these school-centered approaches, which traditionally include activities such as attendance at parent-teacher conferences, parent volunteering, and participation on school councils, may be found in the body of research on social capital and education .

Parent Involvement and Social Capital Theory

McNeal (1999) found that social capital plays a significant role in parent involvement (Coleman, 1998; McNeal, 1999). Coleman's (1998) social capital theory involves obligations and expectations in social relationships, norms and social control, and information channels through social networks. Coleman maintained that those parents who possessed social capital were able to use that social capital for successful engagement by accessing information and resources to promote school achievement of their children. Laureau (2001) documented a social advantage from the good fit between habitus, a family's habits and culture, and the field, the school's way of doing things. Laureau's research was centered on issues of social class and its effects on parent

involvement. Laureau found a difference in how middle class and working class families approach interaction with the school. The middle class parents were more likely to defer to their teachers and other school personnel, as experts. Upper class parents were likely to try to incorporate their own agendas on the school. Middle class parents often socialized or worked alongside professionals while working class parents typically socialized with relatives. When there was a problem at the school, middle class parents had the advantage of being able to negotiate with school people better than the working class parents. The middle class parents had greater cultural capital, giving them an advantage.

Cultural capital is a function of social capital. Lee and Bowan (2006) investigated the effects of social and cultural capital and parent involvement. Social capital includes those resources, skills, abilities, and knowledge that allow students and their parents to be successful in certain social relationships and interactions. When the family's habitus is congruent with the social group it finds itself in, the family is better positioned for success.

Epstein (2001) is the creator of the most commonly referenced parent involvement model. Epstein's model is considered to be a school-centric model. Epstein identified six types of parent involvement observed over a decade. These six types include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with community. Epstein's model sets forth new definitions and expectations for each of these six types, reflecting changes in society. Epstein described communication methods with parents, for example, as shifting from the more traditional

one-way communication methods such as telephoning parents to inform them of their children's behavior problems, monthly newsletters, semester-end report cards, and take-home notices of school policies and practices (PTA, 2000; Wright et al., 2007) to two-way communication methods which encourage more dialogue with parents such as parent and teacher conferences and family literacy nights.

Epstein's (2001) model is based on the idea of a synergistic relationship between the school, family, and community which Epstein conceptualized as overlapping spheres which represent a partnership. Epstein explained that the more these spheres overlap, the more likely the same message will be echoed throughout the school community, giving strength to schooling efforts. Several factors influence this overlap, such as the progression of time, age, grade level, experience, philosophy, and practices of family, school, and community (Epstein, 1987). It is the factors of experience, philosophy, and family practices that are causing some researchers and theorists to question who is really benefiting from school-centric approaches such as Epstein's model. The model encourages *school-like functions* in families, and *family-like functions* in schools. Epstein maintained that when these are the most congruent, students have greater opportunities. Lee and Bowen (2006), found, however, that "involvement at school occurred most frequently for those parents whose culture and lifestyle were most likely to be congruent with the school's culture" (p.199). Lee and Bowen pointed out that school-like functions at home may favor cultures in which these types of interactions are more natural. Lee and Bowen explained that this cultural capital is rarely considered in parent involvement

initiatives. The implications of social and cultural capital make Epstein's full sphere coverage unlikely for an increasing number of families in the United States who represent diverse cultures.

There is also concern that school-centric approaches advantage students from higher SES backgrounds and white students (Lee & Bowan, 2006). Lee and Bowan (2006) emphasized inequalities in the amount of capital such as out-of-school learning opportunities which are inequitably distributed along socioeconomic lines. Desimone (1999) found that influence may be different across demographic groups due to inequalities. Lee and Bowen (2006), McNeal (1999), and Desimone (1999) all found that what appeared at first to be a benefit of these types of activities to student achievement was less so after controlling for race and socio-economic factors. McNeal found that "once a student is one standard deviation below the mean on SES, the positive benefits of parental involvement disappear" (p. 34). This finding suggests that parental involvement may not impact all students' learning at the same levels.

When students' families come into a school setting with a great amount of cultural capital, it is easier to multiply that into greater amounts that can add even more capital to their families (Laureau, 2001). Laureau (2001) also found that the less cultural capital a family has, the greater the barriers the family will experience. The effectiveness of parent involvement may also be weakened due to barriers for some groups (Heymann & Earle, 2000). McNeal (1999) studied the barriers facing low income and minority parents. Many of these barriers such as psychological, language, cultural, economic, and

negative prior experience have negatively affected some parents' interest and ability to participate in school improvement processes, especially in schools in which conceptualizations of school-home relationships are school-centric (Noraini & Naima, 2011; Wright et al., 2007). Pena (2001) studied the involvement of Mexican American parents in schools and found that it was influenced by many factors including language issues, level of parent education, school staff attitudes, and family matters.

Laureau and McNamara (1999) and Lee and Bowen (2006) studied not only how to get social capital but how people utilize it. Laureau and McNamara and Lee and Bowen found that the use of capital was affected by socioeconomic status, race and other factors. Ream and Palardy (2008) offered, "Whereas Coleman emphasized the educational utility in norm-driven social networks and relations of trust, Bourdieu (1977) showed that power and privilege effect the use of social capital across social classes" (p.240). Bourdieu (1984) suggested that even if families have capital, the environment might make it so that the family cannot utilize the capital they have.

Barnard (2004) found a lack of common understanding between the school and parents about parent involvement. Some parents think they are involved but school personnel have different conceptions about this involvement. Misconceptions leave parents and school personnel blaming each other and leave parents feeling unappreciated.

DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, and Duchane (2007) suggested that it is an assumption that parent involvement is always a positive thing. Lopez (2001) posited that it may interfere with social –cultural values transmission in families. Many times, school

administrators say middle-class families are involved to ensure the status of themselves and their children. Even the push to establish parent involvement policies has been questioned for families as most of the policies do not account for issues of race, culture, gender, and the barriers of urban, low income, immigrant, minority, or working class parents (Theodorou, 2007). To account for these things, Weiss et al. (2009) found that parent involvement was the most effective when it was approached as a shared, mutual responsibility which needed to be constructed by parents and school together in mutually respectful relationships and partnerships.

Parental Engagement in the School Improvement Process

Even though parental involvement connections are considered vital to school improvement by some experts, research centered more specifically on school improvement activities is more sparse than parent involvement in general. Lezotte and Pepperl (1999) placed parent involvement as one of their main correlates of effective schools. The Breaking Ranks II report (2004) identified meaningful parent involvement as a best practice leading to the most gains in student learning. The report listed meaningful parental participation as one of the seven cornerstones of school improvement work. Meaningful parental involvement was described as

- Formalizing the participation of students and parents in site-based decision-making teams
- Instituting parent/student/teacher conferences in which the student leads the discussion

- Offering families significant opportunities to monitor student progress on a regular basis
- Encouraging family and community members to become involved in curriculum and fiscal conversations
- Meeting with families on weekends, at home, or accommodating work schedules in other ways.

Epstein's (2001) six types model was adopted by the National PTA who incorporated it as their creed. National Standards for Parent Involvement (National Parent Teacher Association, 2004) were also established based on these six types. The standards reflect a shift from the PTA's long emphasis on volunteering in the classroom and encouragement of parents to help with extracurricular activities in the schools (National Parent Teacher Association, 2000; Wright et al., 2007) to an added focus on the inclusion of families' voices in the development of mission statements and other decision-making activities such as "designing, reviewing, and improving school policies that affect students and families" (Epstein, 2008, p. 9). This emphasis, which encourages parents to look closely at their own children's learning, also requires parents to look beyond their own families to the progress of other children as well.

Results of the national PTA's advocacy efforts toward school improvement may have had a greater impact at the state and national policy levels than the day-to-day workings of local schools that remain largely traditional in their relationships with parents. In acknowledgement of a positive relationship between parent involvement and

student achievement, Title I has long required, as a condition of funding, formal programs that afford "parents substantial and meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children" (US Department of Education, 2011, para 12). In 1995, a national education goal was set legislating the home-school relationship, "By the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children" (National Education Goals Panel, 1995, p. 13). Fifteen years ago the United States Department of Education suggested that all schools will promote partnerships with parents. It follows that by the year 2010, all schools would be promoting partnerships with parents.

Though the definition of active parental participation has varied over the years, the call for parent involvement in school improvement decision-making in the state of Utah is currently strong and comes from several sources. Utah State Law P.L. R277-491 (2011) describes full engagement by parents in the school improvement process. By law, the state of Utah requires all schools to have a school community council, a formal structure involving administrators, teachers, and parents who participate as a decision-making body to determine the use of trustlands funds and to make other fiduciary decisions. The Utah Spring 2011 legislators adopted changes in the wording of the law to force more authentic parental engagement. The rule that mandated schools use parents to help develop school improvement plans (Utah State Law, R477-491) was changed to a mandate calling for parents to assist with creating school improvement plans. This

change, by the legislature, placed emphasis on parents taking a more active, meaningful role in decision-making.

Utah's accreditation process that serves as the mechanism to ensure continuous school improvement at schools requires parental engagement in ways beyond formal council positions (Lifelong Learning, 2000). The current culture of collaboration (Med, 2010) expands the role of the parent to one empowered to engage fully in the school's improvement processes which include activities such as vision setting and analysis of student's work in small groups to school goal setting. There are few tools to help schools establish this home-school collaborative and even fewer to help parents navigate the process.

Tools for School Participation in the School Improvement Process

School personnel engaging in collaboration such as that which focuses on the common elements of learning communities, teacher-shared learning, collaborative activities, and data-driven decision making is supported by a substantial body of research and theory (DuFour et al., 2006; McCaleb, 1994; Wellman & Lipton, 2004). There also exists tools available for school personnel to make the shift to a more collaborative, continuous learning environment (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002; DuFour et al., 2005; DuFour et al., 2006; Fullan, 2001).

The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) and the National Staff Development Council (NSDC), whose research has led to the production of several documents to help schools establish learning communities, created a set of standards for

school learning communities in 2003 (Hord & Roy, 2003). The National Staff Development Council (2003) outlined the roles of each stakeholder in the professional learning community from the teacher to the school board member. Parental involvement is included as a strand in each of several school processes such as leadership and collaboration. Family involvement is also presented as an important school process itself by having its own strand in this standard set. The National Staff Development Council (2003) encouraged staff development "that improves the learning of all students and provides educators with knowledge and skills to involve families and other stakeholders appropriately" (p. 53). The ideal of family involvement in this configuration included parents, teachers, administrators, and even students meeting together often to study the school's progress toward mutually determined learning goals.

National professional teaching and leadership standards also include expectations for collaboration with parents in school improvement efforts. Danielson (2007) produced professional teaching standards that are used throughout the nation to assess teacher performance which includes an expectation that teachers become savvy in their relationships and communication with parents. These expectations are also reflected in the national board's certification process (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2002).

DuFour and others (Eaker et al., 2002; Hord, 1997; Lezotte, 1991; Sarason, 1996; Schmoker, 1996) have been instrumental in furthering the concept of continuous learning communities in schools. Their vision has included collaboratively developed shared

mission, vision, and goals; the development of collaborative teams; and the development of a results-oriented culture. DuFour and others' trainings, books, rubrics, videos, and presentations have helped school administrators and teacher-leaders make the shift from administrators and teachers working in isolation, to administrators and teachers working in collaborative teams. Donaldson (2006) continually described the cultural shift in leadership as a movement from leaders making all decisions to teams of teachers making decisions. These tools have been designed for school personnel to guide their implementation of professional learning communities at school, but tools to further the involvement of parents in this collaboration are not common.

Tools Available for Assisting Parents

Along with professional development for teachers around teaching and for administrators about leadership strategies, teachers and administrators should participate in professional development on how to engage parents in schools. Ferrara (2009) studied the perceptions of parental involvement in regard to parent activities and school beliefs about parental engagement, by surveying more than 16,000 parents, administrators, and school staff in one district. Ferrara found that although administrators, teachers, and parents defined their roles differently, one common theme that emerged was the need for professional development for teachers and administrators about how to engage parents with the school and the need for parent training, as well, on how to be an active participant in the process. Ferrara cautioned,

> Parents, too, need to become more vocal… They need to become active members in parent councils, be a presence in schools, and help schools understand that they are not just volunteers but can be essential members on the various governance committees in the school and the district. To become more inclusive, the IN of "involvement" needs to be all of us – administrators, teachers, office staff, and pre-service teacher preparation institutions – as well as parents. (p. 141)

But, despite the many models of learning communities that identify parent involvement as necessary to effect school improvement efforts (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004; DuFour et al., 2005; Hord, 1997), tools to help parents participate fully within these school improvement processes are scarce (Ferguson et al, 2008; Protheroe, 2010; Wohlstetter & Mohrman, 1996). The information and tools that are available for parents are primarily being developed by parent groups such as the Parent Information Center. These tools guide parents to areas that allow them to receive guidance on scholarships and additional student learning activities provided by the school. Some parent groups and school districts have developed websites and web-based guides for parents such as the *New Orleans Parents' Guide to Public Schools* (New Orleans Parent Organizing Network, 2011) and *A Family Guide to Special Education* in New Hampshire (Parent Information Center on Special Education, 2009), but these guides are provided to help parents access specific school programs, like special education. Information for parents regarding interaction with schools is available to a greater extent online than in paper form such as at The National Center for Family

Literacy's www.famlit.org and Parent Involvement Matters' www.parentinvolvementmatters.org. School sponsored offerings, in general, reflect the message that the school has a program or information to help parents so you come to us and we'll tell you all about it. The technology may be new, but the message is an old one. These sources do not necessarily provide information on neither how to participate in school improvement activities and processes nor how to work as members of collaborative decision-making teams at schools. Newer parent involvement conceptions, such as those of parents as partners possessing valuable knowledge and skills and as worthy contributors to schooling are just beginning to form (Stelmach & Preston, 2008).

Implications

Despite a myriad of definitions and applications of the term parent involvement, there is a general consensus among researchers that involvement of parents in their children's education increases the probability of success in school. Several approaches, frameworks and models exist which attempt to negotiate the complex relationships involved in home-school partnerships. Research in this area has focused on diverse groups and specific family issues and their effects on this home-school relationship. This focus is understandable when considering that many parents are disenfranchised in the home-school relationship due to a wide variety of factors all affecting cultural capital such as issues of language, poverty and culture difference. Many lack, do not or cannot activate social capital. A number of parent involvement approaches tap into culture and social capital to increase educational capital. Diverse family composition and literacy of

the student and that of the entire family is the focus of much of the literature in this area as well.

Despite an increase in diversity, school activities have remained relatively the same and there is a movement to cement these practices in school policies. An unintended consequence of wide-scale, all-size-fits-all policymaking may be a further division of stakeholder groups. School-directed approaches may work for a certain population. While school may be going along seemingly well, those with the least social and cultural capital, perhaps those who need it the most, may still be disenfranchised.

Empowerment approaches will only work if the concern is real concern and the sensitivity is genuine. This type of sensitivity comes from face-to-face interaction. This research base lists dialogue, getting to know the families, sharing back and forth; natural accommodations and activities that increase a family's social capital would help improve all students' school success.

Summary

Section 1 has provided a review of literature explaining the theoretical framework for this study which has focused on parent involvement and issues of capital which influence it. Parent involvement as it relates to school improvement provided a more focused lens. Research findings include student learning gains as parents become involved with schools. This includes multiple types of involvement and levels of engagement. While tools are available for schools to use in communicating with and engaging parents, there are very few tools available to assist parents in becoming

involved in schools and student learning. Section 2 includes a discussion of the qualitative methodology and research design used for this study along with the methods utilized to collect and analyze pertinent data to identify patterns and themes that shed light on this study's research questions. Findings are provided along with their interpretation. A project designed to address this study's central problem is also introduced. This project will be further described in Section 3 which will also include a review of the literature which led to this particular project type selection. An evaluation plan for this project will also be explained. Section 4 includes a conclusion, personal reflections, implications and recommendations. The actual project is found in Appendix A.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

This section includes an overview of the study's research design and approach along with the procedures used to collect and analyze the data which were gathered using the qualitative methods of archival document review and semistructured interviews. To better understand the reporting documents used in this exploration, an explanation is provided as to the processes the schools and visiting teams went through to produce them. Procedures for the chairperson interviews will also be set forth. Participant selection methods used to select the participants and the role of the researcher is provided and is followed by the efforts put forth by the researcher to increase the validity and reliability of the study's findings along with the studies limitations and delimitations. The findings for this study are laid forth so that the reader can follow the thinking and better understand the decisions made by the researcher as to how to conduct this exploration.

Research Design and Approach

To better understand school leaders' conceptions of parents as fully engaged in the collaborative, school improvement process at the public high school, an exploratory, multiple-case study was conducted using qualitative methodology. In the study, I followed a process for case study described by Yin (1994). The study encompassed four stages: (a) designing the case study, (b) conducting the study, (c) analyzing the evidence, and (d) developing conclusions, implications, and recommendations. For this study each single case included the analysis of one school's archival records documenting the

school's improvement process and an interview with the school's visiting team chairperson. The archival records included each school's Self-Study Report compiled by school leaders following the school's in-depth review of student learning activities and the evaluation of its school processes. Each school's Visiting Team Report was created following the visiting team's onsite visit in which they observed classrooms and school processes and interviewed teachers, parents, and administrators in their natural environments. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) held that qualitative research is appropriate for the investigation of processes in their natural environments as well as the description of relationships like those which are the focus of this study.

Case Studies and Participants

Case Studies

Each single case was selected using purposeful sampling, which Merriam (2001) suggested is appropriate to identify the average situation or instance of the phenomenon. Full engagement of parents in the continuous improvement process is mandated in Utah and should be evidenced at high schools which participated in the accreditation process (Utah Administrative Code 277 R91). Therefore, a pool of potential case studies was created and populated by all public high schools in the state having completed the accreditation process in the last 3 years.

Utah is a large state, geographically, with a few large cities and many small cities and towns. The majority of schools with more than 1,000 students are found in the urban areas. The pool was separated into two groups, those with a population of more than

1,000 students, afterward called *large schools;* and those with less than 1,000 students, afterward called *small schools*. To ensure a cross section of communities, stratified purposeful sampling was used. The selection of both rural and urban schools was used to ensure a better representation of the education communities in Utah, as community participation in Utah and student learning opportunities are typically impacted by the size of the school and its location. Larger schools typically offer a greater number and variety of courses and a greater number and variety of student activities. Because of this, a combination of schools was selected as case studies from the two stratified groups to total five schools. This relatively small number of schools may be considered a limitation in regard to the study's generalizability. While smaller numbers of cases is often an identifying feature of qualitative research, the depth of analysis and personal interaction possible with this smaller number is a worthwhile trade-off when compared to the breadth that is sometimes possible with higher numbers of cases (Creswell, 2003).

Participants

Participants for this study were selected from the Utah State Accreditation Chairperson Committee. The members of this committee participate as the leaders of the school accreditation process in Utah. They lead three to five accreditation site visits per year. They are usually either district or school administrators and have participated in state chairperson training and have shadowed other chairpersons on previous visits. They are responsible for setting up the visit with the school, doing some preliminary meetings with the school administrations, and sending documentation and information to the other

visiting members prior to the actual site visit. These trained specialists are responsible for recommending the final term of accreditation to the state school board. Chairpersons to be interviewed were selected following the case study selection process. The selected chairpersons were the leaders of each of the case studies selected and were the responsible author for the corresponding visiting team report. These interviews were used as a second line of evidence or a validator for the information gleaned from the document review.

Data Collection

In this study, I incorporated principles for case study research, one of which was the incorporation of multiple sources of data (Yin, 1994). I included the collection of two types of archival documents to analyze the shared experiences of school leaders, faculty, and parents at five high school communities during each school's improvement process (USOE, 2007). Data were also collected from open-ended, but focused interviews with the four visiting team chairpersons responsible for facilitating and creating these five school's site visits and corresponding final reports.

The conclusions from this study, due to the complexity of the phenomenon being explored, were conveyed through rich description punctuated by relevant participant quotations, which is an inherent element of qualitative design (Creswell, 2003). My role in this case study was to collect data; analyze the data, both explicit and implicit in the school's self-study; and juxtapose this data with the data gathered by the visiting team

through their direct interviews and observations. Visiting team chairpersons were interviewed to supplement and validate the findings.

Archival Document Review

Document research is effective as it helps to describe and lend historical understanding to a phenomenon (Merriam, 2001). In this case, each school's Self-Study Report included a self-description and self-evaluation of the school's improvement process, school evaluation and decision-making, student activities, celebrations, and student learning, all of which helped to describe the school's organizational characteristics, culture, and belief system with its underlying assumptions regarding parental involvement in these processes. The document review had other advantages as well. It did not impact the schools, as the case study documents existed prior to the case study. They also offer a stable target for examination, which allowed the data to be reviewed as many times as needed (Yin, 1994). The self-studies used in this study were in the public domain and were housed at the Utah State Office of Education as well as at the case study's individual high school. The Visiting Team Reports were accessed by downloading them from the Utah State Office of Education website at www.usoe.edu.

The self-study that each of the five school organizations conducted as part of the Utah State Accreditation process was integral to this study as it was used to reveal the parents' participation patterns and their inclusion in the schools' collaborative, improvement process. The self-study's data were collected, written, and reported by individual stakeholders residing within the educational community. Stakeholder groups

(teachers, parents, students, and administrators along with school staff and community members) engaged in this process. The self-study contained primary student learning data, school level focus group insights, and parent, student, and teacher survey data. The self-study was used to also reveal those school specific artifacts that school leaders and visiting team members valued.

The other vital document was the Visiting Team Report that offered an evaluation of the teams from their earlier review of the school's self-study and the subsequent school visit. The Visiting Team Report was prepared personally by members of the visiting team at the end of a 2-day site visit that included observations, interviews (both individual and group), and focus group meetings with stakeholder groups. The purpose of these meetings was to find evidence for the claims made in the self-study and to identify missing information. The self-study and the visiting team report served as primary source material. These documents also served as secondary source material as they each contained responses from parent, student, and teacher surveys conducted at the school.

Self-study process. Schools began their intensive self-study process 2 years previous to the accreditation visit by sending a general leadership team to a state training for schools facing accreditation in the near future. Each school received the accreditation manual *Collaborating for Student Achievement* (2002). This manual outlined the areas to be reviewed, provided suggestions for how to collect and analyze student learning data, and provided a blueprint for the final Self-Study Report. The school entered a 2-year

period of collaborative self-study that included the following school improvement activities:

1. A gathering and analysis of student data related to student learning including school demographics, student test scores on a battery of summative evaluations, changes in organizational structure, schedule, and stakeholders. Data also included a collection of student, parent, and teacher survey data relating to areas of the educational experience.
2. An investigation by each department of its own department's practice using the Guiding Questions for Departmental Analysis from *Collaborating for Student Achievement* (Utah State Office of Education, 2002).
3. Using the National Study of School Evaluation (National Study of School Evaluation, 1998) rubrics, the faculty and other stakeholders, including parents and students, were separated into seven focus groups. Each focus group examined one of the following seven focus areas: quality instruction and design; shared vision, beliefs, mission, and goals; curriculum development; quality assessment systems; leadership for school improvement; community-building; and culture of continuous improvement and learning.
4. School leadership teams, including the school community council, reviewed the school's previous action plans and accreditation team visits to pay close attention to areas identified as growth opportunities in prior accreditation visits.

5. School leadership teams, including the School Community Council, reviewed student data to identify trends in who was learning and who was not learning.
6. School leadership teams, including the School Community Council, created a 6-year action plan for school improvement.

This information was collected into a final product, the self-study that was further studied and approved by the entire school's faculty and staff. Following a final endorsement by the school's principal, it was sent to the Utah State Office of Education as well as to the individual members of the accreditation visiting team, prior to their site visit.

Visiting team report process. Visiting team members began their process of evaluation with training provided by the State Office of Education. The visiting teams, which ranged in size from two-four members for smaller schools and 7-10 members for larger schools, each had a chairperson, specially selected and trained by the state, along with volunteers from across the state that represented a diverse group of district and school personnel. Visiting Team members were not allowed to participate as members of Visiting Teams for schools within their own school districts and schools where they had taught previously or been a contributor in the past.

After attending state-sponsored training, 2 weeks before visiting the school site, the Visiting Teams received their assigned school's self-study. This gave them enough time to review the findings from the school's thorough examination of its own curriculum, instruction, leadership, culture of continuous improvement, and parent and community involvement. After studying the school's written Self-Study, the Visiting

Teams spent 2 days at the school, where they conducted multiple interviews with administrators, focus group chairs, department chairs, students, and members of parent groups. The Visiting Team also conducted direct observations of teachers in classrooms, reviewed general operations within the school, and discussed their observations and learning with parents and community members.

A report documenting all of the Visiting Team's interactions with the school, its findings and recommendation for an accreditation term was compiled. The Visiting Teams used several tools in their review and evaluation process. These included the *Rubric for Assessing Length of Term of Accreditation* (USOE, 2009), the *Survey of Goals for Student Learning*, and the *Survey of Instructional and Organizational Effectiveness* based on the *Indicators of Schools of Quality from the National Study of School Evaluation* (National Study of School Evaluation, 1998).

Chairperson interviews. Following the initial analysis of data collected during the archival document review, I conducted interviews with the original visiting team chairpersons responsible for facilitating the review at each school's site visit and writing the Visiting Team Report. These interviews with experienced and highly trained visiting team chairpersons, responsible for the accuracy and comprehensiveness of each accreditation review, shed light on each school community's experience while providing triangulation of initial findings. Interviews, as valuable sources of data for case studies, not only added new information to this study but also validated and clarified findings from the archival document review (Yin, 2009).

The interview questions were based on the emerging patterns and themes becoming evident up to that point in the document review and were focused on three areas of concentration: personal experience, definitions of full engaged as understood by chairpersons, and alignment of stakeholder group definitions and activities. These interviews included questions at an individual level as well as those at an organizational level to provide context for the data previously collected and to take full advantage of the chairperson's previous experience and expertise. These questions are included in Appendix C. The interviews took place on the phone and were later transcribed to ensure accuracy and increased validity.

Data Analysis

This case study involved a systematic data analysis and interpretation of documents from two key sources. Although the cases were selected through purposeful sampling, data were analyzed using replication logic (Yin, 2009). Data from School A, designated for this study as a large school, were analyzed first and then data from School B were analyzed. School A and B were then compared. School C's data, also considered a large school, were analyzed and compared to Schools A and B's data. School D's data, a small school, were analyzed next and this analysis was compared to the large school's data. School E's data, another small school, were then analyzed and School D and E's data were then compared to each other. The results of this comparison of small schools were then compared to the three large schools.

Content and constant comparative analysis methods were used with open coding for initial conceptualizations and axial coding was used for making connections between evolving categories (Strauss & Cordin, 1990, 1998). Data were analyzed in an iterative fashion as suggested by Hancock and Algozzine (2006), resulting in a continual process of summarizing and interpreting information as it became available for analysis. This allowed patterns and themes to emerge. Memoing was employed as a way to keep track of ideas about how incidents and concepts related to one another (Glasser, 1998). This process of pattern matching, explanation building, and addressing rival explanations, strengthened the internal validity of the study. A log was also kept as a record of research activities.

The state's high school accreditation process was used as a lens in this study to examine how the school improvement planning process was carried out at five high schools in the state of Utah during the past 3 years and, in particular, how parents were involved in this process. The school improvement planning process is comprehensive and takes multiple years to establish and a continuous effort to maintain. Each principal and school leadership team is provided training on the state's expectations for engaging the school community in this longitudinal self-evaluation up to 2 years ahead of their visiting team review. A school improvement plan is required of every school in the state each year and the accreditation process for high schools occurs every 1, 3, or 6 years, according to a performance rating it receives on a formal review of the school's improvement process. This performance rating is reported back to the school community.

As such, administrators are eager to demonstrate the progress their schools have made toward meeting their school's goals. Although many school principals assign another administrator to conduct the school-wide accreditation, principals oversee the project and approve its final state so the school's self-study can be used as an indicator of the school leaders' conceptions about what is required in regard to parent involvement and the school's successes in this area.

It is important to clarify that the purpose of this study was not to evaluate any school organization about the effectiveness of its parent involvement efforts, nor to evaluate visiting teams on the effectiveness of their reviews. Rather, this study was focused on school leaders' conceptions of parents fully engaged in school improvement processes as evidenced in the school's Self-study and in the school's Visiting Team Report. As part of the accreditation process, school leaders were asked to demonstrate how they "empower the entire school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning through meaningful roles in the decision-making process" (Utah State Office of Education, 2007, Appendix p. 5). How each school leader chose to portray the school's efforts in this regard; what the leader chose to include in his school's self-study and what the leader chose not to include; what the leader desired to show the visiting team when they visited the school and what the leaders did not show, provided clues to the school leaders' conceptions, and the underlying assumptions upon which he or she may have based those conceptions.

Evidence of Quality

Three principles of case studies were adhered to in this study: the use of multiple sources of data, the creation of a case study database, and the maintenance of a chain of evidence (Yin, 2009). Data collected through interviews with visiting team chairpersons provided triangulation to validate findings and eliminate bias (Gall et al., 2003). As these interviews followed the document review, they offered a third lens that verified key findings, clarifications, and intentions. Interviews also offered a method of member checking. A chain of evidence, created by the researcher through the maintenance of a database of collected data as well as a log of research activities, strengthened the construct validity and credibility of the findings. Data were also peer reviewed by educational experts to provide greater internal control of possible bias and researcher opinion. Chain of evidence Excel™ spreadsheets were used for coding and sorting this data for analysis.

Step 1 - Archival Document Review

The analysis of data from the archival documents involved three analysis activities: (a) data extraction and initial categorization, (b) pattern matching using embedded subunits, (c) analysis of expectations regarding parent involvement.

Data extraction and initial categorization. I began the process by reading each school's Self-Study Report and its accompanying Visiting Team Report. Statements referring to parent involvement were extracted from these reports and recorded on an Excel™ spreadsheet to be coded in various ways throughout the analysis. The words

parent(s), family(s), community(s), partnership(s), and stakeholder(s) were used as trigger words, but all ideas related to these terms were included to allow as broad an interpretation as possible. The self-studies yielded 337 statements with an average of 84 per school, excluding school E whose data differed significantly from the rest of the schools throughout the analysis. The Visiting Team Reports yielded 98 statements with an average of 25 per school, again excluding school E.

In addition to recording this data on Excel™ spreadsheets, the main idea of each statement was recorded on separate index cards to facilitate more flexible sorting and resorting of ideas to more easily reveal patterns and themes. Cards were originally coded as to which school the data originated, whether the data was reported in a self-study report or a visiting team report and whether the data were reported as being a commendation, a suggestion for improvement, a formal goal of the school, or an activity/resource currently in place. Additional codes were added as other data became relevant. Cards from schools were sorted together initially in order to get a general feel for the type of efforts typical of parent involvement within the schools. These were sorted and resorted until a clear delineation could be made between separate and distinct categories, which were labeled as such.

The initial coding and sorting of extracted data from the school's self -studies and Visiting Team Reports included a combination of actions, events, resources, conditions, and perceptions, which were sorted into the following eight categories:

1. Communication with parents about school events and activities

2. Communication with parents about student progress
3. Parents involved in school goal setting, decision-making and action planning
4. Parent participation in school sponsored activities and events
5. Community support
6. Parent perceptions of curriculum and instruction
7. Accessibility of administration
8. Issues regarding the affective context of the school

The likeness of these categories to those in Epstein's *Six Types of Parental Involvement* (Six Types) model informed the next step which was to sort the data according to Epstein's model.

Pattern matching using embedded subunits. The extracted data were sorted and coded according to Epstein's (2001) Six Types that served as embedded units for this study. Epstein's Six Types (2001) model is based on the idea of a synergistic relationship between the school, family, and community that she now refers to as the Partnership (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). The model is conceptualized as overlapping spheres. Epstein posits the more these spheres overlap, the more likely the same message will be emanated through the school giving strength to the message. The theory positions parents in six basic roles in support of their children's schooling:

1. Communication, as parents are receivers of communications from the school about activities and their children's academic progress
2. Parenting, as they are responsible for their child's health and well-being

3. Learning at home, as parents help their children with homework assigned by the school and create home conditions conducive to learning
4. Volunteering, as parents support their performances and activities at school and help out in classrooms
5. Decision-making and advocacy, as parents participate in formal roles at school such as members of school community councils
6. Community collaboration, as parents can assist the school through business partnerships and civic organizations

Epstein's Six Types (2001) approach is school-centered. Each type is centered on a parent's role in a school-directed activity. Epstein maintained that schools would best be served by this model as they acknowledge and proactively draw upon these Six Types to improve student learning.

Educational program, accessibility, school climate. Epstein's Six Types (2001) model is based on the role parents play in school-directed activities. It organizes these activities as to the *place* or realm where the involvement occurs: home, school, community. It became obvious in this current study however, that place naturally involves notions of boundaries that may be affecting ways of thinking about shared responsibility for student learning. Epstein's Six Types (2001) that include learning *at home*, participation of parents *at school events*, volunteering *at school*, decision-making *at school*, and community collaboration *outside of the school* lend themselves to this place-bound thinking. Thinking in terms of where the teacher's responsibility leaves off

and the parent's begins may be forcing the conversation on more physical aspects of learning such as parents needing to come to the school building for meetings, and reinforcing underlying assumptions that parents who are not coming to the school building must not be interested in their students' education.

Sorting and coding data according to Epstein's Six Types (2001) was problematic because most of the data collected could be placed in a number of categories thereby decreasing its value as a discriminating tool.

Analysis of expectations regarding parent involvement. To explore the discrepancy between what school leaders were providing as evidence of parent engagement in their Self-studies and what visiting teams were focused on in their Visiting Team Reports, I created a tool to capture expectations for school leaders as set forth in professional literature, legislative mandates, and accreditation guidelines. This tool, *Expectation Indicators*, was created from five respected sources (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004; Utah State Code R277-491*,* 2010; National Staff Development Council, 2003; National Study of School Evaluation, 1998; Utah State Office of Education, 2009). See *Appendix C* for this tool that yielded 51 expectations for school leaders involved in school improvement. Schools were coded regarding whether or not each indicator was mentioned in each school's Self-study or its Visiting Team Report and whether the reference was a commendation or a recommendation. These indicators were synthesized into four general themes:

1. Establishing a comprehensive consensus building process

This theme refers to a school identifying a formal process in which stakeholder representatives determine shared beliefs, decide on the group's mission and goals, analyze data, and create action plan steps.

2. Participating in Shared Leadership

This theme centered on members of the community participating in the leadership of the school. School leadership as included in this indicator specifically referred to parents leading parent-school decision-making groups, parents receiving training on how to lead the meetings and parents' actual involvement in implementing plans within the school.

3. Participation of stakeholders

The visiting teams were looking for a broad range and a diverse group of parents involved in the process. They were looking for parent involvement beyond those parents already on the council. "The council is there by law," chairperson C explained, "They have to be there so we are … looking to the focus groups to see if they [school leaders] have invited additional folks in to look at their study. Have they invited additional parents in to help with their school? Are they listening to them?" Chairperson E added,

> We are looking for how open and inviting the school is to have that parent participant on their focus groups. We are looking for how the school is bringing people in from the community to give input on a plethora of areas as far as academics or activities or all those things combined. How much input do they get?

This theme focused on participation of all stakeholders or representatives from all groups of stakeholders participating in school improvement activities. It called for the inclusion of diverse groups of parents in terms of ethnicity, student grade levels, and student extracurricular activity interests. It called for elections for community council positions as opposed to selections by school leaders. It included the need for schools to accommodate family schedules to meet the realities of today's busy families, such as holding meetings on weekends or in homes and scheduling student focus groups during the school day.

4. Meaningful roles in decision-making

Throughout the Expectation Indicators the term *meaningful roles* is connected to decision-making. Meaningful participation refers to parents involved in some type of action that actually makes a difference in a very direct way. It acknowledges the parents' need to be heard and listened to. Chairperson C shared, "If the parent goes to the meeting and they don't see any outcome to them being there, they will gradually disappear."

Step 2 Chairperson Interviews

Following the document review, semistructured interviews were conducted with chairpersons responsible for leading the site visits and writing each of the final Visiting Team Reports. These interviews were conducted to validate preliminary findings from the archival document review and clarify intentions, correct errors, challenge wrong interpretations, and to gain new data. These interviews were taped by permission of the interviewees and later transcribed. Once the data from the interviews were coded,

information discussed in these interviews was compared to the findings in the archival document review and used to create the School Description Summaries.

Four experienced and highly trained visiting team chairpersons were interviewed for this study. One of these chairpersons led the accreditation evaluation for two of the schools in the study. Three of the four chairpersons had been involved in the new Utah accreditation process since its beginning 10 years previous to the study. Each chairperson was trained directly by the developers of the original process and mentored in their role over a number of years. Each still attends a statewide Visiting Team Chairperson's meeting/training twice each year to review the process and share experiences. These chairpersons currently hold a variety of professional positions including one principal, two district level administrators, and one school district superintendent. Their experience and training qualified these chairpersons to reflect on parental engagement in the school improvement process at an organizational level as well as at the individual school level to help situate the experience of these schools to a larger frame and to give a broader look at the phenomenon.

Step 3 School Summary Descriptions

Findings from the analysis of data collected from each case study's archival document review were used to develop school description summaries that provided clues to the understandings of school leaders as to stakeholder involvement, parent roles and relationships with the school, pertinent aspects of leadership, and school improvement planning processes. The summaries also shed light on how school leaders empowered the

entire community through meaningful roles in decision making and how they encouraged participation, commitment, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning.

Findings

Findings from the case study have been organized as follows: a description of the case studies along with the comparative analysis between cases,

School Cases

Each of the five cases was summarized and a comparative analysis was conducted as additional schools were completed. There was also a comparative analysis completed of the three large schools together, the two small schools together and a comparison of the small schools to the large schools. These summaries began to demonstrate the school leaders' conceptions that were captured by the self-study report and the visiting team's conceptions as was captured in the visiting team report.

Each of the school summaries was organized for this report by five themed areas that represented categories identified within the expectation indicators. Areas of investigation included: *stakeholder involvement* – how do school leaders encourage participation for student learning (expectation indicators – inclusiveness, community), *roles* – how do school leaders empower communities through meaningful roles in decision-making (expectation indicator – shared power), *leadership* - how does the school leader encourage collaboration for student learning (expectation indicator – shared leadership), *relationships*—how do school leaders encourage shared responsibility for student learning (expectation indicator – parent partnerships), and *planning* - how do

school leaders empower an entire community toward student learning (expectation indicator - consensus building).

School A

School A is a 50 year old, high achieving school located in an urban area. With a student population of 2300 the school is classified as a 5A school for athletics. The principal, although new to the school was very experienced.

Stakeholder involvement. School A's self-study included a belief statement regarding the importance of parent involvement. A school-wide survey showed a perception among parents and teachers of strong parental support at the school. The school reported that parents were "extremely involved," and they "make improvements" each year to enhance the school, but neither school leaders nor the visiting team included any information about the school's efforts to include all stakeholders. The visiting team provided a recommendation to the school encouraging them to include more stakeholders in decision-making processes.

Roles. The school reported that parents were fully involved in decision-making. This was also expressed as one of the school's Desired Results for Student Learning (DRSLs): "We believe learning will occur when students, parents, and teachers are involved in making educational choices," but little else was mentioned about how parents were included in decision-making other than to give solicited input and feedback. School leaders stated in their Self-study that they welcomed input from parents, and they offered as evidence of this request their counselor's program which, they said, was informed by

parent feedback. School leaders were proud of their school's "culture of open communication," and they reported that parents have "good accessibility to the administration."

While instruction was given a "quality" rating by the school and community, the school-wide survey also revealed frustration by teachers who suggested parents should not be evaluating educational programs and parents should not be making decisions about professional development. This was in spite of a revelation by a school leader that there were misconceptions around parents about the purposes of the time teachers spent in professional development activities, and a suggestion that "better and repeated communication of the late start program [professional development time] could improve parent and student understanding of the times teachers are available to help students."

Leadership. The School Community Council and Parent Teacher Student Association were described by school leaders as "active" and the visiting team validated this "heavy involvement." The purpose of the School Community Council, it was explained, was "to act as a liaison between the school and stakeholders, fostering communication and school support networks." An example provided by school leaders was how the community council helped the school establish and manage the school's annual parent/student information night that was "a direct result of collaboration with our stakeholders, including our feeder schools." The School Community Council, as mandated by the state, also approved the school's Trustlands budget.

Relationships. Most of School A's Self-study focused on communication to inform parents of events and activities going on at the school and to inform parents of their child's academic progress. "We have worked hard at implementing better ways to communicate including sending home monthly newsletters, parent/teacher conferences, a telephone program which alerts parents to student absences and encouraging the use of Skyward [electronic student database] as essential and highly productive in communicating with our parents." School leaders believed it was important to keep track of parents who attended all three parent-teacher conference opportunities during the year, and it was their goal to increase their vigilance by keeping track of parents' website hits as well. "We wish to see the website become a more effective tool in communicating with our greater community." "We would like to see an extended email system in place so that parents could be sent emails notifying them of upcoming events." Despite their many communication efforts with parents (90 mentions in the self-study), the school's current goals remain focused on communication, "Teachers and administrators will increase communication with parents and students regarding progress, positive news and potential problems through phone calls, meetings…..over the next six years by 2% each year." They planned on designating a School Community Council and PTA liaison to help with this goal.

School leaders seemed proud of their school's strong community partnerships and the visiting team commended the school for their "meaningful working relationships with their community."

Planning. While the school Self-study focused on communication, the emphasis in the Visiting Team Report was school improvement planning. While commending the school for its commitment to continuous improvement and change, it also indicated inconsistencies between the schools' beliefs, values, and operations. While School Community Council members felt fully included in the decision-making process at the school and "Overall, comments from the parents, students, staff and administrators indicate that [School A] encourages all members of the school community to participate in the decision-making process, the community members who spoke with the visiting team did not understand the school improvement process." Moreover, the visiting team "found no evidence that the school's data had been shared with the staff, parents or students." In addition, there was "little evidence that the School Community Council reviews disaggregated school data to help set priorities." The visiting team found the same thing true of the school's DRSLs and the school's action plan. Moreover, "There was little evidence that they [school parents] had been given the opportunity to review the self-study." The chairperson shared the visiting team's astonishment that the school leaders did not even know who their struggling students were. "They had to go to the district level for that information." The visiting team advised that the School Community Council join the faculty at the beginning of the following year and together define their DRSLs, review student data and relate school goals directly to student learning. The suggestion was also made that together they consider including data regarding student learning on the website for school community members to review. They wrote, "All

stakeholders need to know and understand its DRSLs and the critical areas of its action plan."

School B

School B was also selected from the pool of large schools. School B had a student population of 2700 and was located in an urban city. Its principal was in her second year of principalship. The school was classified as a 5A school for athletics and was about 10 years old.

Stakeholder involvement. School leaders reported that parents sat on all focus groups for accreditation and parents believed their opinions were valued by school leaders. The school reported that its programs were informed by parents, and this was documented in recorded minutes from group meetings. Parents were "extremely" involved in volunteering, school leaders reported. They participated in "many" extracurricular events. School leaders reported they had built "many" business partnerships and civic relationships as well. The visiting team made several comments about the schools good working relationships and seemed impressed with the ownership felt by the community. This ownership seemed to be an established defining feature of the school yet current school goals suggested the school was continuing their work to improve it.

Roles. The Visiting Team reported that school leaders made many references to "all" parents (or stakeholders) being active in decision-making and planning. However, school leaders also reported that the School Community Council was "presented with

goals," implying the School Community Council approved an already developed school improvement plan. Although the visiting team commended the school on its involvement of stakeholders in the collaborative self-study process, they also recommended that the school revisit their beliefs with stakeholders and come to consensus.

Leadership. The school had a functioning PTA. The visiting team reported that the school reaches out to parents and families to engage them in the learning process but parents reported not knowing why they must rearrange their schedules for the school's professional development in a late start time. Similar to School A, the school's collaboration activities seemed to be centered in extracurricular activities rather than directly with student learning activities.

Relationships. School leaders at School B included in their Self-study ways parents could help the school in decreasing no-grades and Fs by helping their children follow the school's dress code, reinforcing attendance policies and helping out at the school in such capacity as booster club participation.

As with School A, school leaders of school B reported using several methods of communication for informing parents about activities at the school and several common methods for reporting academic progress including weekly progress reports and Student Education Occupation Planning (SEOP) conferencing. Nevertheless, a school-wide survey, with a response rate of more than 70%, revealed several underlying frustrations among some stakeholders. Survey results reflected parents still feeling left out. "Perhaps if I had been informed, I would have been involved," wrote one parent. The self-study

included 46 comments, mostly negative, from parents, about the school, teachers, and the environment at school. While school leaders, for example, prided themselves on how quickly they responded to parents' concerns, comments from the parent survey suggested that teachers were not very accessible despite the establishment of the late start schedule that parents understood would provide teachers the time to make more contact with parents. Teachers believed that parents' concerns were a result of parents not understanding the core and school policies.

The school was dealing with issues regarding mutual respect and the school's singular interest in top students. Parent survey results indicated an added concern that students were not being given individual attention at school and were falling through the cracks. Parents stated there were "too many kids in the school," "Teachers don't know the names of their students," "They try hard but kids are not getting help and understanding" and "Talking to teachers is only good in the short term." This did not reflect on the school sharing responsibility with all stakeholders for decision-making activities and engagement.

Planning.Schools were encouraged to empower all members of the community to become involved in student learning. "The school was successful at involving all stakeholders in a collaborative self-study process," commended the visiting team. "School B's mission statement and school goals appeared to have involved all stakeholders." "They reached collaboration." This collaboration was verified by meeting notes documenting the school's work on the development of the school's mission

statement and school goals. However, the visiting team also reported that the mission was not well understood and the school's beliefs and school goals were misaligned. They recommended the school collaborate with stakeholders and come to consensus on belief statements that will support the school's goals.

School C

School C was located in an urban area and was considered a large school. School C had a population of about 2000 students. The school was classified as 4A for athletics. The school was over 40 years old. The principal was very experienced with multiple years at the school.

Stakeholder involvement. School C's administration reported inviting parents to be involved in student learning. The school reported wanting to communicate the school improvement plan to stakeholders and the visiting team recommended that the school communicate the improvement plan to all stakeholders. School C encouraged parental participation in very typical ways, "parents are involved in the educational process through IEPs, 504s, SEOPs, parent-teacher conferences and access to power-school and the school website."

Roles. The school reported that parents participated in all of the focus groups. The school had a community council and PTSA. The visiting team gave a strong recommendation that the school wanted "to include more parents in the school improvement process." Similar to schools A and B, there was no mention of parents involved in decision-making activities.

Leadership. The school studied the relationship between parents participating in SEOPs and the school's graduation rate. While communication continued as a goal at the school, the communication was primarily one-way and not collaborative. The school used SEOPs, parent-teacher conferences and power-school to communicate with parents and stakeholders.

Relationships. School C reported that "each year the parents, students, and teachers complete surveys" and the school uses the survey data to make school-wide decisions. The parents communicated to the visiting team that they feel very comfortable approaching the administration at the school. The school "frequently shares our equipment and facilities so that students, faculty and parents are able to have...hands-on experiences."

Planning. The school's Self-study included the adage, "it takes an entire community to raise our children." The visiting team complimented the school on their implementation of professional learning communities noting a "very positive school climate that overflows into the community." While commending the school for the involvement of parents and students on focus groups, the visiting team also made a recommendation to the school to "include more parents in the school improvement process." The chairperson suggested that the school had made an effort to involve stakeholders at a superficial level and the team suggested that communication with the community should be increased.

Discussion—Large Schools A, B, and C

All three large schools employed a plethora of methods for communicating with parents about activities at the school and about their children's academic progress and attendance. All three large schools valued and seemed to benefit from a tradition of support from the wider community. All three schools used a school-wide survey to gather parent perceptions of school processes, but this survey uncovered some contradicting perceptions from parents and teachers who were not involved on the accreditation steering committees. A school community council was active at all three schools and included parent representation but the role and task of the community councils beyond the mandated approval of trustlands plans was inconsistent and unclear. Visiting teams pointed out the need for more participation and involvement of parents despite commendations for good working relationships and collaboration. All three schools' visiting teams recommended the schools make parents beyond the community council better aware of school improvement activities. All three schools' visiting teams emphasized a lack of understanding by stakeholders of the school's mission, DRSLs, action planning processes and action plans. All three schools faced serious challenges such as misalignment of beliefs with DRSLs and data unshared with parents and community beyond the community council and steering committees.

School D

School D was selected from the pool of small schools. The inclusion of small schools in the study helped to account for possible differences in available resources and

opportunities typical in the state between large and small schools. School D had a student population of about 500. It was classified as a 2A school for athletics. The school was 70 years old and was located in a rural area.

Stakeholder involvement. There was little mention of inclusive participatory efforts to include all stakeholders, and parents in particular, in the school Self-study yet the visiting team acknowledged the school's "very serious efforts" to involve all stakeholders. School D was also commended by the visiting team for its long tradition of support from the wider school community. Evidence of this community support, as provided by school leaders included the counseling department's plans for a job fair and community field trips quite typical of the state's high schools.

Roles. The visiting team reported, "The school's staff uses a decision-making process that is collaborative and provides opportunities for the meaningful involvement of the school's stakeholders." This is supported by the observation that "The school's leadership team has involved the entire staff and all stakeholders in the decision-making process." While there appears to have been "meaningful involvement" for some, the majority of survey respondents felt "no voice" in decision-making. School D was one of two schools to mention parents' involvement in implementing the school improvement plan although the nature of this involvement was also unclear.

Leadership. The visiting team documented that school D had a school community council that was both collaborative and inclusive. According to the school's

self-study, their very "active" and "awesome" school community council met monthly to oversee the planning process, guide its focus groups, make decisions and write the plan.

Relationships. Like the three large schools, school D placed its greatest emphasis on communication with parents, and like the three large schools, most references about communication were about methods and most of these methods were one-way. School D used, among other things, a website, newsletters, an email system and a marquee to inform parents about events at the school. School leaders listed as the purpose for this communication "to be more aware of course requirements through disclosure statements" and "parents and students being well-informed about required tests." Like the large schools, semiannual conferences were used to communicate student progress to parents and an online student database was available for parents to keep abreast of their children's academic progress. The school also reported that "Teachers accept phone calls at home after hours." School leaders acknowledged future efforts should be directed toward posting more activities in the newspaper, tracking grades better and using an electronic phone messaging system "for better communication."

School leaders reported they provided to "interested parents" the opportunity to participate in its school-wide survey every 3 years "when the school revisits its school plans." The school had a relatively high return rate of 50% of this school-wide survey. The visiting team reported their interviews with parents showed that this parent group believed the administration and faculty wanted them in the school." This positive message was somewhat contradicted however by the results of the parent/teacher survey

that revealed an undercurrent of negativity among parents and teachers. Teachers thought students were unmotivated and parent involvement was poor. Like School B, parents at School D rated the educational program at the school and its instructional innovation poor. They believed their students were not being adequately prepared for work and life after graduation. They perceived teachers' attitudes as negative and the climate impersonal. The visiting team addressed these contradictions by recommending the school review its survey results to make sure stakeholder groups "were all in agreement."

Planning. School leaders reported their school-wide survey drove its planning process, but the visiting team suggested the school revisit its plan. There were issues regarding their goal's measurability. Despite the visiting team's acknowledgement of the school's "very serious efforts" to involve all stakeholders, the school was advised to post the goals so all stakeholders would know and understand them. There remained a noticeable lack of any mention of stakeholder direct participation in the school's improvement planning process outside of the parent survey.

Discussion—School D (Small School) Compared to Large Schools

Despite its characteristics as a rural community school, it showed strengths and areas for improvement that were similar to the large schools A, B, and C. Bringing all stakeholders into the conversation to bring about a consensus on the school's mission and goals and a resultant commitment to their community's action plan was a challenge for School D despite its smaller community. Communication was the clear emphasis of the self-study and just as in the large schools, the visiting team's emphasis on communication

with parents contrasted greatly. Like schools A, B, and C, collaboration with the community was strong. The school had a functioning school community council which played a strong role in the school improvement process. A school-wide survey was consulted and as in schools A, B, and C, the views of parents interviewed by the visiting team and the views of parents expressed in parent surveys clashed. In each case, parents interviewed by the visiting team were positive and supportive about the school, and as in the large schools, the bulk of School D's stakeholders lacked an understanding of the school's improvement plan.

School E

School E was also selected from the pool of small schools. It had a population of 800 and like school D, its location was in a rural community. The school was only 3 years old and was classified as a 3A school for athletics. Despite its young age, a second principal, a former middle school principal, had recently been transferred to the school.

School E's self-study differed from the four other cases in several ways. There were dramatically fewer references to parent involvement than the others while the number of references to parent involvement in the Visiting Team Report was many more than that of the other schools. This is a reverse from the other schools. However, many of the references to parent involvement came from a single list of school goals that included parents as one of several groups responsible for each goal.

Stakeholder involvement. Parents were recruited in this school by a very involved father and son who was a student body leader. It was observed that although this

parent and son, both on the accreditation steering committee, “were extremely positive toward their school, other students and parents seemed unfamiliar with the [school improvement] process.” The Visiting Team Report advised school leaders to bring more students and the community into the process. This suggestion was repeated several times along with a recommendation for a modification to the school improvement plan to include “a wider base of stakeholders”.

Roles. The Visiting Team found that ownership felt by the community, in the plan, was clearly evident. “The process of accreditation and continuous school improvement has been embraced by all stakeholders.” Input was received from the steering committee, Parent Teacher and Student Association (PTSA), and school community council. Parents felt listened to and a part of the process. “Parents were asked their opinions and this feedback was then included in the plan,” reported the Visiting Team.

Still, school leaders were advised to increase the use of community members and parents in the decision-making processes involved with the development of the school profile and action plan. The school was commended for its collaborative efforts. The visiting team report said, “You have pulled off a collaborative community.” The visiting team found that administration had worked closely and openly with staff and the School Community Council to foster this culture of collaboration.

Leadership. A steering committee led school improvement planning. Parents and at least one student were on this steering committee. The PTA and School Community

Council were included and involved in the school decision-making process. Unlike the other schools, large or small, the school had mechanisms to support implementation of the plan such as a parent support group tied to almost all programs. It was advised, however, that school D "formally identifies stewardship responsibilities in an organizational chart that can effectively carry out all duties to future program reviews including faculty, staff, parents, students and visitors and continuous school improvement." Unlike the responses to the other schools, this visiting team commended the principal himself who they described as being "particularly receptive to new ideas and comfortable with its interactions with the community."

Relationships. Unlike the other schools, communication of activities and events did not seem to be the focus of the self-study. "Email, teacher's websites, phone calls and personal contact" along with newspaper announcements were mentioned as a means of informing parents of activities at the school and student achievement, but just as a sentence. Community partnerships were clearly related to student learning. School programs such as internships, concurrent enrollment and job shadowing were provided as evidence of community partnerships in support of student learning.

Planning. While the school did not have the benefit of a long history and tradition with the community, it did seem to benefit from the more recent school opening activities just 3 years before. As is traditional when a secondary school opens, the school led representatives from the school and community in a process to establish identity. They determined a school name, mascot, motto, and mission together.

Unlike the other schools, the rest of the Self-study had an emphasis on the school improvement planning process. “Adding vision statements defined collaborative efforts needed by all and helped keep focus.” The DRSLs and the vision and mission statements were closely connected and represented a clear focus to guide and direct the actions of stakeholders. This vision placed student learning at the center of all activity and emphasized high expectations demonstrated in the following school goal, “In order to become an exemplary school, parents and the community must: Support teachers in their efforts to elicit high-level academic and social achievements and hold their students accountable for learning the material they are required to learn.”

Unlike the other four schools, this visiting team reported the school’s “use of data analysis for improvement is evident within all departments.” However, the school was advised “to share this data,” with the community and students and amongst faculty and the greater community” as well. A more comprehensive profile was also advised.

Discussion--School D & E (Small Schools)

School E, the second small school, differed considerably from School D. While the portion of the Self-study devoted to parent involvement was much shorter than that of the other four schools, the content was not focused on communication methods to the extent that the others had been. Instead, the main focus was on describing aspects of the school’s planning process to determine its goals and objectives. Student learning was clearly central to the self-study. Alignment of vision, beliefs, mission, and goals was present. Data for decision-making was shared. Parents were “empowered” by their

involvement in decision-making in which they were given authority or power to make important decisions.

What was similar to the other small school, however, was the challenge of inclusion of all stakeholder groups in "the conversation" ensuring the message and its resultant commitment is widespread throughout the system. A representative parent group was very positive and supportive of the school. School E may have been advantaged by the newness of the school that allowed for a more collaborative involvement by the entire school community in determining the school's mission and other aspects of the school's identity. However, in a departure from the other cases, school E's Visiting Team Report commended the principal's willingness to learn, his openness to new ideas and his comfort in the role of participant along with parents, as having contributed to the sense of ownership in the process.

Summary of School's Studies Analysis

All five schools in this study had in place multiple paths of communication with parents about activities at the school and student's academic progress. All five schools gained support from partnerships in the larger community. They also had difficulty ensuring that all stakeholder groups had an understanding of the school improvement process, the school's mission, its goals, and its action plan. They all struggled with a consensus building process that reached all stakeholder groups. All five schools were advised to increase involvement beyond the leadership team. All five schools were

advised to return to the planning process and work together with stakeholders on important elements of the school improvement process.

In spite of this, school leaders from all five high schools seemed satisfied with the work their schools had done and with the level of responsibility they shared with parents. School leaders at the high schools felt they worked well with their representative parent groups and with the community. They saw their responsibility as it had been prescribed to them through mandates and tradition. They invited parents into their worlds, on their own terms. School E included vision statements that helped focus the group's work and communication at School E, although considered very important, was looked at as a means to an end as opposed to an end in itself.

Overall themes

General Themes

A comparison of Epstein's Six Types (2001) with this study's initial categories revealed some interesting findings. Efforts on the part of school leaders, for example, did not include much emphasis on the home. Epstein's parenting type was not referenced in the school's self-studies except in one school's list of ways parents could help improve student learning. This list included an emphasis on parents supporting school rules such as enforcing the school's dress code and supporting the school's absenteeism and tardy policies but had no message about the parent's role in the learning process. Epstein's learning at home type was also mentioned in only a few instances. This type supposed that learning is initiated at school and should then be supported at home.

None of the self studies included a reference to this type. Decision-making and advocacy, another of Epstein's types, centered on the parent's involvement on the school's community council and as part of the parent teacher organizations and was the third least type mentioned in the school self-studies.

While participation of parents as traditional classroom volunteers was not mentioned in the school's self-studies, other types of parent participation such as membership in school booster clubs and attendance at student performances were mentioned frequently demonstrating that Epstein's volunteer type was one with which the schools were comfortable.

Communication with parents, however, about school activities and student progress was by far the most referenced of Epstein's Six Types in the school self-studies. All five school's self-studies included numerous ways the schools were communicating with families such as email, voice messaging systems, and electronic progress reports. School communications centered on encouraging families to attend events as well as how they provided parents opportunities to monitor their student's learning through various progress reporting mechanisms. It should be noted that one way in which the initial categories identified in this study differed from Epstein's Six Type categories is that references to communication were separated into two groups according to their purpose: (a) communication to inform parents of activities and events to increase parents' participation, and (b) communication to inform parents of their own student's progress to better monitor their learning.

School leaders' references to parent communication consisted of a variety of forms of communication as represented in the following quotations from the self-study reports:

> We have worked hard at implementing better ways to communicate including sending home monthly newsletters, parent teacher conferences, a telephone program which alerts parents to student absences and encouraging the use of Skyward [electronic database] as essential and highly productive in communicating with our parents. (School A)
>
> Teachers communicate expectations of student learning through disclosure documents, parent teacher conferences and other contacts as needed: school website, phone calls, email, Power-school [electronic database]. (School B)
>
> The counseling center is working on parent contact – having parents get weekly emails on deadlines for scholarships, opportunities available to students through programs, etc. (School B)
>
> We communicate well with our community by having parents on our focus groups. (School C)
>
> Student accomplishments are published in the county paper. (School D)
>
> School goal – in order to become an exemplary school, parents and the community must facilitate open communication between students, staff and administration. (School E)

In view of this clear emphasis on communication by school leaders in the self-studies, it was surprising that visiting team reports were practically void of references to communication - for either purpose – to inform parents of activities and to inform parents of their children's progress. This difference in the level of attention given to communication in the school self-studies as compared to the attention given to communication in the visiting team reports was dramatic as demonstrated in Table 1. While visiting team reports were typically shorter documents than school self-studies, the percentage of communication references in the self-studies and the percentage of communication references in the visiting team reports were incongruent. Out of 337 references extracted from the school self-studies (excluding outlier School E), 224 (66%) were about communication. Out of 159 statements extracted from the visiting team reports (excluding outlier School E), only 18 (12%) were about communication. A dramatic example of this contrast is found in the self-study report of School B (see Table 1) that included 80 references to communication while the visiting team report from school B included only two references to communication.

Despite these difficulties, the comparison of this study's initial categories to Epstein's Six Types (2001) led to some important findings: 1) School leaders may not have viewed parenting as a resource for increasing parent engagement in school improvement efforts, 2) School leaders may not have viewed the parent's role as the main facilitator of learning at home as a way of engaging parents in school improvement efforts, and 3) School leaders seemed to rely heavily on one-way communication in the

form of telling parents things. This seemed to be their main strategy for engaging parents and all five schools had future plans to keep telling parents things to try to increase parent engagement in the future, 5) a place-based perspective may encourage a focus on physical activity but limit cognitive and emotional aspects of parent involvement, and 6) a discrepancy existed between what school leaders offered as evidence of parent engagement in school improvement processes and what visiting teams were expecting school leaders to offer as evidence of parent engagement in school improvement processes.

Table 1

References to Communication by School

	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	Totals
Self-Study Report	90	80	26	28	6	230
Visiting Team Report	11	2	5	0	15	33

Expectation Indicators

Establishing a comprehensive consensus building process. None of the Self-studies actually mentioned parents participating actively or fully in the development of a school improvement plan. In contrast to the self studies, the development of school improvement plans was the main focus of all of the Visiting Team Reports. Despite school leaders not mentioning the involvement of parents in the school's improvement process, two of the schools were commended for their work in this area and only three

schools were encouraged to improve. Although two schools were commended for their work in this area, only one of the schools included parents in data analysis and evaluation activities suggesting that the visiting teams were probably attempting to encourage schools toward greater involvement. Only one self-study mentioned parents being involved in establishing meaningful, measurable goals but three were advised to improve in this area. None of the self-studies included any action to suggest they considered the school improvement planning process to be continuous. Several schools, in fact, approached school improvement activities as a once in a six-year event. While other parts of the self-study may have referred to the continuous nature of the improvement process, it was not evidenced in respect to parent or community engagement.

The need for parents to assist in the implementation of school improvement plans, while not included in any of the self studies, was mentioned as a significant oversight by four visiting teams. Interestingly, School E did have structures set up for ongoing parent support of their school's improvement plan with parents assigned to each program activity although it was not clear if the school had that plan before the visiting team's intervention. The visiting team reports did provide a clue as to how school leaders conceived the role of parents in school improvement planning with four of the visiting teams reporting that parents played a role in approving school plans as opposed to helping create them.

Participating in shared leadership. Except as it is implied in the operation of school community councils, the self-studies were void of discussion about shared

leadership. None of the self-studies nor any visiting team reports included training parents in leadership skills such as how to conduct meetings although the sharing of power and accountability, along with written ground rules and bylaws are mandated in the law. Chairperson A explained that in the interview process, visiting teams were looking for whether or not parents were actually leading focus groups. Chairperson E suggested, "We are looking for evidence that they are not just 'rubber stamping', you know, giving 'lip service'." It is clear visiting teams were looking for shared leadership rather than simple feedback from parents. Additionally, none mentioned the creation of mechanisms for the establishment of teams for ongoing self-study. It was not mentioned in either the self-study reports or the visiting team reports how the family and community members became involved in curriculum and fiscal conversations suggesting that perhaps the subject was too problematic to address.

Participation of stakeholders. None of the self-studies discussed being all-inclusive and participatory and only one reported on the meaningful involvement of parents, while three of the five visiting teams mentioned it as being important. Although four of the five school self-studies included ways the school encouraged parents to be more involved, three of the five visiting team reports discussed schools encouraging parents to be involved as an area that needed improvement. Four of the five self-studies reported going to great lengths to involve all parents in the process, while three of the five visiting team reports also included this activity. Chairperson D explained that visiting teams looked for an authentic effort at involving parents. He shared that although

a school leader might say that they invited “500 of them but only 3 came, “ the visiting team would then look for evidence of sustained effort on the school’s part at improving that involvement and not just accepting the low attendance. When asked about the parent’s satisfaction with their level of involvement, however, the same chairperson reflected, “I think people are busy...I don’t think they want to be involved in every little thing, like creating the school’s motto. Just figure out some good choices and let me vote on one.” Chairperson B clarified, “It’s important that parents who want to be involved, have the opportunity.”

Chairpersons concluded that parent involvement in the schools did not depict “full” engagement, “but closer to 60-70%” (Chairperson E). “For the most part the principal listens to parent groups and for the most part, they [parents] follow the principal,” shared chairperson D, “Sometimes parent involvement is…cursory.” When meeting with parents as part of the school site visit, Chairperson B shared that “school leaders have a tendency to “cherry pick” parents or in other words, select overly supportive parents sure to cast the school in a good light. “Certain parents are invited to participate, usually because of a past positive relationship. These parents are very supportive and positive about the school but they don’t usually represent all stakeholder groups” (Chairperson B).

An example is School B’s number one parent who seemed to act as a cheerleader for the school and who was asked to represent parents on the council and on focus groups. The parent, in reality, represented a single stakeholder group. He gave glowing

reports about the school to the accreditation visiting team, sharing his own involvement, which was extensive. The visiting team however, found that only a few of the other parents they met with that day understood the plan, the mission, or the goals of the school. “They hadn’t even seen any of the data,” shared chairperson B. Chairperson E commented, when discussing parental participation in community councils,

> Some schools advertise it. They seek candidates. They want people from all different ethnicity groups, and different activity levels, not just student body president parents. They want another voice. They go out and recruit. Some schools put it out there. Others give it minimal lip service.

Chairperson B shared,

> There are good parents in the community. In large, schools don’t understand what the community sees looking in. We see what is around us. A good parent can add valuable insight. They don’t see what the school sees. The view is different.

Visiting teams were looking for parents who have been invited, even recruited, by the principal to participate. “One principal went to the local church to get in touch and invite parents,” shared chairperson A.

Meaningful roles in decision-making. Although schools are encouraged to engage parents in meaningful roles, this study found a distinct lack of representation of this within the self-studies. Most school leaders were not yet comfortable with empowering parents in decision-making. “There is a belief among principals that there are certain things parents shouldn’t be making decisions about” such as curriculum,

instruction, and professional development. “They are not sure if the community should be making those decisions,” explained chairperson B.

School leaders were encouraged to give teams the power to make decisions, not just make recommendations. School leaders were expected to make the structural leadership changes that would help make this happen, to have parents help develop plans and not just to approve someone else’s work. Chairperson E suggested, “It can be an ego thing. It’s about power.” While chairperson B shared a personal experience about a time when extending power in decision-making was particularly threatening. “I was paranoid. I knew that this one parent could destroy the rapport I had been building for years.” The chairperson explained that it can make a school leader hesitant, “to give over any control. It’s scary too.” While chairperson C added, “The reality is that a parent ‘with an agenda’ can cause problems and ‘undo years of work’. If you could trust all the parents like you could trust the teachers that would be great.” There seemed to be a fear among school leaders that parents, who do not have a professional background in education, cannot possibly understand the background of the situation so they will vote against what has been carefully planned by school personnel.

When considering Expectation Indicators not referred to in any of the school self-studies nor any of the visiting team reports, the avoidance of power sharing became even more evident. While I expected to find that not all of the Expectation Indicators would be included in every report, I was surprised to find the number of indicators not connected to any study, particularly the indicator expecting that power and accountability would be

provided to the site council. The following Expectation Indicators were not referenced in any of the reports:

- Parents advising school administrators
- Providing power and accountability to the site council
- Providing training on how to conduct meetings
- Reporting on plans, programs, and expenditures for professional development
- Encouraging family and community members to become involved in curriculum and fiscal conversations
- Acknowledging that partnerships require different sets of knowledge and skills
- Conduct elections
- Create mechanisms for the establishment of teams and bylaws or other guidelines

Misconceptions and Disconnects

Misconceptions, in this study, are defined as alternate conceptions to those set forth in the Expectation Indicators. A list of the most apparent misconceptions follows:

Telling parents more things will improve schools. The most consistent finding in this study was that schools continually attempt to communicate with parents about events and activities at the school. All schools put forth a great effort at communication with parents to inform them of student's progress. Most of the methods used for this communication were one-way communication methods, or in other words, they consisted

of *telling parents things*. In spite of great progress in this area, most of the schools had current goals calling for improvement of this same type of communication; they were planning to improve their schools by *telling parents more things*. However, findings from this study show that the type of communication lacking at all five schools was communication meant to increase understanding among all stakeholders of the school's basic beliefs about student learning, the school's mission, its student learning data, its school-wide goals, and its action plans and their alignment. What was lacking is a conception among school leaders of parents and schools communicating in a way that increases the development of a shared understanding of learning and school improvement or consensus building.

A small group of parents can speak for all stakeholders. In all five schools, a small group of parents was used as representatives for the broader community, but in all cases there were no mechanism in place to ensure a critical flow of messages throughout the system. At every school there were parents who believed they had no voice and misinformation was apparent. No matter how effective the school community council was, a process for networking to allow the critical flow of messages back and forth among all constituents seemed to be lacking.

Approving school improvement plans is a meaningful role for parents. In all cases parents were participating on school community councils that had as a main role to approve plans assembled in large part by school personnel. Decision-making that leads to making a difference is what makes a role in the school improvement process meaningful.

Modern parents look for meaningfulness in their participation activities. They are a generation of participators. Many participated in service-learning in school. The 2011 Utah State Legislature intentionally changed the wording in its state law directing community councils. The legislature's prior changes had been directed at getting the right people to the table. However, in 2011, there was a specific change in the language of the bill which placed special emphasis on the word *create* as opposed to the word *develop* to represent a significant change in the type of activity they envision for parents fully engaged in school improvement. While the concept of creativity is so complex that experts have as yet to come to agreement about its meaning, many experts agree that the definition includes aspects of flexibility, fluency, originality, and elaboration. A creative person is thought to have the ability to apply these characteristics to problem-solving. Problem-solving models include both inductive and deductive reasoning. Research in the past decade has emphasized problem-finding as perhaps an even more important activity than problem-solving. While both inductive and deductive reasoning are inherent in both problem-solving and problem-finding, the activities of each pursuit differs (Arlin & Levitt, 1998). Where problem-solving emphasizes analysis and discarding, problem-finding looks at ever broadening brainstorming, seeing patterns and asking why until focusing on the problem that seems most worthy of putting forth energy and resources. Problem-finding requires a deeper understanding of the issue, its history, and the resources available. Applied to parent involvement, a parent involved in problem-finding would point to a parent more fully engaged.

A change from development to creation, as mandated by the legislature would require a different type of interaction. It would require a change in relationships among stakeholders and a change in their major activities. It would require parents to participate on an ongoing basis so that they are involved in the problem-finding stage as opposed to problem-solving stage. Problem-finding would require transparency in school data sharing and ongoing conversation that is lacking in the five schools in the current study. The directive, which followed the changed bill, from the Utah State Board of Education to school leaders did not include any explanation of the change and interestingly, chairpersons interviewed about it did not believe it would necessarily lead to any significant change in the way school leaders conceive of fully engaged parents. Chairperson D stated, "Chairpersons are baffled with the determination and dissatisfaction of the legislature toward parent involvement in the school improvement process." Chairperson D suggested that the current disengagement of parents in school improvement processes might be due to parents themselves not wanting to be involved in school improvement any more than they already are. Chairperson B agreed that parents might be too busy for more involvement. Chairperson A, however, suggested that perhaps the type of involvement offered by the school might be the problem, "If the parent does not see that they are making a difference, they go away." If parents actually do not care to engage fully in the school improvement effort, then laws must change removing that requirement. If not, school leaders are charged with helping parents

understand why their engagement is so necessary. This will require school leaders to be convinced themselves.

Shared leadership means having a community council or PTA. Chairperson A shared that visiting teams are looking for parents to be leading the focus groups. Although a community council is definitely an opportunity for parents to join the conversation at the school, this study found there was no evidence that any of the schools encouraged or helped parents understand this leadership role. This study did not find evidence that the schools helped parents look beyond the success of their own children which is necessary for shared leadership. Neither did school leaders acknowledge the students' world beyond the classroom, also necessary for shared leadership. For shared leadership, school personnel need to know how to put to use the special experience base, knowledge and skills that parents have obtained throughout their lives.

Partnering with parents is the same thing as creating partnerships with the community. In all five cases the relationship with parents seemed similar to creating partnerships with the community. Schools have benefited from important partnerships with the community for decades. These partnerships are based on mutual benefits and charitable intentions. For example, a grocery store hangs posters of student drawings in his or her school. The school benefits from the motivation of students to write and the store benefits from the increased probability the mother will shop where her child's poster prominently hangs, but the optimal relationship with parents according to the ideas set forth in the Expectation Indicators is as full partners. Full partners share risks as well

as the benefits of the partnering relationship. Parents ultimately have the most to gain and the most to lose if the enterprise fails. The concept of *partnering* with parents as opposed to *creating partnerships* as with community groups emphasizes the shared goal parents and schools have of facilitating the ultimate success of their children. Britton et al. (2010) found that true trusting relationships happen at the individual level through interpersonal relationships. This type of trust cannot be built through the basic community partnerships, but through parents and school personnel working together interpersonally. Partners trust each other. They believe that their partner has their best interests at heart. A partnering perspective could strengthen a mutual trust.

School is the center of learning. In all cases, learning seemed place bound with the school considered the center of all learning. Learning that occurred at home was not considered important to school improvement by school leaders in this study, nor was parenting—also a place bound phenomenon. Today, information, people, and ideas from all over the world can be and is accessed with immediacy from home and other places outside of the school building while schools seemed stuck in inflexible thought processes perceiving parent involvement as represented by only certain types of activity at certain times and in certain places.

The purpose of increased attention to involvement of parents in school improvement processes is to be politically correct. School leaders seemed to place parent involvement secondary to other aspects of school improvement. Chairperson B stated, “School leaders don’t always include a parent involvement component in their

Self-study." She went as far as to say, "It's never in the Self-study. I always have to dig for it once I'm there [on site]." Chairperson C explained how some school leaders give parent involvement more seriousness than others but the general impression from this study was that school leader's conceptions of engaging parents in school improvement is a nice thing to do but is not necessary to school improvement efforts..

These misconceptions may not be misconceptions at all but symptoms of a rather obvious disconnect also revealed in this study, between what school leaders were providing as evidence of parents fully engaged in school improvement processes, and what visiting teams were expecting as evidence of parents fully engaged. This disconnect may have been exacerbated by miscommunication and ambiguous messages within the accreditation process itself.

Miscommunication

The disconnect between what school leaders provided as evidence of parents fully engaged in school improvement and what visiting teams were expecting as evidence of parents fully engaged in school improvement may have been caused by miscommunication between the school leadership teams and the state's visiting teams. Chairperson B remarked, "While school leaders provided evidence of their efforts to communicate activities at the school and student progress, visiting teams were looking for evidence of school improvement planning, decision making and consensus-building processes at the school." Chairperson E stated, "When we are talking about parent involvement, principals may be thinking about the day-to-day communications, while we

are thinking about continuous improvement processes." "We want to know if there were parents that were crafting and involved in the creating of the school improvement plan. What was done with stakeholder groups?" he shared. Better alignment is needed between what is expected by the visiting team and what the school leaders are given as a guide through the process. Likewise, some of the words used in the accreditation documentation, mandates, and professional literature are vague. Words like meaningful, active, engage, and encourage are all words that need further defining to ensure better understanding.

Ambiguous messages. The accreditation process is based on the concept of valuable *critical friends*. A critical friend, in this setting, is a team that offers a peer group a third eye allowing them to evaluate their own progress toward meeting their goals. Visiting teams in this study were made up of administrators and teachers from districts throughout the state. Each visiting team acted as that third eye for their peers. Following each site's school visit, the critical friend group conferred and wrote a report that included areas of strength and one or two areas needing improvement. The state requirement is that the school should then incorporate these recommendations into their school improvement plan and work on that plan over time.

Teams are trained to commend the school on strengths in addition to making these recommendations. It seemed that in some of the cases in this study, the visiting teams may have embellished a mediocre performance in an effort to encourage and soften the blow of a recommendation. In some instances schools were commended on things that

later in the same report were represented as recommendations or areas needing improvement. Ambiguous messages like these could have resulted in misconceptions.

The rating system for the accreditation process also included ambiguous elements. According to the chairpersons, the rating structure was such that it was possible for a school that was grossly underperforming and a school that was meeting expectations to each earn the same performance score. When asked how they might justify giving the same score in that situation Chairperson A explained, “Even among the chairs there was some disparity….it’s just like you have some who are hardnosed and some who are in the middle and some who would never give a school a 3 (the lower rating).” She also stated her concern that a common understanding of the phenomenon of parents fully engaged in school improvement is needed among visiting team members as it impacts school leaders’ conceptions. Chairperson A explained, “If we don’t clearly define the target we can’t expect that they’re going to hit it.”

School teams creating the self-study reports and visiting teams creating the visiting team reports appear to be aimed at different and separate targets. Visiting team chairpersons also share the concern that the target may not be clearly defined for each of the stakeholder groups leading to the misconceptions and disconnects between the groups.

Summary of Findings

According to the findings of this study school leaders conceptions of parent engagement in school improvement processes included three necessary components.

Parents were engaged as receivers of information as the school made great efforts to provide information to parents about events at the school and their children's progress. If the school had numerous ways to get information to parents, school leaders seemed satisfied that parent engagement was high. Along with this, a small carefully chosen group of parents participating on focus groups and on a functioning PTA or school community council also seemed to satisfy that "requirement, " although the parent's role on the community council was in most cases perfunctory as the council most often approved the work of others.

School leaders at each school proudly provided details of the school's communication efforts for letting parents know about the activities going on at the school and letting parents know about their child's grades. School leaders shared long lists of types of communication methods such as parent newsletters and marquee messages. They all listed numerous technological means of communication such as online grading systems websites, telephone messaging services, and email systems. School leaders shared numbers of parents participating in parent-teacher conferences and as members of the school community council and other parent organizations. School leaders described activities that involved the larger community such as business partnerships and the number of parents who participated in their school-wide surveys. Very rarely did schools report on parents sharing leadership, engaging in decision-making activities, or creating school improvement and professional development plans.

Chairpersons did not entirely agree amongst themselves about what full engagement actually meant. While they all agreed on similar criteria, the value they placed on various criteria seems to differ. One chairperson, for example cared deeply about including a diverse group of parents while another was more interested in the parent's role on the focus groups. They were looking for evidence of the inclusion of parents beyond school community council members. They wanted to see that parents understood the goals of the school plan. Visiting teams were looking for parents involved in making important decisions. They looked for evidence that school personnel were actually paying attention to what parents said on their surveys. They looked for parents taking leadership roles in the process. Accreditation teams were looking for what they called authentic parental engagement in the school improvement process. They looked for how parents were involved in carrying out the plan they helped create. They wanted to know how parents were involved in school improvement on a day to day basis throughout the school year. However, even while almost all visiting team reports suggested and even recommended that each school make a more concerted effort at fully engaging parents in these ways, in most cases they would also commend the schools on the parental engagement that currently existed within the school. Chairpersons believed that commending activities that were not necessarily high quality might help schools move faster towards actually being able to facilitate the full engagement of parents in school improvement. Inconsistency such as this, however, might have led to conflicting ideas among school leaders as to expected standards.

Limitations and Delimitations

The self-study documents included interviews and observation data conducted by the school personnel themselves. Human nature and the political impact of less than stellar accreditation performance ratings have created the possibility that school personnel may not have depicted their school improvement processes accurately. Further, school reports may not have included all pertinent information. Each school's self-study however, was reviewed by a visiting team prior to an actual school visit when information was validated through further observation and interview, thereby reducing inaccuracies, and the probability of bias (Utah State Office of Education, 2002). Also although the lack of direct observation by the researcher may be viewed as a limitation, Visiting Team Reports did include discoveries from the visiting team's intensive, direct observation of the school's processes. Data collected and analyzed from the researcher's direct interviews with visiting team chairpersons have been used in an effort to validate and eliminate bias within the data (Gall et al., 2003).

As a parent, I served on a school community council while the school was establishing its continuous improvement processes. As a teacher, I served as the school leader at two different high schools participating in the state accreditation process where I assisted in the production of the school's self-studies. As a visiting team member, I participated on 10 state accreditation visiting teams and co-authored multiple visiting team reports. My experience as a participant in these three different roles has made me more sensitive to the phenomenon and its variables uniquely qualifying me to discover

and synthesize the meaning shared by participants using these data collection tools. My personal experiences from these three perspectives however, will most likely affect its interpretations as suggested by Merriam (2001), "It is assumed that meaning is embedded in people's experiences and that this meaning is mediated through the investigator's own perceptions" (p. 6).

The limitations of a visiting team site visit should be kept in mind. A two day accreditation team visit can capture only a certain amount of evidence with which to base judgments for a Visiting Team Report. Interviews with parents during that time may have been negatively affected by certain parents unable to meet for various reasons. A single site visit by a visiting team every six years may not allow the capture of enough or appropriate evidence to accurately measure the engagement level of parents within the school.

Conclusions

I explored school leaders' conceptions of parents as fully engaged in school improvement processes as evidenced in five high school accreditation self-studies and visiting team reports as well as through data gleaned from interviews with visiting team chairpersons. Although this study explored school leader's conceptions, it is ironic that it was the school leaders' misconceptions that provided the best clues to their conceptions. They seemed to view parental engagement in this process in similar ways. School leaders in this study seemed to feel that parent engagement was secondary to other more important parts of the accreditation Self-study. Parents were considered important in a

student's life but not so important to the work of the school. No school leader provided evidence that parents were involved in meaningful decision-making. None took a leadership role in the process. A very small number of parents participated on focus groups and that work ended with the visiting team site visits. An even smaller number of parents were involved on community councils. Parent involvement in general took on very traditional forms such as booster clubs, PTA leadership, and attendance at sporting events. Events and activities involving the larger business community were also quite traditional such as with job fairs. Parent involvement at all the schools seemed to at least meet regulatory requirements and there was a sense that if it wasn't required the level of parental involvement in school improvement processes would be less.

Some areas of work with parents seemed to be favorites for school leaders. Communication with parents, meaning information sharing, was an activity that school leaders seem to feel very comfortable with and so it encompassed much of each of the reports. School leaders were less comfortable with other aspects of communication with parents. While sorting and coding the data initially for this study it became apparent that Epstein's Six Types (2001) did not easily lend itself to discussion about parents' perceptions, thoughts, ideas, and feelings, specifically about the school's educational program (curriculum, instruction, assessment), the accessibility of its administrators, and the school's climate. It was difficult, for example, to categorize a parent's concern about the lack of attention many struggling children were experiencing, into one of Epstein's Six Types (2001) of parent involvement. Categorization in this current study includes

these three subjects as their own categories. Each represents a cognitive or emotional connection with the school suggesting that perceptions, opinions, understandings, hopes, fears, concerns, and dreams are perhaps even more significant to parent engagement than the place where parent involvement actually occurs. Thinking of collaboration as place-based may actually impose limitations on who and how parents can be involved. If rather, school leaders think of involvement in the sense of creating opportunities for the convergence of ideas toward solving problems or in the sense of creating systems in which messages could be communicated through networks, new ways to collaborate may be generated and more authentic parental engagement at the school may result.

The problem central to this study was the difficulty of meeting expectations for full engagement of parents in school improvement processes. This study explored the conceptions of school leaders as to full engagement of parents in these processes assuming a school leader's influence over a school's culture, operations, and ultimately its success is directly tied to the school leader's conceptions.

The findings from this study identified several misconceptions among school leaders and a possible disconnect between the conceptions of school leaders and the expectations of regulatory agencies. Specific misconceptions were identified regarding who is involved in the work of school improvement and the manner in which the work is done. These are summarized here as subtle shifts in emphasis in current expectations.

A cultural shift is occurring in schools from parents involved in developing school plans to parents involved in creating school plans; from school leaders using a few

carefully chosen supportive parents to be involved in school improvement to the inclusion of a large number of diverse parents involved in the process in various ways; from a place bound mentality to a more flexible, networking approach to collaboration; from an emphasis on one-way communication to two-way communication methods and convergent opportunities, and; from an emphasis on partnershipping with parents to partnering with parents in acknowledgment of both party's mutual risk and benefits in the venture.

Recommendations

Parents are important partners in the school improvement process, but the collaborative interaction expected between parents and schools in today's continuous school improvement processes requires different roles and relationships for parents and school personnel. School leaders need to lead a consensus building process with people beyond the boundaries of the physical school building, extend decision-making power, and share leadership. Few parents or school leaders have experienced this type of collaboration, and there are few models of this collaboration currently available, therefore school leaders' conceptions are based on little knowledge and experience, yet these conceptions greatly impact school-wide culture and operations.

Legal solutions and policy changes are not usually sufficient to change misconceptions or to facilitate complex social change. Neither is policy setting alone. Parent involvement has been a legal mandate since Title I was instituted in 1965 and parent engagement in school improvement has been mandated in the state of Utah by way

of School Community Council laws since 1992 yet school leaders still struggle with it. Utah laws have become more stringent over time causing consternation and confusion among school leaders who feel they are already complying with the regulations. Chairperson E shared, "They [schools] are …complying with law even now. There are more members of parents than school people [on these committees]. However, there are still problems out there or they wouldn't keep changing the law." Not even visiting team chairpersons know how to help schools engage parents in the process. As shared by chairperson E, "Principals don't understand the concept of parents fully engaged and I don't know how they should address it."

Chairpersons did agree that while a program of professional development is already in place for the training of principals and school leadership teams, a comprehensive training program is in place for visiting team members, and a statewide meeting twice each year for visiting team chairpersons is also available as is training for school community councils something is missing. There are still misconceptions, fear, mistrust, and a lack of confidence in the process. The result is a compliance mentality among school leaders who end up doing new things, like collaborative-type activities, in old ways, missing the point and resulting in surface level involvement of parents.

Since one of the consistent findings in this study was that widespread knowledge and understanding of the school's plan was lacking at all five schools perhaps knowledge and understanding of the school's plan should be the content of a training experience with all of the players participating together. All stakeholders, school leaders, school

leadership teams and community councils could attend the same training over time and the school's plan could be the focus of that training in a very authentic and genuine effort to create and monitor the plan together ensuring a deeper understanding among parents of the issues that impact the school and a deeper understanding among school personnel of the issues that impact the family outside of school.

Convergence theory (Jeong & Chi, 2007; Jorczak, 2011) is an idea that refers to the interactions and cohesiveness of a group of people who do not normally work together, often in places they do not normally work, doing work they do not normally do. Convergence theory in the science realm is seen as scientists and other professionals from seemingly unrelated fields work in shared buildings and in common labs to solve the most puzzling problems of the day. Applied to parent engagement in school improvement, convergent training opportunities would engage home and school together in meaningful interactions to find and solve pertinent problems while taking advantage of the unique experiences and expertise of a mixed group of home and school stakeholders.

I found vulnerabilities in all five of the school's improvement planning processes in regard to parent engagement. All five school leaders provided evidence of their understanding of parent engagement in school improvement as numerous communication methods have been put in place to inform or tell parents things. Successful school improvement efforts, however, require more than passing along information. Training opportunities that raise the level of understanding of everyone in the system as to the

school's current reality are required to truly make parents and all within the system part of the solution.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

School organizations are experiencing a shift in culture characterized by more collaborative processes as part of school improvement efforts. The parent's role in these processes has become more significant, as reflected in current legislative mandates and high school accreditation processes in the state of Utah. Each reflects a vision of school improvement planning involving all stakeholders, including parents, working together to analyze student data, identify problem areas, determine a school-wide course of action, and set goals. It is believed that in this way parents can play a meaningful role in decision-making and thus be more fully engaged in school improvement.

School leaders' conceptions of these new roles for parents vary. The purpose of this study was to better understand the concepts of sharing leadership, decision-making, and planning with parents. A school leaders' understanding of these concepts, and the underlying assumptions that form these understandings, are difficult to determine and cannot always be identified through survey processes. The evidence of these conceptions; made more visible through outward behaviors and the operations, organization, and culture of a school; can provide clues to school leader's understandings. Accreditation provides an opportune time to observe these aspects of the school, especially since school leaders traditionally attempt to showcase their school. What school leaders provide as evidence of parent engagement as part of their accreditation self-study and what they

offer as evidence for visiting teams during their accreditation site visit can provide clues to their conceptions of what it means to have parents fully engaged.

All five high schools participating in this study varied in several ways, but regardless of their differences, several findings were common to all. In each school there was a lack of understanding among stakeholders of critical elements of their school's improvement process such as the school's mission, vision, and goals; a misalignment between the school's beliefs and goals; or a lack of understanding of the school's current reality as reflected in student achievement data. Each of the school's leaders seem to share the same "misconceptions," characterized as such due to the stark contrast of these ideas with the ideas articulated in the Expectation Indicators tool that I devised and informed by current legislative mandates, accreditation guidelines, and key professional literature, to describe behaviors and approaches to parent involvement expected of school leaders in the school improvement process.

The need for professional development for school leaders and information regarding involvement for stakeholders was suggested and a review of literature was conducted to determine the most effective way to meet this need. The study project, Teaming Together, was developed based on information gleaned from this review of literature. A description of this project and the review of literature that informed it follows.

Description and Goals

The Project- Teaming Together

A professional development program for school/parent teams, Teaming Together (found in Appendix A), a six segment, conversation-based discussion group, was created and designed based on the assumption that one of the key reasons for the mismatch between parents as fully engaged participants in meaningful decision-making roles in school improvement processes and parent involvement in school improvement processes is due in part to the lack of a process that assists parents and school personnel in developing common understanding and shared meaning about learning. *Teaming Together* uses the tenets of social constructivism and adult learning theories as a theoretical base to provide opportunities for collaborative interaction to create common understandings. Because of these common understandings, shared meanings will develop and become the foundation for full engagement of parents in the school improvement effort due to better understanding.

Purpose of the program. Legislation and researchers share the expectation that all stakeholders will meet, study student learning, and create school improvement and professional development plans together. The purpose of Teaming Together is to assist councils, comprised of stakeholders, representing groups associated with the secondary school, in collaborating to improve student learning while functioning in new roles, with new responsibilities and forging new relationships.

A talking points discussion guide, in the form of a Power-Point, has been designed to be used by any collaborative group of parents, school leaders, and/or educators who are engaged in school improvement efforts to guide discussions among mixed groups around the topic of student learning. This discussion guide can be used flexibly by committees or teams prior to formal school improvement planning efforts or it can be used at the beginning of each school community council meeting, culminating in school improvement and professional development plans. It can be incorporated as part of accreditation focus group norming processes, Parent Teacher Student Association planning meetings, or any other decision-making body involved in school improvement activities in any of the following configurations: (a) six extended learning team sessions, (b) a condensed 3-day learning conference, (c) 12 shorter learning team sessions, or (d) any combination of the above.

These short discussions allow groups to examine current realities and develop common understandings regarding student learning. As parents have to deal with educational jargon along with changes in school operations today (i.e., early-outs, professional learning community weekly planning sessions), an explanation of these more modern changes along with terminology, which holds special meaning to educators, will be shared with parents through this program, just as parents' supposed apathy towards involvement, often cited by school personnel as justification for student failure, will be addressed through opportunities for parents to share their realities with school personnel. More importantly, commonalities in how learning is conceived by both groups

can be explored and a joint reality constructed which may bring the school community closer to full engagement of parents in the school improvement process and better alignment of school leaders' conceptions of full engagement with accreditation process expectations, legislative intentions regarding Community Councils, and best practice research regarding parent involvement.

Goals of the program. While the program can be used flexibly, its main use will be to facilitate the work of engaging all stakeholders equally in the school's ongoing, continuous school improvement process, learning about student learning at their school and education in general, conducting a comprehensive review of the current school improvement and professional development plans, and eventually culminating in the creation of a newly completed plan which should include provisions to improve student learning at all levels of student achievement and particularly align with the student learning goals of the school and district.

Through a process of collaborative learning, representative team members will work together and develop common understandings about key educational ideas and activities. Through acquirement of common understanding, group members will be able to collaborate through a shared set of values and expectations that can lead to shared meaning about student learning data, school processes, and the study of best educational practices. Shared meaning will allow a more focused and synergistic effort at increasing student achievement school-wide.

Program Objectives

1. Facilitate the creation of common understanding and shared meaning amongst all persons participating in the learning group of key educational language and ideas.
2. Ensure support of the vision and goals of the school.
3. Ensure creation or full review of school improvement plan aligned with and in support of vision and goals.
4. Prepare to create, implement and evaluate plans for continuous school improvement.

Key Principles

1. Theoretical ideas underlying this program are constructivism, adult learning theory, school improvement processes, change management and professional development.
2. The work is supported through key readings, conversation and continual support available through key district personnel and possible off-site trainers.
3. The work is based on the four key questions: Who is learning? Who is not learning? What are we doing for those not learning? What are we doing for those that already know it?
4. The collaborative process is based on professional learning community best-practice and research.
5. The key resources are provided within individual modules.

Rationale

The collaborative team is the fundamental building block of successful school improvement and this professional development program as well. In this study, I found that there was a lack of understanding among parents and school personnel as to critical components of each school's improvement plans. Recommendations were made to all schools by their visiting teams to go back and develop such things as belief statements and school-wide goals, with other stakeholders, to ensure everyone's common understanding. The teaming up of school personnel and parents in this program represents a way to go about professional development that differs from most and will lead to deeper understandings about the school's current reality.

The teaming process as presented within these sessions attempts to accomplish the following:

- Create a team of stakeholders who can speak a common language about student learning.
- Create a team of stakeholders willing to make decisions about the "whole" school, not simply the parent's child nor the teacher's student.
- Fully engage parents in the school improvement decision-making process and encourage deeper trust between parent and school leaders.
- Arm a team of stakeholders with the knowledge and tools to accurately assess the school and create student achievement and faculty professional development plans in the most effective and efficient method possible.

This program is conversation-based. For case study schools involved in this study, the school's efforts to communicate with parents, largely through one-way methods, about student learning and other activities were a reflection of the conception of full engagement of parents by school leaders. Recommendations from all five visiting teams and information gathered during the review of literature for this project led to the establishment of two-way, dialogue as the main methodology for this professional development program.

This program allows for parents to work alongside school personnel in the creation of the school improvement plan and other meaningful pursuits. In this study, community councils were not typically involved in the creation of school plans. They functioned more often as approval bodies. The state legislature in Utah recently changed its state law regarding school community councils to try to change this lack of parental engagement in improvement planning. The adjusted law adds procedural requirements to an already existing rule-heavy code. These new requirements required (a) that the council be led by a parent chairperson; (b) added language to ensure fair and commonly timed elections; (c) mandated methods for communicating minutes from community council meetings to the public, and most pertinent to this study and project; and (d) a change in the wording of the council's responsibilities "to develop a school improvement plan" and "to assist in the development and implementation of a staff professional development plan" to "create a school improvement plan" and "to assist in the creation and implementation of a staff professional development plan" (Utah, 2011).

My discussion with the state representative who sponsored the original bill, Bill Wright in summer 2011, revealed that the legislature made deliberate changes to the wording within the law because he believed the word "create" suggested a higher level of parent involvement, even full engagement to make the role more meaningful. Wright also shared that although the legislature established the original law over 10 years previous to the change, in his perception only 50% of principals even recognized it and most used the School Community Council to make token approvals to key school decisions.

There was some doubt expressed by visiting team chairpersons that this wording change in the law would actually make a difference in school leaders' conceptions of parent engagement. This doubt was made stronger with the distribution to school districts and school administrators in May 2011, of a document, from the Utah State Office of Education, explaining the changes in the law. There was no mention of this specific change in wording. The USOE document focused on election rules, community council member selection processes, and requirements for communication with the community.

The numbers of parents on School Community Councils, the methods of selection of such membership, and the reporting activities of the councils were in line with legislators' expectations, but the parents' participation in meaningful decision-making activities on these councils was not evident. This professional development program will allow parents and school personnel to analyze student data together, determine problem areas together, and lead to better understanding of school needs and resultant goals.

A review of literature was conducted to determine an optimal approach for school leaders to help increase awareness and understanding among stakeholders of their school's continuous school improvement processes and to facilitate these processes while nurturing the new roles, responsibilities, and relationships necessary for their implementation. The roles, responsibilities, and relationships of parents and school personnel, especially in regard to parent involvement in school improvement have, in the past, been more distinct, clear, and separate. Changing expectations, however, among experts in the field, the public and the legislators that serve them, and state accreditation leaders have necessitated changing conceptions.

As with all schools, a school leader's conceptions can impact an entire school organization, its operations, and its culture (Devos & Bouckenooghe, 2009). In this multiple-case study, I explored the conceptions of school leaders at five high schools, as to their understandings of parents fully engaged in school improvement processes as self-described in their accreditation self-studies and demonstrated by their school communities during visiting team site visits. A pervasive lack of understanding among stakeholders of basic elements of their schools plans such as its mission, vision, student data, and goals were demonstrated in this course. A lack of understanding among school leaders themselves was evidenced, in some cases, by a misalignment of belief statements and goals, or by the absence of a robust school profile. Each school's final visiting team report, while including multiple commendations, included a recommendation that school leaders go back to the beginning of the process, with their schools, to work on important

but missing pieces of the process to the end that they increase the understanding of the school community to its plan.

School leaders need to increase the understanding of both school and non-school stakeholders of the critical elements of the school's ongoing, school improvement planning process. They must also facilitate and support the changing roles, responsibilities and relationships required of stakeholders for the creation, implementation and evaluation of continuous, school improvement planning. Since understandings are at the heart of these questions, the conceptual framework for this review of literature involves cognitive and socioconstructivism and adult learning theories.

Review of the Literature

The focus of this literature review is on the best practices of professional development and the key learning processes for adults. The review included both an EBSCO search and an ERIC search of the following key word combinations: *professional development*, *effective professional development*, *constructivism*, *adult learning*, *professional learning communities*, *improvement planning*, and *comprehensive school improvement planning*. The research-base included many case studies, survey research, some literature reviews, commissioned governmental reports and professional literature on adult learning, professional development, and improvement planning. The research-base also included descriptions of best practices, types of professional

development, principles of constructivism, and professional learning communities along with adult learning approaches.

This review begins with a discussion of effective professional development methods and activities. This is followed by a description of cognitive socioconstructivism theories including participant interactions, the creation of shared meanings, and the needs of effective collaboration. Adult learning theory is investigated as a key driver of how to manage learning relationships impacting school leaders and parents. Finally, a summary of how each of these impacted the background of the creation of a multisession collaborative project created to facilitate the engagement of parents with school leaders and other stakeholders.

Effective Professional Development

As part of Utah's accreditation process school leaders are expected to provide evidence that the school community has engaged in continuous improvement processes. Deming's (1986) total quality management, a model for organizational effectiveness in business was a precurser to modern continuous improvement processes in schools. The model emphasized small improvements over time and the meaningful involvement of participants through decision-making. Senge (1990) built upon this idea of continuous improvement through the identification of several vital elements of a professional learning organization. Systems thinking, shared vision and team learning were all initial features of Senge's (1990) vision of the professional learning organization. Fullan (1993) followed with his depiction of a learning organization in schools as one with group

reflection and a continuous construction of shared meaning while Kruse, Louis, and Byrk (1994, 1995) included the sharing of group values and collaboration as key activities in a learning organization. The sharing of power by the principal, collective learning of the group and the application of the learning to address students' needs were all found to be critical components in Hord's (1997) research describing effective professional learning organizations. What is similar in all of these depictions of schools as learning organizations is that the organization meets regularly to analyze its practices. Through this analysis, an organization like a school can make improvements.

School organizations engage in professional development activities in order to increase the ability of the school personnel in accomplishing their goals and responsibilities. Guskey (2000) defined professional development as "those processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators" (p. 16). Learning organizations engaging in effective professional development, as described by Guskey, include learning experiences which are continuous and constructivist in nature (National Staff Development Council, 2011). A report from the United States Department of Education Professional Development Team (1994) defined effective professional development further as training opportunities that included a focus on collegial improvement, reflection about best practice, involving collaborative planning and promoting continuous improvement (para. 5).

Wiggins and McTighe (1998) set forth what they felt was needed for deep levels of understanding and skill sets necessary by learning groups to facilitate the

implementation of learnings. Wiggins and McTighe maintained that traditional in-services, conferences and workshops rarely increased the level of understanding among participants because the structure these learning opportunities did not necessarily challenge participants' prior assumptions about learning (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Sparks (2002) discussed these professional development activities as "unfocused, insufficient, and irrelevant" (p. 7) and continued to make a case that while educators have a growing base of knowledge about effective professional development practices, we maintain older non-effective practices in our day-to-day professional development activities in schools. It is by challenging these prior assumptions that leads organizations and participants to create the new and shared learning necessary for continuous improvement (Senge, 1990).

Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1990) identified five optimal professional development formats that each shared a constructivist base. Three of these formats were providing opportunities for personal involvement in the improvement process, providing shared training to participants, and engaging those participants in various inquiry activities. These formats were utilized in the development of the project. Another key provision used in the development of the project was provided by Little et al. (1987), who suggested that collective meaning-making and learning occurs as participants are involved in continuous collaborative reflection that allows for the clarification of the participants' understanding of learning. In addition to Little et al., other researchers

suggested that ongoing reflection and collaboration are needed for sustained learning (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Wood & McQuarrie, 1999).

DuFour and Eaker's (1998) definition of an effective professional learning community included the engagement of participants in a collaborative process that includes teams engaged in collective inquiry through meaningful conversations in an environment of shared learning and facilitated by leaders engaged in sharing leadership.

An effective professional development program should include characteristics of continuous participation by team members in collaborative conversations resulting in deep levels of shared learning that challenges previous assumptions and values (DuFour et al., 2004; Hord, 1997; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004; National Staff Development Council, 2011; Senge, 2000). Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin's (2011) work led them to believe that professional development must involve the sharing of knowledge through collaboration. Finally, while learning as a team and creating a culture of professional learning communities within our schools, Senge (2000) suggested that parents and parent teams should be included into these communities. Senge continued to suggest that the only way full parental relationships could be built would be to "hold conversations…where we openly examine our attitudes about kids (and ourselves) and the influences that put those views in our mind in the first place" (p. 388). This project creates opportunities for participants to continuously engage in shared learning conversations.

Cognitive Socioconstructivism Theories

The tenets of constructivism theories suggest that knowledge cannot be given to someone with the expectation that it be perfectly understood and ready to be applied until it is first connected to something the receiver already knows. The process of learning then is influenced by a person's prior knowledge, experiences and social interactions (Brunner, 1966; Vygotsky, 1978). The implications of these ideas have enormous impact on the operations of the school when its learners include the entire adult population, including parents and other stakeholders, in addition to the student population (Knowles et al., 2005). But, that is the perspective taken in the modern school improvement movement in which everyone is considered a learner and the work of the school is to get better at learning, both individually and collectively in teams, focus groups, and councils (DuFour et al., 2006). It is a cultural change that requires paradigm shifts amongst school leaders charged with leading it.

The most significant characteristic of constructivist theories is probably that of the attention on the learner as an agent acting on new knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). Not only does the learner's prior knowledge, experiences, and social interactions affect learning, so does the learner's beliefs, attitudes and the context of the learning. In their pursuit of meaning and order, everyone makes personal interpretations.

Three early constructivist theorists helped the understanding of learning from a constructivist perspective. Dewey's (1916, 1938) work centered on broadening the intellect through problem solving and critical thinking skills rather than memorization of

facts. From Dewey's perspective, active manipulation of the problem leads to learning because the manipulation includes a process of comparing, contrasting, and analyzing against what the person already understands. The same cognitive tasks are involved as a community of learners constructing knowledge together. From this perspective, the one-way communication methods prevalent at each of the five schools could not be expected to lead to understanding among the parent population. Piaget's well known theories (e.g., Piaget & Inholder, 1971) of cognitive development in children are constructivist in nature as well. Children construct mental maps which help them order their world. Children understand things when they are developmentally ready to understand them at which time they may discard a faulty prior understanding. Bruner (1966) considered the implications of constructivism to teaching as well as learning. Because knowledge is built on knowledge already understood, he considered spiral learning, ideas of readiness, and opportunities for extrapolating learning as in discovery learning important. Experiential and situational learning theories also fit in this paradigm (Lave & Wenger 1991; Stelmach & Preston, 2008).

The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (1999) identified six principles of "constructivist" learning based on it's research into the work of Dewey, Piaget, and Bruner. Three of the principles are particularly pertinent to parent involvement on collaborative teams: (a) Learners bring unique prior knowledge, experience, and beliefs to a learning situation; (b) Learning is internally controlled and

mediated; and (c) Social interaction introduces multiple perspectives through reflection, collaboration, negotiation, and shared meaning.

Applied to school community councils, learning is possible as both parents and teachers bring prior knowledge, experience and beliefs which have been internally mediated, into the school team learning environment where social interaction introduces to them multiple perspectives through reflection, negotiation, and collaborative problem-solving leading to shared meaning. From this perspective, when a school community council member is asked to approve a plan constructed by someone else we can expect that the council member will not understand the plan as well as those who created it.

Just getting parents and school leaders to sit down together in order to engage in the study of school improvement activities, does not ensure that parents will be able to engage fully in the process. Spillane et al. (2002) argued that because "new information is always interpreted in light of what is already understood….without structured opportunities for stakeholders to construct policy meaning and understand its implications for their own behavior, they will interpret policy according to individual values, beliefs and prior experiences" (p 394). Although parents and school personnel can share a common concern about their student's learning at school, without collaborative opportunities to socially construct meaning, each member of a group, team or council will construct its own individual meanings and understandings about whatever topic is being shared. It follows that if schools continue to encourage parents to "rubber stamp" other people's work, the chasm between parents and schools could become wider and

wider as miscommunication due to personal realities could increase and create greater discontent or even disengagement (Macfarlane, 2009).

Interaction

Vygotsky (1978) added to understanding of learning through social activity by proposing that learning involves language. Learning occurs through interaction with other persons as well as ourselves. Twenty years later, Lambert et al. (2002) and Spillane et al. (2002) agreed that new learning connects to previous learning but that this learning occurs more frequently and deeply as learners reflect and discuss with others their learning experiences. Learners add depth and understanding as they share ideas, questions and engage in reciprocal processes of sharing with each other (Lambert et al., 2002).

Shared Experience

The lack of shared experience in the past between parents and school personnel in meaningful ways has made shared meaning unlikely and is why experiences to bring about a shared common language and understanding is so necessary. Shared meaning develops out of common understandings. This would suggest that in order for parents to fully engage in school improvement processes, and school personnel to reciprocate with awareness and understanding of parents' situation, shared learning and experience gained through interaction is necessary.

Vygotsky (1978) also emphasized the cultural medium as an important element impacting this learning. Vygotsky maintained that knowledge is culturally mediated.

Vygotsky also pointed out that artifacts we use to express ourselves are also part of our message. Memos, letters, e-mails, handbooks, provide information which can reinforce current understandings or can lead to changes in understanding depending on our previous experiences and understandings.

Individual cognitive construction and social construction are both closely connected and active at all times. Social constructivists posit that reality is constructed by individuals and social realities by social groups. This new group, the home/school collaborative, must forge its own vision and determine its own mission. Without efforts at developing common understandings that make shared meaning possible there will remain two separate realities – the parents reality and the schools reality and the synergistic power implied in the concept of parent involvement, will continue to be weak. Collaboration as a school improvement movement represents a dramatic change in relationships from earlier school improvement movements in this nation's history in which parent-teacher, teacher-leader, and teacher-student relationships were emphasized. Instead, this cultural shift focuses on home and school fully engaged, as equal contributors, in the school study and reform process. Lambert et al. (2002) found,

> It is the facilitation of the reciprocal processes that enable participants in an educational community to construct meanings toward a shared purpose for teaching and learning. It is a skilled undertaking for which each participant needs to be prepared; it is a shared responsibility. (p. 87)

"Reciprocal processes" according to Lambert et al., "are mutual learning such as listening, questioning, reflecting and facilitating – those relational endeavors that weave a fine fabric of meaning" (p. 45). Social constructivists hold that through these reciprocal processes trust is developed that allows for sharing of memories, perceptions and assumptions that create the foundation for constructing meaning and increasing shared knowledge (Kessler-Sklar & Baker, 2000). Trust then is an important contextual condition for this process. If more than superficial involvement is desired, all parties must participate as equals, fully expecting that their needs will be acknowledged, respected, and met through this process. The importance of mutual trust has only recently begun to be documented (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Payne & Kaba, 2007).

But, obstacles to creating strong, trusting relationships built on the principles of trust and commonalities exist. Parents have feelings of unfamiliarity (Boethel, 2003) and/or bad personal memories of school that can hinder this process (Funkhouser & Gonzales, 1997). School leader's feelings of tension and concern over sharing important decision-making power with parents can make joint school planning activities a daunting endeavor (Gordon & Louis, 2009; Spillane et al., 2002; Stelmach & Preston, 2008).

Collaboration, for school leaders, can be uncomfortable, and even scary. When parents are invited into this collaboration, the fear can escalate as collaboration brings an element of unpredictability to the work and can lead to feelings of a loss of control. Leaders may fear being put on the spot. Group members with power can unravel work that has been in progress at a school for years. Conoley and Conoley (2010) maintained

that the key to good collaboration is the trust members have in those they are working with and that allows for relationship building which can lead to the development of overall trust between professionals and nonprofessionals. Hargreaves and Fullan (2000) concurred that collaborative work can increase feelings of value and trust in team members. Indeed, social trust, is an indicator of the quality of the relationships within an organization, and has been found to be a leading predictor of improved student learning (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Payne & Kaba, 2007). So, collaboration requires trust, but collaboration is also the creator of trust. Deal and Peterson (1999) maintained that

> Different languages, interaction styles, and educational beliefs too often create a sharp divide between professionals working inside schools and parents waiting outside. Building a cohesive school community means shaping a culture that reaches out and touches everyone: students, teachers, staff, administrators, parents and community. Symbolic bonds need to connect across the school's perimeter. They need to incorporate all constituents in a shared effort to both achieve results and to create an institution that produces widespread faith, hope and confidence. Doing both requires the active involvement of everyone. (p 135)

Findings from the current study demonstrated that school leaders spent much time and attention on communication. Much of this communication, however, was one-way communication meant to inform parents of activities at the school and students' progress, yet the public has not been satisfied as evidenced by the latest changes in state law

mandating stricter oversight of parent involvement in school improvement processes. Deal and Peterson (1999) suggested, “parent handbooks, back-to-school nights lunches, principal chats, assemblies, newsletters, school advisory committees, fundraisers, parent centers [were] mechanical, go-through-the-motion initiatives. They are devoid of shared meaning and the organic, communal values that truly bring people together for a shared purpose” (p. 134). These tools do not provide the opportunities for partners to learn together by sharing knowledge and experiences.

Lightfoot (1978) suggested that commonalities could be found between teachers and parents if they had real conversations and that these commonalities could lead to shared meaning, particularly as it addressed student learning. Shared meaning is not a new concept. Several professional learning community advocates have referred to it as a necessary element in collaborative endeavors as it often leads to a shared vision (Dufour et al., 2005; Hord, 1997). Without this shared meaning and the shared vision and purpose it inspires, a superficial togetherness can result.

Collaboration

McDougall and colleagues (2007) found that collaborative group learning was a key principle in the school improvement effort because of the substantive discussion it encourages. The growth, adaptation and change that can accompany good collaborative work may make improvements in student lives (Med, 2010). The importance of this and the opportunity to really make a difference makes it meaningful. Dodd (2002) found through his research that “collaboration is the means by which leaders use their

relationships with others to influence them to work toward a shared goal" (p. 79). School leaders can use collaboration to increase the desire of parents to fully engage in the school improvement planning process.

Most recently, schools have begun to self-identify as collaborative professional learning communities. A professional learning community is an organization that continually improves its capacity to meet its organizational goals. Professional learning communities can be recognized by several key identifiers, including a shared vision and mission, a results orientation, collaborative teams and collective inquiry (Hord, 1997; Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004). Working in teams is an important concept for professional learning communities. Barth (2001) found that teachers experienced personal satisfaction, a reduction in isolation and gained new learnings from their participation on collaborative teams in professional learning communities. DuFour et al. (2006) distinguished a group from a team in the following: a team is "a group of people working independently to achieve a common goal for which members are held mutually accountable" (p 98). DuFour et al. suggested that teams must be collaborative to be successful. They defined collaboration as, "a systematic process in which educators work together interdependently to analyze and to impact their professional practice in order to achieve better results for their students, their team and their school" (p 98). In other words, groups that collaborate together, become teams. If schools and parents are to work together as teams in school improvement processes, there must be collaborative opportunities for the group, in order to become a team.

Adult Learning Theory

From a constructivist view, a school community council and other groups engaged in school improvement work are in the process of learning, so adult learning theory has much to offer. Adult learning theories vary greatly and have been criticized as perhaps not being theories at all, but principles rather. Knowles (1975) is considered the father of adult learning as he was first to define and describe adult learning processes. Knowles maintained adults have certain characteristics, experiences and motivations, which are different from children under the age of 18 that greatly impact their learning (Knowles, 1975). Knowles considered his work with self-directed learning as ways to helping adults learn.

Adult learning theories typically address two situations—the learning of the individual and the change or improvement of an organization. Both apply to the current study. Adult learning theory acknowledges that adults tend to be self-directed due to their independence and autonomy, have more experiences to draw from, can apply learning immediately, are internally motivated, and the adult's readiness is closely related to their assumption of new social roles (Fellenz & Conti, 1989; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Many of the tenets of adult learning theories complement those of constructivism. Fellenz and Conti (1989) held that the adult learner should be "an active participant in a learning activity that is a cooperative venture" (p. 5). Adults require active participation for optimal learning.

A decade later, Donovan et al. (1999) suggested three key elements of adult learning which, if applied to parent engagement in school improvement, might help to develop cohesiveness and establish a culture of collaboration. The first of these is that new material should be relevant to the learner and easily connected to prior experience. The second element is that the adult learner should have the opportunity to apply new knowledge. Third, the adult learner should have the opportunity to self-assess and continually monitor his progress. Smith and Hofer (2003) found that the duration of learning was as important as was active learning and collective participation for effective adult learning and Desimone (2009) proposed a conceptual framework for these three elements that he believed would lead to shared meaning and shared understandings, increasing the probability of sustainability.

Fullan (2005), a noted expert on system sustainability, found that shared meaning is necessary for a culture of continuous improvement as it provides the energy and support needed for constant adaptation and the complex problem-solving required for deep learning throughout an entire system, "in the face of complex challenges that keep arising" (p. 22). This was validated by Forrest (2007), in the 5-year longitudinal study of change in the secondary school in which she found that the resulting ownership which accompanies a shared vision brings about a level of energy that can sustain organizational change efforts over time.

Identity Confusion and Disengagement

In a study of community councils in Canada, Stelmach and Preston (2008) found that parents wrestled with identity confusion in how they were to participate. There was a division of responsibilities between parents and school leadership that precluded the full participation of parents in the process and like the experience of at least one school in this study, a conception of parent members as liaisons with the community instead of full participants in the activities of the school. Schnee and Bose (2010) found that a conception of parents as "guests" may actually lead to disengagement of parents, stemming from forced school-prescribed behaviors and interactions rather than interactions directed by parents for parents—understandable in light of adult learning theories.

Summary

Based on professional development best practices, tenets of socioconstructivism and adult learning, this project focuses on facilitating communication and shared learning experiences between participants in the school improvement process. It has been created to prepare teams of school personnel and the parent community to engage in meaningful, collaborative school improvement planning processes, not to necessarily complete a school improvement plan, as findings from this study suggested a need for authentic communication leading to common understandings which are necessary for effective consensus building.

The conceptual framework for this project is based on both cognitive and socio-constructivist theories. Tenets of these theories support creating training opportunities which allow school and nonschool stakeholders to meet together often, to discuss and reflect, drawing on their prior experiences, knowledge and expertise to work together on meaningful, authentic, and important tasks, such as collaborative problem-solving and collective inquiry focused on the groups' purpose, mission, vision and goals. Tenets of adult learning theory support relevant and active, experiential, transformative, and self-directed experiences as most appropriate for adults.

Findings in the current study showed a high number and a wide variety of communication activities currently being engaged in by schools to inform parents of activities at the school and to inform them of their student's academic progress, but these activities revealed a conception of parents situated in the periphery of schooling. This supports the conception of a parents' role as a receiver of school-directed, one-way communication about an education process which is largely off-limits to them. An analogy for this relationship is the relationships and interactions most people associate with a hospital wherein visitors are allowed in certain circumstances, at certain times, to certain places, to do some very specific things, leaving not much involvement with what actually goes on there, behind the scenes. A sense of mystery and authority has been accepted by these "visitors." But even in the medical world, this mystery and authority is being challenged and most people will find situations very different in hospitals today compared to their experiences with hospitals just a few years ago. People are demanding

to be included more in the medical process for their loved ones and the medical field is encouraging it. The same cultural changes are occurring in schools. Schooling is being challenged by the public and educational researchers are supporting this cultural shift toward more collaborative practices. But many schools continue as they have traditionally, as sites of autonomous decision-making, with closed classroom doors and parents and community members permitted as "guests," "boosters," and "audience members."

But, for education, community expectations are changing, transparency is becoming more necessary. As was the case for some of the schools in this study, schools continue to function as if the key to successful collaboration is for parents to "buy –in" to the school's already developed plans, programs and agendas, but true buy-in requires a level of understanding. This review of literature has considered professional development through cognitive and socio-constructivism and adult learning theories as possible ways people really "buy-in" to paradigm shifting situations.

Next Steps

The project will initially be implemented in Utah on the Wasatch Front as this will allow the researcher to personally gather data during the implementation period. Successful implementation will require a district to select and pilot the project. Optimally, a district with at least four high schools will choose to test the project. This will allow for a more in-depth evaluation. Another option will be to present the project to the Utah State Office of Education for a review and possible adoption. The state office

could then roll out the project to multiple districts and an in-depth study and testing period could commence. The project will need to be published. The cost for publishing the materials for the project will be covered by the researcher for the pilot test site.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

Several cultural shifts currently occurring in secondary schools support this project:

- More flexible scheduling and a variety of instructional formats such as inline schools and charter schools support the idea of new ways to interact with parents.
- Teachers working in less isolation and more small group with a variety of ways of disseminating information throughout the system.
- Faculties and staff are engaged as professional learning communities using using common assessments, and operating from a shared vision.
- Teachers are engaging in continuous study of student learning data to inform decision-making.

Current state law in Utah requiring School Community Councils provides a support and implementation platform for the project. The state's mandate that School Community Councils meet monthly throughout the school year fits very nicely with the schematics and structure of the project. Emphasis in schools throughout the country in establishing Professional Learning Communities provides an ideal background for focusing on collaboration within the School Community Council or decision-making team. The

wording change in state law requiring School Community Councils to assist in the creation of the school improvement plan and the school's professional development plan may provide motivation for schools to experiment with improving and encouraging parental engagement.

Potential Barriers

This project, based on shared communication and sociocognitive theories was created in a format that is new for many stakeholder groups participating in professional development activities. Some barriers may exist in the implementation of this project. These may include

- School communities' motivation for change
- Parents' desires to participate in decision-making activities
- Abilities of school leaders to implement the project

Although many schools in Utah have not made Adequate Yearly Progress, most schools are not considered Title I schools and are therefore not impacted by federal laws requiring a major emphasis on school improvement and change. Secondly, most school districts in Utah are ranked in the top one third of all school districts in the country. While there is a great opportunity to improve student learning, without mandates for change, principals may be hesitant to engage in any type of change process. Principals in the state of Utah have a great deal of autonomy in how they work and how they run their schools. In fact, additional changes in the state law governing School Community Councils are aimed directly at principals. These stipulate increased regulations regarding

the elections of members of the School Community Council and how this group communicates agendas and minutes to more closely align with open meeting stipulations already in place in the state.

I found a mismatch between what the accreditation team was looking to authenticate and what the state of Utah legislators are requiring. I also found a a mismatch between the school self-study claims and the visiting team's reports of parental engagement in the school improvement process. In spite of this misalignment, schools continue to receive "adequate" ratings of performance. If this trend continues it could negatively impact the implementation of this project as few would see the need for it.

Teaming Together requires school leaders and stakeholders to engage together in learning key principles about learning and school processes. The ability to facilitate these conversations while personally learning and trusting others with power in the decision-making process may be difficult for many school administrators. The skill sets for effective facilitation of groups are for many existing educational leaders fairly new and the opportunities to engage in professional development to gain these skills are few.

School leaders may not want parents and other stakeholders engaged in decision-making process at the school. Whether because of personal inadequacies or beliefs that untrained persons cannot or should not be engaging in these decision-making activities, internal feelings and beliefs may cause school leaders to disengage from the process and not fully include themselves and others in the creation of shared meanings necessary for shared work.

Implementation

Implementation will begin in August 2012 with training of the leadership teams (school and stakeholder personnel) at the schools selecting to participate in the pilot. The training will involve a shared learning experience using the core project principles of sharing and collaboration.

The project's pilot will be completed by May 2013. This will provide me the months of May, June and July to review the findings, create a final report for schools leaders and stakeholders and make adjustments within the project to such things as structure and content before the next school year begins. It is an expectation that this will be an ongoing continual learning process as needs at the schools will change naturally over time, and while information shared within school improvement teams may change over time, the core principles of learning together would stay the same.

Roles and Responsibilities

I will have the responsibility for two key activities, introducing and training the initial schools teams engaging in the pilot study and collecting and analyzing data collected during the initial implementation of the project. I will be responsible to analyze the data collected and create a final report to be shared with the participating schools. Following the data analysis, I will review and make adjustments to the project, better aligning the project to the individual school or district needs. The schools and district that engage in the pilot will be responsible to provide the researcher access to meetings,

council members, action planning documents, and student learning data in order for the researcher to complete the evaluation.

School leaders will be responsible to plan meetings and execute the project with their community councils. These leaders will be responsible to use the activities and process as identified in the project, particularly using the languaging activities with shared meaning expectations.

Participants in the learning groups will be expected to participate as fully engaged partners in the process. This includes leading exercises when called upon, sharing the leadership responsibilities of the group, sharing personal and group learnings and misunderstandings, and fully investing knowledge and thoughts into the planning and implementation of the school improvement and professional development plans.

Project Evaluation

The evaluation will be formative and outcomes-based. Outcomes-based evaluations review whether the program or activity being participated in or implemented actually brings about the outcomes desired. The outcomes desired from participation in this project include

1. A common understanding and shared meaning amongst all persons participating in the learning group of key educational jargon and ideas.
2. Vision and goals of the school are supported by all persons participating in the learning group.

3. Creation of school improvement plan aligned with school goals and student learning needs.
4. Implementation of plans for continuous school improvement study.

Understanding whether or not these outcomes are reached by the end of the project is important, it is also important in all improvement activities to do continual evaluations throughout the process to measure full implementation and engagement levels of participants, progress towards final successful outcome, and additional needs and requirements of participants.

By receiving data throughout the process, teams are better able to direct the learning process, make adjustments for issues that may arise through the implementation, and continue on the same path when working. Formative assessments are used to drive and measure learning while the learning is happening. As a School Community Council engages in implementing this project, it is important to know how they are doing during the process, not necessarily at the end of the year. Summative evaluations, while useful, paint a picture of success or failure of an initiative or learning outcome at the conclusion of the process. Like a balance sheet, it shows a picture of what a student or in this case a School Community Council member may have experienced or learned at the conclusion of the project. A formative assessment rather, is like an income statement. It can show learning over a period of time, is not time-bound and when used often, it can show patterns of the learning process throughout the project. As certain indicators are met,

formative assessments can be changed to measure additional indicators that become necessary in order to meet the final outcomes.

Outcomes and Performance Measures

Initial observable indicators of each identified outcome will include

1. Creation of common understanding and shared meaning amongst all persons participating in the learning group of key educational jargon and ideas.
    a. A shared language and understanding of learning processes.
    b. A shared language and understanding of professional learning communities and cultural shifts happening in schools.
    c. A shared language and understanding of formative and summative assessments.
    d. A shared language and understanding of professional development.
2. Ensuring support of the vision and goals of the school.
3. Creation of school improvement plan aligned with school vision, goals, and student learning needs.
    a. A school improvement plan.
    b. A review of test data and student learning needs identified.
    c. Team has reviewed school site-based educational processes.
    d. Team has researched best practices addressing identified gaps.
    e. Team has chosen best practices to address identified gaps.
4. Creation of evaluation plan for continuous school improvement.

a. Created continuous improvement measurement process.

b. Continuous improvement measurement tools exist.

Methods of Measurement

Three types of measurements will be used to evaluate the indicators:

1. Surveys are a method that is used to quickly gather information from many people in a non-hreatening way. Surveys in the form of rubrics will be used consistently throughout the process to measure the implementation levels of the project. These surveys will also measure common learnings and understandings as participants indicate personal definitions and descriptions of school activities and processes. Surveys can be formative and are quickly assessed and information gleaned therein can be shared back quickly to the key participants.
2. Observation is a concrete method for gathering accurate information, particularly about processes and operations of a project. During the pilot cycle, the researcher will observe groups in action. These observations will allow the researcher to quickly and efficiently gather data about the general processes and operations of the project and allow for immediate feedback to working groups and teams allowing for immediate adaptations to events and new understandings.
3. Focus Groups provide the opportunity for deep reflection and learning. Members can share information and experiences together in sharing common successes and complaints. I will lead focus groups in self-evaluating the project and their participation, learning, and engagement therein.

During the initial meeting and training for the project, I will assist the leadership team in creating the rubrics for evaluation. These rubrics will be created as a description of what each level of implementation of the specified outcome might look like. This may include key milestones revealing the combined learning and accomplishments of the team. Observations and focus group work will be centered on the outcomes and will use the rubrics to analyze the collected data about the team.

Implications

Technology is changing the way people interact. With such communication and sharing tools as email, texting, twitter, chat rooms, and social sites like Facebook and Linked, people expect access and involvement in every avenue of their life. Schools have walls, very real and very high walls. The disconnect between the instant information that is available to stakeholders every day in their normal world and the lack of that same instant information from schools can be frustrating for stakeholders today. From home, stakeholders have access to people (authors, politicians), program information, and banks of information about almost any topic. It should be unsurprising and in fact an expectation that there will be new ways for people to interact around schooling.

Schools must create new ways for people to interact with each other and the school. As many parents become more and more frustrated with the educational process and public education, more and more charter and private schools are being created to facilitate the desire to make decisions about their children's education. Along with that,

parents are choosing to homeschool their children in order to have complete access to the child's learning and well-being.

Schools and district leaders must relearn skills and gain the abilities to engage parents in school processes and learning. The project – *Teaming Together*, helps schools and district leaders learn with other stakeholders how to partner together and make decisions. As legislators continue to call for more and better engagement of parents in school improvement processes, the importance of school leaders possessing the tools and abilities to lead these processes becomes more vital.

Conclusion

In addressing the need to provide opportunities for parents and school leaders to engage in collaborative processes around school specific learnings, this project guides stakeholder decision-making groups through a process ending in the creation of common understandings that allow for shared study and the creation of school improvement plans. The project is based on constructivist theories which center on the need to share common knowledge prior to engaging in additional meaning-making experiences. When persons share common understandings of key ideas, terminology, and ideas, then collectively they are better able to make shared decisions. These shared meanings create trust between members of the team and allow for quicker and better decisions based on key school data shared equally amongst the team.

Additional resources must be collected and barriers will need to be overcome in order to implement this project. Included in this project is an outcomes-based evaluation

plan. This plan, through the use of surveys, observations, and group interviews, measures how well the project is understood and implemented within the school or district. Measurement centered around key indicators level-sets the process and adds objectivity to the evaluation.

New technologies and expectations of stakeholders are beginning to drive how relationships between stakeholders are created and maintained in secondary schools. While technological advances and the amount and ease of retrieving data electronically have changed how parents and stakeholders share and communicate. Schools, for the most part, have yet to acknowledge and take advantage of these stakeholder expectations. This project promotes a major change in how schools approach the school improvement process and engage with all stakeholders in the decision –making experience. It enables schools and school leadership to move forward in creating communications and shared learnings for all stakeholders.

Section 4 includes a description of the project's strengths and limitations along with offering other possible causes and recommendations. I discuss my learning process and the potential impact for social change from this study.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

While some of this project's strengths and weaknesses may be readily apparent, many will only emerge upon implementation of the project. The findings, as identified and analyzed, have not included all of the possible interpretations. Alternate solutions and recommendations will be considered in this section. Learnings from the researcher as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer will also be included in this section following a discussion of the project's strengths and limitations. Finally, ideas about the potential impact of this project on social change will be provided along with implications and directions for further research.

Project Strengths

This project follows the commonly accepted idea that professional development is necessary to increase learning in an organization (Conoley & Conoley, 2010; DuFour et al., 2006). The difference and strength of this training program is the interactive shared learning built into the activities in which the group is expected to participate. Through shared learning activities of stakeholders from inside and outside the school, core understandings around key principles can be created and magnified.

Researchers calling for involvement of parents in schools have centered on school-directed and school-centered activities (Epstein, 2008). This project shifts school improvement activities beyond a traditional generic "involvement" to parental engagement in school improvement processes. It facilitates an openness necessary to

meaningful discussion around the current reality of the school in regard to student achievement and facilitates decision-making opportunities among all stakeholder groups. One of the strengths of this project is the shared meaning that can be created about learning and education in general and school practices and educational jargon more specifically.

The project is a tool available for immediate use by leadership teams to facilitate the creation of common understandings and ownership in the educational process. It creates the opportunity for stakeholders to learn together and enables all stakeholders to be valued participants, equally able to share and participate in the planning process at schools. When all participants are able to participate with the same core understandings, opportunities for full participation and engagement occurs. Having common understandings then allows for the accomplishment of a comprehensive school improvement process that includes anxious and timely engagement by all stakeholder groups.

Limitations

The depth of the project cannot address all of the information a group might need to make informed key decisions for the school. The project does not include information about how to how to measure and assess student progress gains, for example. It should, however, lead to a shared understanding about the importance of gain and its continuing assessment. It is a project focused on the development of trust in relationships through the sharing of ideas, experiences, feelings, and perceptions particularly about learning

and education in general leading to shared understandings about schooling and shared meaning around specific operations of the school all leading to more meaningful engagement on the part of stakeholders. There is a time limitation to this project. While schools continue to move forward year after year, parents and stakeholders change continually as students enter and exit the system. Because of the change in leadership team participants, a limitation to any school improvement tool is the need to complete the same activities year after year with a new group of stakeholders. Buy-in of current school leaders is necessary to keep a project like this alive.

The project has not been field-tested or fully implemented and may not completely accomplish its claims, including the facilitation of stakeholder participation in the school improvement process. While the project is based on theories investigated and accepted for generations (Bruner, 1966; Dewey, 1916; Vygotsky, 1978) the project does not reach across all disciplines of activities performed within schools and districts and, therefore, may not create the reach necessary to fully assist any particular school improvement or decision-making committee's activities and requirements.

Alternate Causes and Recommendations

Possible alternative causes of the problem may include (a) school administrators consciously deciding not to allow parents in the conversations and decisions about school improvement activities, (b) parents may not want to be involved in the conversations about school improvement activities, and (c) the randomly chosen grouping of schools may not truly represent the schools in Utah. Alternate recommendations may include (a)

to engage a study group at the state office of education focused on better aligning the self-study and visiting team reporting process, (b) a review process created at the state office of education that reviews the actual participation of parents in the creation of the school improvement plan each year, and (c) the removal of the parental engagement requirement in the creation of the school improvement plan.

School administrators not allowing parents to participate fully. There may exist a conscious effort on the part of school administrators to block parental involvement in the schools, particularly in decision-making activities. Schools continue to engage parents in activities similarly to how they have been engaged for generations. Although extensive research has been completed on the impact parental involvement can have on student learning performance, it does not seem to be fully accepted by school administrators. The entire lack of parental engagement may be a complete lack of trust from the state legislature, to the school administrators, to the parents, and finally to the students.

Parents not wanting to participate in decision-making activities. Another possible definition of the problem could be the parents' lack of desire to participate. While there are tools currently available that suggest activities and strategies for schools to use in inviting or communicating with parents, there is a gap in the availability of tools that assist school and parents in how to fully participate in school improvement decision-making activities. Without support, parents may not feel worthy or prepared to participate fully in decision-making at the school. While a few parents seem to be engaged fully in

the school, there could be a conscious decision on the part of many parents to disengage themselves from the process. Researchers are beginning to better identify the differences between the child rearing and parental engagement of middle-class parents with those of low income parents and the impact those activities have on children and their learning (Lareau, 2001, 2011). Some parents may not feel empowered to fully engage because they may be too busy or do not know feel comfortable in the school environment. Further studies may better clarify this as a possible cause of nonparental engagement in school decision-making activities.

Limitations of the cases. This study's sample may not represent the schools in Utah. In the random selection of schools for this study, the schools chosen may be the outliers of the 150 high schools in Utah. There is a chance that the majority of schools within the state of Utah are engaging parents fully in the school and the leaders conceptualize the full engagement of parents, as suggested in the literature.

In research circles, there has been continual debate on the efficacy of qualitative research and the ability to draw conclusions from qualitative research. While the number of schools in this study was small, the selection process was random and stratified to help ensure the possibility of an objective review. Because of this, the findings can only be centered on these five schools, but they do provide a clear call for further study and research in this area.

The authentic nature of the discussions this project fosters brings unpredictability to the situation. Therefore, it is impossible to say what or how much actual information

about the school and how it operates will be shared with parents. The amount of information, however, is less important than the relationships that will be forged and the pattern of communication that will allow unlimited information sharing in the future.

The volunteer aspect of parent participation in the sessions has the potential to negatively affect the project's ultimate success. In addition, a mechanism for networking to facilitate a continuous flow of information the system would improve the results of the project.

Alternate recommendations. It is an underlying assumption that school leaders desire more meaningful parental engagement but feel powerless to make that happen. It is possible that there are contrasting feelings among school leaders about parent involvement. Administrators may simply not want parents involved in school decision-making. They may feel that parents do not want to be involved in school improvement any more than they are already. In either case, the discussion format of this project and the flexibility of its structure may still provide school leaders a helpful tool to generate thought provoking and fruitful discussion within already existing school improvement activities.

Recommendations for other ways to address the problem include a possible review of the Utah state accreditation process to analyze its alignment to school leader's expectations or even those of lawmakers. Of particular interest would be the alignment between the self-study process, materials for training of that process, and the expectations of visiting teams. A review of professional development offerings for school leaders and

visiting teams as to parental engagement to ensure alignment of expectations is also recommended. Training for community councils could also incorporate information about continuous improvement processes and the parents' role in that process.

The state legislature in Utah has mandated the inclusion of parents in the decision making process of the school through the creation of laws that may prohibit school LandTrust monies from going to schools that do not allow for parental participation in the school improvement process. Although they did not create an internal control mechanism to measure parental engagement levels, they mandated participation of schools and all stakeholders.

In this study, I did not identify or study possible political ramifications of allowing or enabling schools to be in noncompliance of state law and the identified accreditation rubric and yet still receive recommendations for high terms of accreditation. The state visiting team would seem to be a natural internal control group which could be used for measuring compliance to state law and best practices. But if there is a disconnect between schools and visiting teams about what is expected to be reported and discussed on visits, then there will not be a way for visiting teams to act as a control unit.

The state legislature may be encouraged to remove the parental engagement requirement from school improvement planning and decision-making process. As parents may feel fully engaged in the schools already, there may not be a reason to legislate full participation by all stakeholders to pacify a possible small group of parents dissatisfied with their engagement in the process. Although not recommended by educational

literature, continuing parental engagement at current levels with one-way communication methods, attendance at back-to-school nights and sports events, reviewing student learning through midterms grade reports, and online grading programs may be what parents on the whole expect and desire to do.

Scholarship

I have learned that all educators are involved in action research on a daily basis, whether they realize it or not. Even so, action research is not respected by the professional or scholarly community, perhaps due to a lack of use of scholarly terms and methods for reporting active research results. Similar to the lack of shared meaning between parents and schools, due to a lack of common language, there is a difference in what is expected by practitioners and researchers in describing and explaining certain research processes.

To be recognized and acknowledged within the professional or scholarly community, teachers and administrators must learn to use language generally accepted within those communities. I think this may cause hesitancies on the part of educational practitioners to enter into the realm of original research and may be a contributing factor to the dearth of studies completed by practitioners (those actually teaching in the public school systems).

Project Development and Evaluation

I have learned that creating a project that is applicable to groups of persons outside the normal practitioner's range of colleagues and students requires some

consistencies in approach and method. These include a common and extensive literature review, the use of acceptable writing processes, and use of common language. A valid project must be able to stand on its own among the educational community at large.

The educational culture of autonomy allowed and accepted between individual teachers and schools within the same educational community create a possible barrier to full implementation and evaluation of any project created for use within the educational community. Ensuring full participation of a best-practice across teachers and schools within a school district is difficult and rarely implemented with fidelity.

Leadership and Change

Utah introduced the new accreditation process over 10 years ago. The state law requiring school community councils and their use is also over 10 years old. In this study, I found that many of the recommendations having to do with parent engagement in the process have yet to be inculturated into the school system. Change is hard. Even with the addition of new communication methods, time in schools for teacher collaboration and learning, the creation of parent decision making entities, and the push to align all resources in a consistent pursuit of increased student learning, most schools do not have a comprehensive school improvement plan that includes all stakeholder groups in the creation and implementation of that plan. All schools in Utah have a School Community Council but these councils still function primarily as an approval group for the expenditure of LANDtrust funds and not as creators of the LANDtrust plan and few School Community Councils seem to be involved in more than a surface level in the

creation of the school improvement plan or the professional development plan as required by law, and even less with the implementation of these plans. The abilities to communicate, to allow for shared decision making, the ability to guide communities through change without the fear of failure, trust in all stakeholders, a strong enough sense of self to allow for meaningful participation in the creation of plans, and the implementation of those plans along with the ability to create mechanisms that foster common understandings amongst all community stakeholders that allow for engaged discussion and the creation of shared meaning by all groups and persons, including school personnel.

Analysis of Self as Scholar

I am not comfortable in the scholarly community as I am in the "trenches." I am definitely a practitioner. I have a passion to be involved in the learning process. I feel much more comfortable in the action research realm, making decisions, implementing a tool, an idea or a suggestion and reviewing its outcomes and results than I am with the process of formal research. I have learned to appreciate those able to spend time in the creation, collection and analysis of a full research study. While I enjoyed reading the research of others and learning of their findings my mind was racing to how I could see possible solutions play out in the school. Fluency and articulation of the findings of my own research were the most difficult activities for me within the dissertation project.

However, this process required that I learn the necessary skills to participate in active research in the future. While professional writing continues to be a struggle, this

process has allowed me to gain needed confidence in my writing. This improved skill will allow me to engage in conversations with other professionals while feeling like I am an equal participant and can fully engage in the experience.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

I have come to realize that I am a practitioner. I am a person who desires to work in an environment of shared learning and application. I feel at home in a constantly changing environment rich with successes and failures. I am action –oriented. I need to be problem-solving, making decisions and creating opportunities for increasing student learning within a dynamic, community of learners. My strengths lie in the training and coaching of adults and facilitating adjustments to school activities driven by student learning needs.

While continuing to progress as a practitioner, I learned more about the research process and the necessity for research to continually being done. Current research is what allows practitioners to practice their craft. It allows for refinement of processes and the renewal of energies necessary for continued best-practice creation and refinement within the practioners world. These insights also suggest that all practitioners must be able to engage in some level of scholarly research in order to continually create and implement practices that are effective and efficient in a continually changing environment.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

I felt like I had finally come home when I was finally able to begin work on the project. Throughout the process, I continually found myself desiring to move directly to

the development of the project. One of the key learning activities within the process for myself was coming to the understanding that the process of reviewing literature, interviewing key participants, and reviewing other work by practitioners allowed for a much better final project. Higher scholarly expectations for myself improved the project by ensuring it was grounded in best practices and led to the creation of a project which may significantly affect a larger educational community.

The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

There seems to be a gap in scholarly research centered on full parental engagement in school improvement processes (Dom & Verhoeven, 2006; Epstein, 2001; Protheroe, 2010; Sheldon, 2003). The research exists for parental participation in schools and the improvement of student learning; however, the particular study of engagement in school improvement processes and decision-making activities is clearly lacking. Educators seem to struggle creating an environment that facilitates shared meaning between the home and school and parent engagement in the work necessary for school improvement and increased student learning. This project is a guide for school leaders and stakeholder participants implementing a process to create this shared meaning between all participating groups.

School improvement activities and the full engagement of all stakeholders in those activities has been a point of study and emphasis for generations, however, schools in this study had not yet fully engaged parents in the process. This project provides a fresh view of parents and school personnel partnering to learn about each other and

coming to terms with the current reality of the learning situation prior to making decisions about school improvement. It is designed to build trust between stakeholder groups which may currently be missing within the educational community.

Implications and Directions for Future Research

I identified a possible disconnect between what schools are being directed to include in accreditation reviews and what is expected by visiting accreditation teams from the Utah State Office of Education.

The state accreditation process may be evaluated in order to more properly align the communication of work required by the individual schools and reported in the self-study with what is expected and being investigated by the visiting team, particularly in the area of creating a comprehensive process for study and improvement that includes all stakeholder groups.

There is a need to create a grouping of common understanding and language necessary to effectively communicate and create shared meaning between all stakeholder groups involved in the process. Engaging in common learning experiences will allow stakeholders to engage in two-way communication and learn together. These constructed learnings may lead to better and more full engagement of parents in the school decision-making process.

Schools may need to ask more direct questions of parents about their desire to participate in school improvement processes. Currently parent surveys seem to center on the educational experience of their children and the visual indicators of that along with

communication about school activities and communication with teachers about student learning progress.

Not only should this project be used in districts and individual schools each year to facilitate engaging all stakeholders in the school community council process, but the findings should lead to additional research on the Utah state accreditation process. These discoveries may also be used by the Utah State Legislature as it reviews further legislation regarding parental involvement in schools and in schools providing power to parents to fully engage in the decision-making process.

Directions for Future Research

Future research to determine the effectiveness of this project is needed. Research to determine how shared meaning helps in the collaborative work of the school improvement process would also be helpful, as would research to measure the gains in student learning within schools wherein parents fully engage in decision-making and other aspects of school improvement planning to ascertain the effects of this type of engagement on student learning. Another study option may be to survey parents statewide as to their desire to participate in school improvement processes in an attempt to identify roadblocks to parent participation.

Conclusion

The problem central to this study was the difficulty of facilitating full engagement of parents in the school improvement process. I found a need for shared meaning that results from shared experiences between home and the school. The strength of this

project is the opportunity it provides stakeholder groups participating in decision-making and school improvement planning to create this shared meaning around the school's current reality regarding student achievement. Shared meaning allows for the building of trust between stakeholder groups necessary for shared leadership and the consensus building that engages parents in the process.

I explored school leaders' conceptions of parents' engagement at five high schools of varying size and location within the state of Utah. Using a qualitative approach, I gathered data from self-studies and visiting team reports generated from each school's current accreditation process. An iterative process of content and constant comparative data analysis methods proved effective in identifying the significance of particular aspects of each school's operations and culture in regard to parent involvement. I crafted school-based descriptions which highlighted the relationships of these parents with the school personnel, the parents' involvement in leadership, and parents' involvement in school improvement planning processes. The evidence produced by school leaders' self-studies and visiting team reports illuminated school leaders' conceptions and expectations of parents fully engaged in school improvement processes. Of particular import to school functioning and effectiveness, the data suggested school leaders' conceptions and expectations of parental involvement were not aligned with those implied in the state's accreditation process and legal mandates regarding parent engagement. Although school leaders reported great effort in communicating with parents, visiting team members were looking for parental participation in meaningful

decision-making. Factors contributing to this disconnect included ambiguous messages from the state to schools about expectations and a lack of experience among school leaders in sharing decision-making. Data from school leaders did not indicate sufficient preparation for the integral nature of parental involvement called for by the regulating agencies.

To assist school leaders in facilitating an optimal level of parental engagement which would both satisfy legal mandates and effect essential parental engagement, I designed a professional development series for school personnel and parents. The series is designed in such a way that school personnel and parents work as a team and develop shared understandings of education and student learning through discussion-based data inquiry sessions. In working together through this professional development series, school leaders and the parent community can meet their collective responsibility for educating the students in their joint care.

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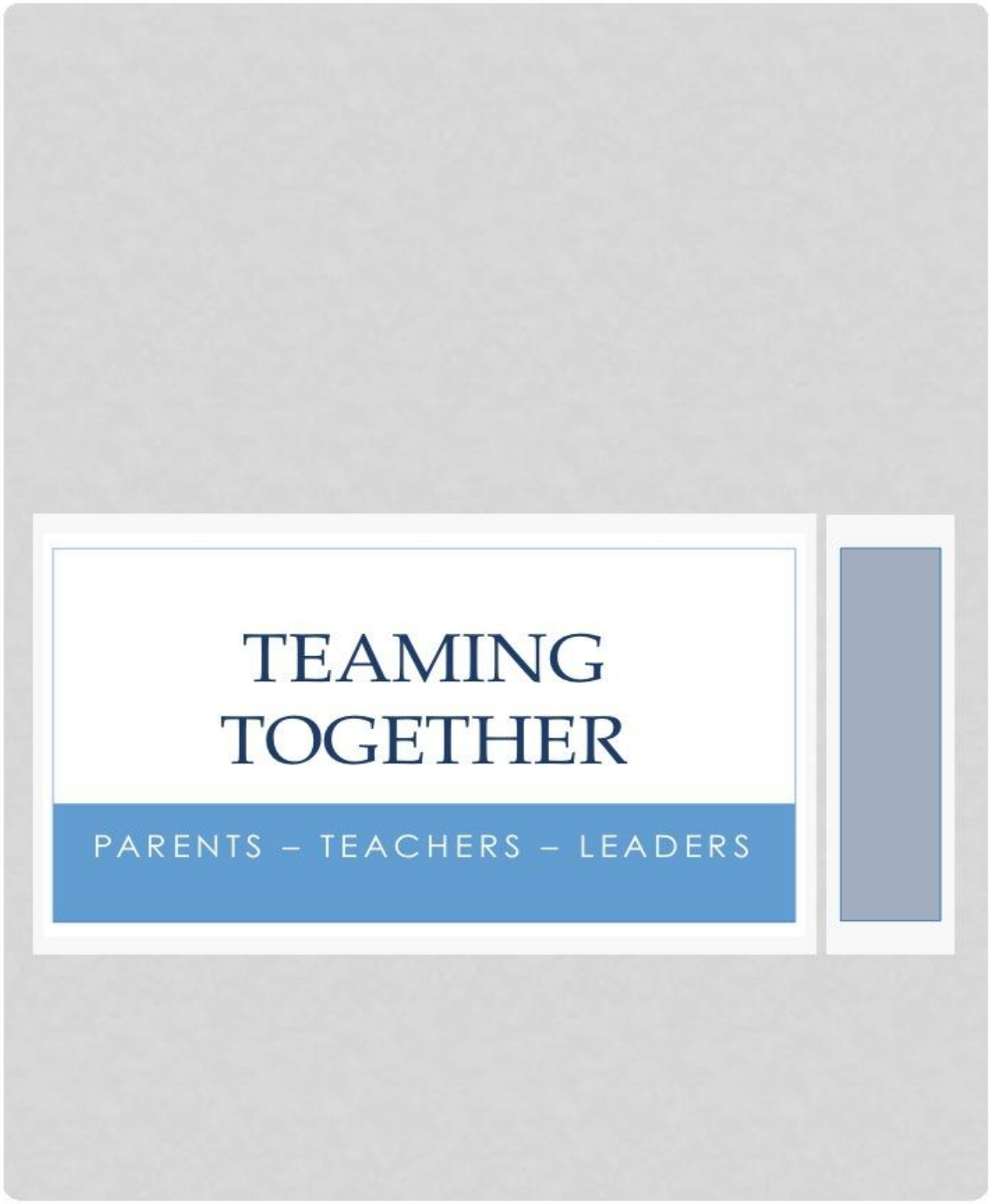
Appendix A

(Project is not intended for publication at this stage)



PURPOSE OF THE PROGRAM

Legislation and current best-practice research include the expectation that parents and school leaders work together to create school improvement and professional development plans.

Laws in several states require parent involvement in the creation, development and implementation of improvement plans in schools. School improvement research findings also point to parent involvement as a positive influence on the process. The school improvement process, however, is complex. School and district needs differ.

The purpose of this program is to assist school personnel in their facilitation of this collaborative work leading to more authentic and meaningful involvement of parents in the school improvement process.

GOALS

The goal of this program is parents fully engaged in the collaborative, ongoing work of school improvement.

The program is designed to facilitate and sustain comprehensive school improvement planning and implementation efforts made by school councils made up of representatives from all stakeholder groups, in particular, parents, teachers and school leaders.

A school council or other mixed group of stakeholders that shares the experience of determining, for themselves, educational goals and objectives while coming to terms with the reality of their own students' achievement toward these goals, comes to share a unique set of values and expectations for student learning that can fuel synergistic activity toward the improvement of student learning in both school and home environments.

This program helps these councils work as teams to study the achievement data of the students in their own schools while exploring their own conceptions of student success. As a team, the council sets goals and makes decisions based on common understandings of student learning and key educational ideas. This team orientation differs from other home/school relationships that have been the focus of school improvement initiatives of the past.

OBJECTIVES

1. Facilitate common understanding and shared meaning of key educational language, practices and ideas amongst all persons participating in the learning group.
2. Ensure support of the school's and district's vision and goals.
3. Create or review school improvement plans that align with school's vision and goals.
4. Create, implement and evaluate plans for continuous school improvement.

KEY PRINCIPLES

1. This program's conceptual framework draws from three theoretical orientations:
   A. constructivism
   B. adult learning theory
   C. change management theories

2. The program entails a collaborative process based on professional learning community and school improvement best practice and research.

3. Four key questions guide the process:
   A. Who is learning?
   B. Who is not learning?
   C. What are we doing for those not learning?
   D. What are we doing for those that already know it?

4. Capacity-building and ongoing district support are essential to ensure sustainability.

5. Key resources are provided within individual modules.

ORGANIZATION OF THE PROGRAM

The program is divided into six structured learning sessions. These sessions follow a collaborative learning process to complete a comprehensive review of the current school improvement and professional development plan with provisions to improve student learning aligned with the student learning goals of the school and district.

The six learning sessions can be used by a community council, a school leadership team, the PTSA council or any other decision-making body involved in school improvement activities in any of the following ways:

A. 6 extended learning team sessions
B. A condensed 3-day learning conference
C. 12 shorter learning team sessions
D. Any combination of the above

FACILITATOR SKILLS

Wellman and Lipton (2004) suggest that "skilled facilitators employ a three layer mental model to guide their actions,

- They anticipate:
  - The emotional state of groups with which they will be working
  - The room arrangements and physical materials required for task success
  - Their own emotional readiness and the internal resources they will need to stay focused and centered
- They monitor:
  - Group member nonverbal and verbal responses
  - Group member compliance with task and process protocols
  - Their own emotional resourcefulness
- They recover:
  - When group members lose emotional resourcefulness
  - When miscommunication and task or process confusion emerges
  - When they lose their own emotional resourcefulness" (p. 13)

As you choose your facilitator(s), carefully select a person(s) who will enact the leadership principles of this program. This process should be very deliberate and thoughtful. The facilitator must be someone who is strong enough to anticipate, monitor and recover – yet be sensitive enough to collaborate to build a coalition of support for plans and actions decided by the group.

BUILDING A COLLABORATIVE CULTURE

The collaborative team is the fundamental building block of successful school improvement and improved student learning. Simply meeting as a team and "collaborating" about the school, the environment, or general student needs and/or behaviors will not lead to improvements in the school. It is what we choose to "collaborate" about and who we choose to "collaborate" with that determines improvements in a school.

The teaming process as presented within these sessions strives to accomplish the following:

1. Create a team of stakeholders who can speak a common language about student learning.
2. Create a team of stakeholders willing to make decisions about the whole school, not simply particular students of interest.
3. Arm a team of stakeholders with the knowledge and tools to accurately assess the school and create student achievement and professional development plans in the most effective and efficient method possible.
4. Fully engage parents in the school improvement decision-making process encouraging deeper trust between parent and school leaders.

Dufour, Dufour, Eaker and Many (2006) distinguish a group from a team: a team is "a group of people working independently to achieve a common goal for which members are held mutually accountable" (p. 98). They also suggest that teams must be collaborative to be successful. Collaboration is defined as, "a systematic process in which educators *[and other stakeholders]* work together interdependently to analyze and to impact their professional practice in order to achieve better results for their students, their team and their school" (p. 98, words in brackets added).

This suggests that within our teams, we must provide opportunities for stakeholders to work independently and interdependently. We must provide opportunity to collaboratively analyze the work of the school and overall student learning.

SESSION 1

Key Terms

Collaboration:
A communication process whereby two or more persons work through an iterative process to meet shared goals. This process is based on shared knowledge and consensus.

Vision:
Describes where an organization wants to be in the future. The school's vision inspires action and provides meaning to all stakeholders involved in the school.

Mission:
Describes why the organization exists. The school's mission describes its purpose and how that purpose will be accomplished.

Student Learning Goals:
A goal is the objective, target or end result that comes from the completion of tasks, activities or programs. A goal steers the organization towards the accomplishment of the mission. School-wide goals should be centered on the improvement of learning for all students.

Objectives:
1. Choose group leadership.
2. Decide on group norms and ground rules.
3. Reach common understanding of the term *learning*.
4. Review relevant school, district or state legislation guiding the decision-making group.

Homework:
Read school's vision, mission and student learning goals.

SESSION 1 CONT.

1. Choosing Group Leadership

Purpose: It is necessary for any collaborative group to select a leader, establish leadership strategies and set expectations for all members. The first step any group must take is the decision of the leader(s) of the group. Traditionally, a school leader or previous group leader takes charge of the first meeting of the group and will lead the group through the process.

Step 1

Existing leader begins the meeting and will ask for volunteers to serve as a leader of the group for the current year.

Step 2

The existing leader conducts an election. This can be done in a manner chosen by the existing leader and may include a hidden paper ballot or simple raising of hands in a public vote. Many states require the leader to be a parent or community representative and not a school teacher or administrator.

Step 3

New leader should have a meeting with key school leaders prior to the next group meeting to clarify role, assignments and responsibilities.

SESSION 1 CONT.

Atmosphere:
A general feeling about the group. It should be positive and focused on student learning. People need to feel secure for open communication.

Norms or rules:
A list of behaviors to which the group members commit that guide and direct interactions between members and creates a positive atmosphere for learning.

Steps:
1. Identify negative behaviors.
2. Create norms (or rules) to avoid these negative behaviors and create a positive atmosphere.
3. Post norms each time the group meets as a reminder of behavior and participation expectations.

Suggestions:
- In order to create an atmosphere of safety and learning, all stakeholders must feel valued as contributors to the group. If certain members of the group do not feel safe or included, the group will not meet its top level of effectiveness.
- Make sure the group works productively each time it meets and acknowledges its common understandings.

2. Creating Group Atmosphere, Norms and Ground Rules

Purpose: Members of the collaborative group typically come from many different backgrounds and experiences. All members of the team share a common desire to improve student learning for various reasons including parenthood, personal employment or for the good of the community.

In order for the collaborative learning team to be effective, the atmosphere of the team must be one of security and learning—an atmosphere where all members of the team feel valued and inspired, and where every conversation and decision is driven by data derived from student learning. A respectful, mutually caring, open and trusting atmosphere allows for the creation of shared meaning, which can lead to better planning and decision-making.

Some of the behaviors that can impede trust and a safe atmosphere include: name-calling and putdowns (which can happen non-verbally when teachers, administrators or parents believe they know more than another or show disdain or disinterest toward another's thoughts and feelings), side conversations, the act of placing blame, continual interruptions, the withholding of information, or the domination of the conversation by a person or group.

In order to avoid these and other destructive behaviors, it is important to create norms or ground rules for the learning group. These should be created by the team and ownership for these norms should be held by all members of the team.

SESSION 1 CONT.

Atmosphere:
A general feeling about the group. It should be positive and focused on student learning. People need to feel secure for open communication.

Norms or rules:
A list of behaviors to which the group members commit that guide and direct interactions between members and creates a positive atmosphere for learning.

Steps:
1. Identify negative behaviors.
2. Create norms (or rules) to avoid these negative behaviors and create a positive atmosphere.
3. Post norms each time the group meets as a reminder of behavior and participation expectations.

The norms or ground rules set by the learning group should address behaviors that facilitate open collaboration and build trust. An example of norms might be: respecting each person's right to his or her beliefs and values; no put-downs of self or other; no side conversations; be open and share concerns and thoughts; use I-statements and avoid making assumptions especially about others in the group.

Step 1
Identify behaviors that may become barriers or would be detrimental to the group. List these and discuss them as a group until common understanding of each is created.

Step 2
Create norms or rules that govern the identified negative behaviors to allow the group to move forward quickly and efficiently. Make sure that the norms or rules of the group are understood by all members and that all members of the group commit to hold each other responsible for following the rules. Create a poster of the norms or rules that can be posted each time the group meets to remind the group of the expected behaviors.

SESSION 1 CONT.

Key Terms

Learning:
The act or experience in which one gains knowledge or skills by instruction or study. It is also when one makes a modification of a behavior or tendency through experience.

Note:
Although a definition should be created by the group, this does not mean the definition or understanding will remain unchanged as the group continues to engage in continuous learning and the decision-making process. As different knowledge is shared within the group during the year, the definition or understanding of any idea or learning may develop or change into a deeper shared meaning of the group.

3. Common Understanding of Learning

The first key term for the group to explore is *learning*. Without a common understanding of *learning*, miscommunication can occur about a myriad of central questions, such as: What constitutes learning? What is learning? How is learning done? What are we supposed to learn? Who is learning?

Teachers trained to facilitate learning in the classroom may have a very different personal definition of what constitutes learning as compared to an administrator who may not have been involved in the classroom setting for many years or a parent who is involved in student learning every day but doesn't consider his or her parenting as facilitating student learning.

Step 1
Give everyone a copy of the worksheet titled Learning. As a group, read through the definitions of learning as listed on the worksheet.

SESSION 1 CONT.

Stages of development in the teaming process:

1. Forming
   At this stage, the participants are finding out about their roles and responsibilities. Groups tend to "fake it" and their behavior is usually polite and guarded.
2. Storming
   Teams naturally will move to this next stage. In this stage, members of the team begin to try to convert others to their ways of thinking. It is important that the facilitator insist during this stage that issues are discussed, not people.
3. Norming
   As members of the team begin to understand each other they begin to look beyond themselves and begin to commit to finding the collective good for the school.
4. Performing
   At this point the team has matured. They are close, flexible and understand each other and are able to share ideas and strategies while respecting others' voices.

Step 2
Take five minutes to allow each person in the group to write their definition of *learning* within three areas: student learning, adult learning and the relationship between teaching and learning.

Step 3
Come back together and as a group share thoughts in regard to each of the three areas. Using a Venn diagram, have a scribe note overlapping ideas and understandings for *teaching* and *learning*.

Step 4
As a group, using the overlapping ideas and understandings, create a common definition of *learning* for the team. This common understanding should include the best efforts by the members of the team to create a product with full consensus.

Step 5
Have each member of the group articulate the meaning in their own words by sharing with the group their understanding. Create a common language to use in describing *learning*. This becomes the common understanding of the term *learning* for the group's work throughout the year.

SESSION 1 CONT.

Notes:
While every group or team goes through the stages listed on the previous slide, it is not a linear process. Very often, teams continue an iterative process of returning to the storming stage and move through the other stages. It is through this iterative process that true growth occurs within the team.

Members of the team should not be discouraged if one stage seems to take longer than the others. Every team goes through these stages and every team worries about its pacing. It is important that the stage is acknowledged with the group so that the group can learn about it together.

4. Review relevant school, district or state legislation guiding the decision-making group.

Many times, decision-making groups that include all stakeholders are held because state legislation or district mandates require them. Along with requiring that they exist, there may be specific responsibilities or requirements that the group is expected to accomplish during their allotted time.

In the first session, the school administrator or person representing the school district should share that information with the group. It is important that the representative ensures that all members of the team understand the expectations and responsibilities of the group.

SESSION 2

Norms or rules:
A list of behaviors to which the group members commit that guide and direct interactions between members and creates a positive atmosphere for learning.

Steps:
1. Identify negative behaviors.
2. Create norms (or rules) to avoid these negative behaviors and create a positive atmosphere.
3. Post norms each time the group meets as a reminder of behavior and participation expectations.

Objectives:
1. Review norms and program objectives.
2. Discuss the school's vision, mission, and goals.
3. Review modern secondary school structure
   A. Schedules (traditional/block/ trimester/modified)
   B. Learning community ideas, structure (late start, early out)
   C. Assessments (formative, summative).

Homework:
Read professional learning community articles. Review collaboration.

SESSION 2 CONT.

Key Terms

Collaboration:
A communication process whereby two or more persons work through an iterative process to meet shared goals. This process is based on shared knowledge and consensus.

Vision:
Describes where an organization wants to be in the future. The school's vision inspires action and provides meaning to all stakeholders involved in the school.

Mission:
Describes why the organization exists. The school's mission describes its purpose and how that purpose will be accomplished.

Student Learning Goals:
A goal is the objective, target or end result that comes from the completion of tasks, activities or programs. A goal steers the organization towards the accomplishment of the mission. School-wide goals should be centered on the improvement of learning for all students.

1. Review norms and program objectives.
Purpose: If there is any period of time between group meetings (e.g. one week, one month) it is necessary to review the norms and guidelines along with the objectives selected by the group. This "remembering" allows for each member to recommit to certain actions, as well as instigate the individual participation required for the group to meet its full potential.

2. Review school's vision, mission and student learning goals. Create a common understanding for the group of the particular school's vision, mission and student learning goals.

Step 1
Read aloud the school's vision. After reading aloud the vision, and while each person is looking at a copy of the vision, each person in the group should fill-out the first part of the *School Direction Worksheet* dealing with the school's vision.

Step 2
Each person shares two or three of his or her key ideas after reviewing the vision. Facilitator should make a master copy of key ideas on another worksheet, placing a mark beside each idea that is shared more than once.

SESSION 2 CONT.

Note:
As the group becomes better at moving through the common understandings process, the process moves more quickly and shared meanings become more readily apparent.

Step 3
Group should discuss the key ideas suggested by the majority of the members and create common understandings of the meanings of each idea. Along with creating a shared meaning, the group should decide what a graduate from its school should look like (should know, be able to do, etc.) and who exemplifies that vision. Scribe should write down what a graduate should look like on a new *School Definition Worksheet*. This will serve as the group's common understanding of the school's vision throughout the group's work during the year.

Step 4
Return to Step 1 and do the same process for the school's mission statement.

Step 5
Return to work completed from Session 1 and review the group's definition of learning.

Step 6
Return to Step 1 and do the same process for the school's student learning goals or desired results for student learning. Pay particular attention to what is expected of student learning in relation to the vision of a graduate from the school created in Step 3.

SESSION 2 CONT.

Key Terms
Traditional Schedule
A 6 or 7 period day broken into equal classroom segments during which students meet with teachers everyday for 1/2 or a full year. *Strengths*: smaller class sizes, daily interaction with teachers. *Weaknesses*: low number of course selections for students; short class times for activity and hands-on classes.

Block Schedule
There are two primary block schedules: AB Block and 4 X 4 Block.
AB Block: A 4 or 5 period day broken into equal classroom segments during which students take 8 or 10 classes at a time and meet with their teachers every other day for 1/2 or a full year. *Strengths*: high number of course selections for students; long periods of time for activity and hands-on courses. *Weaknesses*: large class sizes, meet with teachers every other day.

4X4 Block:
A 4 or 5 period day broken into equal classroom segments during which students take 4 or 5 classes at a time and meet with their teachers everyday for 1/2 a year. *Strengths*: meet with teachers everyday, long class time for activity, students only prepare for 4 or 5 courses at a time. *Weaknesses*: only take class for 1/2 year, long break between successive course (e.g. Algebra to Geometry).

3. Review modern secondary school structures including:

- **A. Schedules (traditional, block, trimester, modified)**
- **B. Learning community professional development structures (late start, early out, embedded collaboration, etc.)**
- **C. Assessments (formative, summative)**

A. Schedules

Most secondary schools function under the three different schedule types: traditional, block or trimester. There are schools however that have created their own schedule or a combination of the above schedules such as the modified block. School schedules should be created to enhance the learning process. While school schedules may have a more black and white definition than other concepts covered thus far, what each schedule type could mean to the student learning in a particular environment can and may be very different. The activities for this section center on creating common understandings of the schedule type currently used in the school and a basic understanding of the strengths and weaknesses other schedule types might provide the school.

SESSION 2 CONT.

Trimester Schedule:
A 5 or 6 period day broken into equal classroom segments during which students take 5 or 6 classes at a time for 60 days or 1/3 of the year, and some classes 120 days or 2/3 of the year. *Strengths*: adds more course selection than traditional schedule; smaller class sizes than block schedule; students meet with teachers everyday. *Weaknesses:* courses do not cover the entire year; lack of coordination with state and national testing dates; less course choice than block schedule.

Modified Block Schedule:
Any type of schedule that combines the elements of the traditional schedule with longer blocks of time during certain periods or days of the week. *Strengths:* allows for students to see teachers most days; provides longer periods of time to all classes for activities. *Weaknesses:* Difficult to schedule and manage classes.

Step 1
Identify the schedule type currently in place at the school. Ask school leaders to discuss how that schedule is implemented and how it impacts teachers, administrators and most importantly students at this particular school. During this introduction, each member fills out *School Schedule Worksheet* with thoughts on the schedule types.

Step 2
As a group, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the current school schedule particularly as it pertains to student learning.

Step 3
As a group, list 3 or 4 strengths and weaknesses noted from the current school schedule. This will describe the group's common understandings of the current situation at the school.

Step 4
As a group, review at least two other school schedules and discuss their strengths and weaknesses as they may pertain to the group's school. This activity may lead to a decision to further the study of school schedules with possibilities for current school.

SESSION 2 CONT.

Key Terms

Professional Development: Any activity participated in by school personnel to increase knowledge or improve skills leading to student learning.

Embedded Professional Development: Any professional development participated in by the school during the contract school day. Most common types are Early-Out and Late-Start.
Early-Out: School ends early one day per week allowing teachers and stakeholders to meet for professional development.
Late-Start: School begins later one day each week or month allowing teachers and stakeholders to meet for professional development.

B. Schedule Embedded Professional Development Structure

Consistent with current research, many schools and school districts are beginning to embed teacher professional development within the school schedule and existing teacher contracts. While this is done through a myriad of different structures allowing for consistent teacher learning time, two of the most common are a late-start and an early-out.

Step 1

As a group, discuss the school's current professional development plan if such a plan exists which impacts the daily schedule. A key school leader should be able to share this structure with the group.

Step 2

As a group, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of this structure including its impact on teachers, students, families, administrators and the community. Fill-out the *Professional Development Structure Worksheet*.

Step 3

List these strengths and weaknesses on a separate *Professional Development Structure Worksheet*. This describes the common understanding of the current professional development structure for the group.

SESSION 2 CONT.

Key Terms

Formative Assessment:
A test or activity that measures the learning or acquisition of knowledge throughout participation in a learning activity or course of study.

Summative Assessment:
A test or activity that measures the learning or acquisition of knowledge at the conclusion of a learning activity or course of study.

C. Assessments

Student assessments are used to measure student learning, either individually or as a group. Assessments paint a picture of what a student or a group of students knows or does not know in any particular subject area. Key indicators of understanding should be built into each assessment used by a teacher or school in clarifying the knowledge and understanding of the student in each area. Most schools use a combination of summative (final) assessments and formative (during) assessments to measure overall student learning. Summative assessments measure student learning following a learning activity and formative assessments provide continual snapshots of the learning happening throughout the learning experience. Each type of assessment has strengths and weaknesses. It is important that the group create a common understanding of the strengths and weaknesses for each type of assessment. This will help to guide the group in decision-making activities about student learning later in the group's work.

Step 1
Together, read the definition of summative and formative assessments.

SESSION 2 CONT.

Notes:

1. The school's vision, mission and goals are the key guiding principles for any student learning decision-making body. A common understanding of their meaning will allow trust to develop as group members are able to use a consistent lens when reviewing school learning activities and their relation to improving student learning.

2. It is vitally important to remember that each type of school schedule has strengths and weaknesses. What may be right for one school, may not be right for another. When engaging in a conversation about time structures, the discussion will be most effective when focused on strengths and weaknesses in terms of student learning and not general group likes and dislikes.

3. All teachers and schools use assessments in measuring student learning. It is important that the group understand how the school and teachers define different assessments, but more importantly, how the school personnel use the information the assessments provide.

Step 2

As a group, discuss the purposes of each type of assessment in regard to how it works to inform teachers, parents and students of student learning gains or gaps.

Step 3

As a group, discuss how each type of assessment may be used to drive future learning gains of students or how it may be used to identify gaps, adjust teaching strategies, and impact learning strategies used by teachers, parents and students.

Step 4

Articulate characteristics and value for each assessment type in regard to the group's school learning goals. Fill-out *Summative and Formative Assessment Worksheet* as a group.

SESSION 3

Objectives:

1. Review norms and program objectives.
2. Review professional learning communities key structures:
    A. Shared vision, mission
    B. Learning teams
    C. Collaboration
    D. Focus on student learning
3. Discuss cultural shifts currently happening in schools:
    A. From a focus on teaching to a focus on learning.
    B. From a culture of isolation in teaching to a culture of collaboration in teacher learning teams.
    C. From leadership strategies of singular management to strategies of shared leadership.

Homework:

Participate in a learning walk. Read articles on summative and formative assessments. Review accreditation information sheets.

SESSION 3 CONT.

Norms or rules:
A list of behaviors to which the group members commit that guide and direct interactions between members and creates a positive atmosphere for learning.

Steps:
1. Identify negative behaviors.
2. Create norms (or rules) to avoid these negative behaviors and create a positive atmosphere.
3. Post norms each time the group meets as a reminder of behavior and participation expectations.

1. Review norms and program objectives.
Purpose: If there is any period of time between group meetings (e.g. one week, one month) it is necessary to review the norms and guidelines along with the objectives selected by the group. This "remembering" allows for each member to recommit to certain actions, as well as instigate the individual participation required for the group to meet its full potential.

SESSION 3 CONT.

Professional Learning Community Considerations

- Supportive Conditions
- Logistical Conditions
  - Time
  - Working Proximity
- Communication Structures
- School Autonomy

2. Professional Learning Communities

A professional learning community is a group of persons committed to continuous improvement. In a professional learning community teams work to meet group goals. In a school, this is a focused approach to school improvement aimed at increasing student learning.

Most professional learning communities in schools display common structural and cultural characteristics. These include such things as:

- common planning time for teachers to work in teams;
- a collaborative effort on the part of school teams to review student learning through common formative assessments and reviewing summative assessment data;
- an atmosphere of shared leadership and shared responsibility by all members of the school community for the learning of all students;
- job-embedded professional development centered on student learning;
- a focus on data and its daily use to make decisions.

SESSION 3 CONT.

Professional Learning Community Considerations

- Supportive Conditions
- Logistical Conditions
  - Time
  - Working Proximity
- Communication Structures
- School Autonomy

Professional learning communities engage in continuous improvement—continuously identifying those who are learning and those who aren't learning and applying best instructional practices to meet the needs of all students.

Activity #1

1. As a group discuss the articles assigned on Professional Learning Communities.
2. Each member of the group should highlight 2-3 key aspects of an effective collaborative school environment.
3. Together, craft a working definition of professional learning community. Include a description of what it would look like, how people would act in it, what they would do, etc.
4. Discuss the current school structure and activities in regards to a professional learning community. Compare current school structures and activities to the group's working definition of professional learning community, and identify ways in which the current state of affairs aligns or does not align with this definition.
5. Discuss how the group might begin to address gaps between how the school community currently functions as a professional learning community and the group's vision for a professional learning community in the future.

SESSION 3 CONT.

Key Terms

Focus on teaching:
Where educators, parents and students view the classroom and learning as a teacher-driven activity and adjustments are made to curriculum and teaching skills or activities.

Focus on learning:
Where educators, parents and students constantly review student learning and make adjustments to teaching based on this student learning.

3. Discuss cultural shifts currently happening in schools:

- **A. From a focus on teaching to a focus on learning.**
- **B. From a culture of isolation in teaching to a culture of collaboration in teacher learning teams.**
- **C. From leadership strategies of singular management to strategies of shared leadership between stakeholder groups.**

(Dufour, Dufour, Eaker & Many, 2006)

A. From a focus on teaching to a focus on learning

In the recent past many educators and parents, teacher incentive and teacher evaluation programs, and school improvement plans relied on a focus on what was being taught and how it was being taught rather what the student was learning as a result of this instruction.

Currently, in many schools, there is a shift in focus from teaching to learning. Teachers, parents and other key stakeholders are focusing their reviews on what the students know or have learned, and are making educational decisions based on this student learning.

SESSION 3 CONT.

Key Terms

Focus on teaching:
Where educators, parents and students view the classroom and learning as a teacher-driven activity and adjustments are made to curriculum and teaching skills or activities.

Focus on learning:
Where educators, parents and students constantly review student learning and make adjustments to teaching based on this student learning.

This key cultural shift requires a new way of thinking about education and student learning. It puts more responsibility on students to be aware of and recognize their learning. It also creates a necessity for teachers to know each student individually and plan accordingly.

Activity #1

1. Take a sheet of paper. Draw a line down the middle of the paper, top to bottom.
2. Label one column "teaching focus" and the other column "learning focus."
3. List all of the things you would expect to find in a classroom where that focus is apparent.
4. Include activities outside of the classroom in which teachers, students and parents may be involved.
5. Beginning with the person in the room whose last name comes latest in the alphabet, share an item from the column titled "teaching focus." Have the recorder list everyone's comments on a flip chart or white board.
6. Next, in reverse order, have each person share an item from the column titled "learning focus."
7. As a group synthesize the items listed. Discuss the results.

SESSION 3 CONT.

Key Terms

Focus on teaching:
Where educators, parents and students view the classroom and learning as a teacher-driven activity and adjustments are made to curriculum and teaching skills or activities.

Focus on learning:
Where educators, parents and students constantly review student learning and make adjustments to teaching based on this student learning.

8. As a group, complete the following statements:
   a. In our school, a classroom with a focus on teaching may look like……
   b. In our school, a classroom with a focus on learning may look like……

B. From a culture of isolation in teaching to a culture of collaboration in learning teams.
From the beginning of formal schooling in America, teachers have practiced their craft in cultures of isolation. Secondary school teachers, in particular, have experienced a long tradition of isolation due to the separation of content into subject areas. Recent efforts have been made to reduce this isolation. Teachers are being asked to participate as members of teams within and beyond their own subject specific departments to work cooperatively and collaboratively toward greater student achievement goals school wide.

Conversations between collaborating teachers is a key tenet of a professional learning community.

SESSION 3 CONT.

Key Terms

Focus on teaching:
Where educators, parents and students view the classroom and learning as a teacher-driven activity and adjustments are made to curriculum and teaching skills or activities.

Focus on learning:
Where educators, parents and students constantly review student learning and make adjustments to teaching based on this student learning.

Activity #2
Follow each of the steps from Activity #1, but on Step #2 label the columns, "Isolation in Teaching" and "Teacher Learning Teams."

On Step #8 complete the following statements as a group:

a. At our school, when our teachers are acting in isolation, their classrooms may look like…; our school functions like….; teachers are involved in….
b. At our school, when teachers are collaborating, our classrooms may look like…; our school functions like….; teachers are involved in…

SESSION 3 CONT.

Key Terms

Leadership:
"Managers administrate; leaders innovate.
Managers maintain; leaders develop.
Managers control; leaders inspire.
Managers have a short-term view; leaders have a long-term view.
Managers ask how and when; leaders ask what and why.
Managers imitate; leaders originate.
Managers tell; leaders ask.
Managers do things right; leaders do right things."
(Bennis & Goldsmith, 1997, p.9)

C. From leadership strategies of autocratic leadership to strategies of shared leadership

For centuries, schools have been managed by autocratic leaders. In fact, for a long period of time (and continued in some places today) the search for a new principal or superintendent was dependent on finding that one great man (or very seldom a woman) who could flip the school or district around to improve student learning. They were experts at following district policy; they took care of the building and safety of students and teachers; and they led by telling people what to do and when to do it.

Leaders as per Bennis and Goldsmith's (1997) definition think and operate differently. They engage all stakeholders in making key decisions regarding student learning in the school. They convene teams and create opportunities for stakeholders to share their ideas, suggestions, concerns and feelings with the administration.

Under most models, the principal maintains responsibility for the school, the student learning process and stakeholder safety and so must make many final decisions. But a leader focused on shared leadership seeks out opportunities to use various stakeholders in continually improving the educational experience for all students.

SESSION 3 CONT.

Key Terms:

Learning Walk
A professional development activity that includes a walk throughout a school by teachers, administrators and stakeholders for the purpose of gathering evidence of targeted efforts at the school to meet certain goals and objectives. The group doing the learning walk provides school leaders with their observational notes which is then used as evidence to create new goals in a continuous improvement cycle.

Activity #3
Follow each of the steps from Activity #1, but on Step #2 label the columns, "Autocratic Leadership" and "Shared Leadership."

On Step #8 complete the following statements as a group:

a. At our school, when leaders manage with an autocratic style, our classrooms look like…; our school functions like….; stakeholders are involved in….
b. At our school, our shared leadership looks like…; classrooms may look like…; our school functions like….; stakeholders are involved in…

Activity #4
Now that you have descriptions of the basic cultural aspects of the school, the group is ready for its first research project.

In the next two weeks, coordinate with the school administration to set up the opportunity to participate in a learning walk through the school. During your learning walk, look for examples of the descriptions the group has created. Discuss with teachers and students the culture at the school in regard to these items. Come prepared to collaboratively create a future vision for the school in these areas.

SESSION 4

Objectives:

1. Review norms and program objectives
2. Review and analyze student learning data
   A. Who is learning?
   B. Who is not learning?
3. Create a school profile:
   A. Review of student learning data
   B. Review of school processes
4. Review current teacher professional development in the district and school:
   A. Job-embedded learning
   B. Continuous learning processes

SESSION 4 CONT.

Norms or rules:
A list of behaviors to which the group members commit that guide and direct interactions between members and creates a positive atmosphere for learning.

Steps:
1. Identify negative behaviors.
2. Create norms (or rules) to avoid these negative behaviors and create a positive atmosphere.
3. Post norms each time the group meets as a reminder of behavior and participation expectations.

1. Review norms and program objectives.
Purpose: If there is any period of time between group meetings (e.g. one week, one month) it is necessary to review the norms and guidelines along with the objectives selected by the group. This "remembering" allows for each member to recommit to certain actions, as well as instigate the individual participation required for the group to meet its full potential.

SESSION 4 CONT.

2. Review and analyze student learning data

A. Who is learning?

B. Who is not learning?

There are many ways to review and analyze student learning data. The facilitator may choose different methods than those included here.

Step 1

Collect student learning data from 3-5 years at the school. Possible data sources may include:

- School & community demographics
- School & grade populations, class size, teacher load
- Standardized test scores, SAT scores, state specific scores, etc.
- Attendance records
- Transience rates
- AP classes and scores, ethnicity participation in advanced courses
- Student, parent, teacher satisfaction surveys
- Suspension, discipline records
- ELL, Special Ed records
- Co-curricular programs & activities

SESSION 4 CONT.

Step 2: Analyze Data

1. Give everyone an opportunity to get familiar with all data gathered about the school.
2. Focus the group on a singular set of data, for example, math AP scores.
3. Systematically go around the room and have each person say what they see in the data that should be noted.
4. Record observations related to the data on chart paper.
5. Keep going around the room encouraging participants to look deeper and for connections with any previously observed data. Individuals should pass if they have nothing new to add.
6. Looking at the chart paper, the group looks for and classifies related observations.
7. Using the same process, have the group respond to: "What else do we need to know in order to improve student learning?"
8. This process continues with other collected data.
9. Eventually, the group discusses the relationships among their observations and begins to identify problems.

(Bernhardt, 1998, p. 157)

SESSION 4 CONT.

Step 3
Using an affinity exercise, begin to classify and categorize these key problems derived from the data. The facilitator guides the group through the following steps. (Prior to the exercise, the facilitator has large papers taped to the wall to create a giant paper whiteboard to use with sticky notes.)

1. Clearly articulate one of the identified problems.
2. Independently, brainstorm why the problem might exist. Write each thought on a separate sticky note and attach each of them to the paper whiteboard.
3. Without talking to one another, move to the wall. The entire group is to moves sticky notes to categorize the issues. Anyone can move any issue at any time to group it with any others.
4. Once the issues are all grouped, break the team into trios assigned to review a certain group of issues and created a title (or concise sentence) that captures the essence for the assigned grouping.

SESSION 4 CONT.

Step 4
Using a force-field analysis, begin to identify the forces maintaining the problem and forces that support its resolution.

1. Write the resolution as an ideal state at the top of the page.
2. As a group, list the titles of the grouped issues from Step 3 and any other data to determine forces that work to maintain the problem in its current state
3. Brainstorm all of the forces that can or currently do work to support its resolution.

Step 5
Prioritize the problems for action.

1. Complete Steps 3 and 4 for each problem identified in Step 2.
2. Write all of the identified problems on chart-sized paper.
3. Discuss with group all problems and combine similar problems.
4. Give each person a marker or stickers and 5-7 votes (depending on how many problems).
5. As a group, each person marks the problems he or she deems most important. Each person can vote for one problem multiple times, but each participant only gets a certain number of total votes.
6. Identify those with the highest number of votes as the most critical to the strategic direction of the school.

SESSION 4 CONT.

3. Create a school profile

- **A. Review of student learning data**
- **B. Review of school processes**

Step 1

Create a profile of the school by combining the student learning data, the problems and issues, and any other pertinent data that came out of the preceding exercises using the *School Profile* worksheets 1 through 4.

Step 2

As a group, compose a narrative based on the compilation that clarifies the current state of the school or district. This writing task should be broken-up into small chunks and assigned to various group members.

Step 3

Compile the sections and send it home with everyone for further study and review prior to the next session. (If doing this in a condensed study session, skip this step.)

SESSION 4 CONT.

4. Review current teacher professional development in the district and school:
   - **A. Job-embedded learning**
   - **B. Continuous learning processes**

Step 1
Have a school or district employee share with the group what professional development activities are currently being participated in at the school or district.

Step 2
Discuss as a group how those activities are conducted, such as the scheduling and participation requirements. Discuss what the school processes are that enable or hinder professional development.

Step 3
Identify as a group what works and what doesn't work in regard to professional learning at the school.

SESSION 5

Objectives:

1. Review norms and program objectives.
2. Identify stakeholders' requirements.
3. Identify value offerings:
   A. Why do or should our constituents choose us?
4. Articulate organizing principles and design criteria for how the school or district will achieve its mission and vision.

Homework:

Bring ideas for creating the school improvement and professional development plan. Make preparations for the future development of these plans.

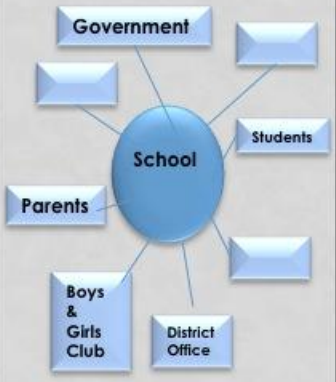
SESSION 5 CONT.

Norms or rules:
A list of behaviors to which the group members commit that guide and direct interactions between members and creates a positive atmosphere for learning.

Steps:
1. Identify negative behaviors.
2. Create norms (or rules) to avoid these negative behaviors and create a positive atmosphere.
3. Post norms each time the group meets as a reminder of behavior and participation expectations.

1. Review norms and program objectives.
Purpose: If there is any period of time between group meetings (e.g. one week, one month) it is necessary to review the norms and guidelines along with the objectives selected by the group. This "remembering" allows for each member to recommit to certain actions, as well as instigate the individual participation required for the group to meet its full potential.

SESSION 5 CONT.



Stake-holder	Specific Requirements & Priorities
Parents	1. Safe haven 2. Students learn 3. Communica-tion about learning 4. Etc.

2. Identify stakeholders' requirements.

As a team, do the following:

1. Draw a circle and label it with the school or district (see example on left).
2. Using a brainstorming technique, generate a list of all parties that influence or place requirements on the school improvement process.
3. Visually represent stakeholders by drawing an arrow toward the organization for each stakeholder group and labeling it (see diagram at the left).
4. Split-up into smaller groups and assign each group the task of creating a chart which lists the expectations and requirements of one stakeholder group for the school improvement process.
5. As a large group, engage in a process to prioritize the requirements and expectations of each stakeholder group.
6. As a large group, identify any other expectations imposed on the school either directly or indirectly beyond those attributed to stakeholder groups (e.g. technology, location).

(Deshler & Smith, 2011)

SESSION 5 CONT.

Tips:

- A stakeholder value proposition is one of the cornerstones of good organization design. Many value offerings are too general in their verbiage to provide design direction. They should be specific and descriptive. A school's design aimed at the wrong target is short-lived.
- A key characteristic of a stakeholder value proposition is that it is created in the words of the stakeholder.
- You can test the value propositions by taking them to the stakeholders by the way of a survey or other means.

3. Identify value offerings:

A. Why do or should our constituents choose us?

As a group, do the following:

1. Describe those groups for whom the school provides services.
   Examples:
   - Families with students attending school
   - Students preparing for college
2. Describe the benefit or value each stakeholder group is seeking from its perspective.
   Examples:
   - I choose (school) because of the great teachers.
   - I choose (school) because the building is new.
3. Prioritize the benefits sought by the stakeholder.
   Examples:
   - A safe learning environment
   - A college-ready student
4. List the values not currently offered by the school community.
   Examples:
   - We do not offer after-school activities.
   - We do not offer college preparation courses.

(Deshler & Smith, 2011)

SESSION 5 CONT.

Operating principles are statements about what is desirable and important. They usually reflect the values of the organization and/or expectations of how people are supposed to behave.

Some examples of operating principles include the following:

- We offer great value (high quality, superior education).
- Our most valuable asset is our teachers.
- Community businesses are our partners.
- Everyone is responsible for student learning.
- Continuous improvement is core to improving student learning.

These principles may be written as expectations. Examples as expectations for leaders:

1. Encourage leaning and the development of continual professional development.
2. Deliver constructive and candid feedback in an effective and respectful manner.
3. Take action to address substandard performance.
4. Create high performing teams.
5. Willingly share knowledge and best practices across the building and district.

4. Articulate operating principles and design criteria for how the school or district will achieve its mission and vision.

Operating principles are statements about what is desirable and important. They usually reflect the values of the organization and/or expectations of how people are supposed to behave.

Design criteria is a subset of operating principles and serves as the measurable "non-negotiables" for implementing school improvement plans.

As a group, do the following:

1. Develop a vision for each stakeholder group. This may be different than the organization's vision, but it should align itself to that vision. This step is done by answering the questions:
   A. What are the needed results from the school or district?
   B. What are the necessary behaviors, feelings and attributes of employees?
   C. How should the design of the school organization impact the stakeholders?

(Deshler & Smith, 2011)

SESSION 5 CONT.

Tips:

- The key to transforming conditions and assumptions into principles is to capture assumptions about cause and effect. For example, let's assume that a leader states that she/he wants the school plan to result in a significant student learning increase. You ask, "We will have a significant student learning increase when what occurs?" She/he may respond by saying, "We will have a significant student learning increase when our teachers use data to drive student learning decisions." Once the key assumptions or cause and effect statements are captured, the next steps can be completed.

- Operating principles are developed and adjusted over years. Design principles may carry over from one design to another, but are more focused on single initiatives.

- Don't wordsmith operating and design principles as a group. Capture concepts and opinions and assign one or two individuals that task of cleaning up operating and design principles.

2. Articulate the conditions and assumptions necessary to achieve the vision. This step is done by answering the question:
   - We will have _____ (the impact, results, behavior, feeling, attribute identified in Step 1) when _____ (what occurs)?
3. Translate the conditions and assumptions into operating principles by restating them as generalities. This process is done for each of the conditions and assumptions from each stakeholder group. The resulting list of principles may be long and will probably need to be combined and reduced.
4. In relation to the operating principles, create design criteria to guide the implementation of the school improvement plan.

   Examples:

   A. Consensus decision-making will be encouraged. Ties will be broken by the principal.
   B. The decision of what a curriculum will include is separate from how it will be taught.

SESSION 6

Norms or rules:
A list of behaviors accepted by the individual group that guide and direct interactions between members and creates the atmosphere for learning desired by the group.

Steps:
1. Identify negative behaviors.
2. Create norms or rules addressing negative behaviors.
3. Post norms each time the group meets as a reminder of behavior and participation expectations.

Objectives:
1. Review norms and program objectives.
2. Review school improvement planning.
3. Review school professional development planning.
4. Discuss the need for change management and individual transition plans as part of school improvement.

SESSION 6 CONT.

Norms or rules:
A list of behaviors to which the group members commit that guide and direct interactions between members and creates a positive atmosphere for learning.

Steps:
1. Identify negative behaviors.
2. Create norms (or rules) to avoid these negative behaviors and create a positive atmosphere.
3. Post norms each time the group meets as a reminder of behavior and participation expectations.

1. Review norms and program objectives.
Purpose: If there is any period of time between group meetings (e.g. one week, one month) it is necessary to review the norms and guidelines along with the objectives selected by the group. This "remembering" allows for each member to recommit to certain actions, as well as instigate the individual participation required for the group to meet its full potential.

SESSION 6 CONT.

Key Concepts according to Lezotte & McKee (2002, p. 34)

"Sustainable change requires that....

- We have a realistic and accurate idea of the system-in-place.
- The mission, core values and core beliefs be reviewed and revised to reflect the current reality of public education: "learning for all."
- New knowledge be brought into the system.
- All relevant stakeholders be involved in the process.
- Structural and procedural changes are consistent with the revised mission, beliefs and values.
- Individuals involved in the process be willing to examine their own mental models and be aware of preconceived notions."

Tips:

- Design continuous improvement into the culture and organization.
- Ensure that those who work in the organization contribute to its renewal. Those who do the work, know it best.
- Leadership sets the example.

2. Review school improvement planning

Lezotte & McKee (2002) describe continuous improvement as "both an attitude and a set of concepts and tools....School improvement is an endless succession of incremental adjustments" (p. 35).

As a group, review and discuss the education continuous improvement model (see next page):

1. Understand the organization's current reality.
2. Analyze the current reality by comparing it with the professional learning community's vision and value offerings generated in Session 5. Identify gaps.
3. Research best practices that align with the operating principles and design criteria articulated in Session 5.
4. Select those practices that will best resolve these gaps.
5. Implement new strategies.

SESSION 6 CONT.

School Improvement Process

1. Understand the current reality.
    A. What works?
    B. What doesn't work?
    C. Who is learning?
    D. Who is not learning?
2. Analyze current reality using vision and value offerings. Identify gaps from current reality.
3. Research best practices that align with operating principles and design criteria. In the design phase, the leadership team has the opportunity to envision a future ideal organization that aligns with developed design criteria and design principles.
4. Choose new strategies or realignment of current activities, organization, activities, etc. This is the real work of the team – making choices and ensuring that these choices will lead to the desired results and are aligned with each other.
5. Implement new strategies or realignments. Develop the implementation and change management plans. Do it.
6. Begin again to review and understand the new reality.

SESSION 6 CONT.

Organizational Change
- Is situational
- Is external
- Can be relatively quick
- Is outcome-focused

Individual Transitions
- Are individual
- Are experiential
- Are psychological
- Are internal
- Are process-based
- Are gradual & slow

Badly planned or implemented change creates painful transitions.

Unmanaged transition makes change less likely to work.

The changes organizations undertake are just the flipside of the transitions individuals must make.

3. Review school professional development planning

Once you have created a school improvement plan, it is important that you identify competencies, skills, attributes, beliefs and culture that will be impacted or changed through the plan.

Step 1
Determine the competencies, skills, and attributes required by the stakeholders to successfully implement the plan.

Step 2
Determine the key processes (how the school functions) that must be changed or adjusted to align with the new plan.

Step 3
Identify programs, technology, processes and information needed to successfully implement the plan.

Step 4
Create a professional development plan for stakeholders that includes the steps necessary to complete any technology or process changes to support the school improvement plan.

(Deshler & Smith, 2011)

SESSION 6 CONT.

Key Terms

Passion:
Refers to creating a compelling need for the change effort to be felt by the stakeholders.

Readiness:
Refers to measuring how prepared the school or district is to move forward with the change initiative.

Mobilize:
Refers to the assignment of roles and expectations of the new organization or improvement plan.

Implementation:
Refers to the actual planning process and implementation of the change initiative.

Tips:
- To increase likelihood of success, organizations and the people in them must be ready for change.
- Support and buy-in come from stakeholder engagement.
- Constant focus on change issues and addressing potential barriers has more impact on an intervention's success than does a one-time, comprehensive change management plan.

4. Discuss the need for a change management and individual transition plans as part of school improvement.

Share with the group the steps for developing a change management plan and stages of individual transition. Discuss how the school community might go about planning and implementing these plans. The group might decide to extend these sessions to develop a change management plan:

Step 1: Create a passion or a case for the change
- Shared vision
- Compelling case for change
- Feel the need

Step 2: Prepare a readiness assessment
- What is the magnitude of the change?
- What is the current understanding across the school or district of the change?
- What is the leadership commitment to the change?
- What are the individual capabilities (tools/skills)?
- What are the school or districts capabilities?
- What is the stakeholder response to the change?
- What are the competing resources & events?

Step 3: Mobilize
- What are the new roles and responsibilities?
- What is the engagement/involvement of stakeholders?
- What are the expectations/consequences?
- What communication needs are required?

SESSION 6 CONT.

Key Terms

Ending:
Refers to the process of finishing one set of work activities, structure, and processes.

Searching:
Refers to the period of time during which stakeholders begin to look for what is going to change in their reality, including what their future may look or feel like.

Engaging:
Refers to the recommitment process of the employee to the new reality.

Tips:
- A brilliant design and improvement plan can fail due to poor change planning and implementation.

Step 4: Implementation
- Planning
- Structure
- Monitoring
- Risk Mitigation
- Celebration

Stages of Individual Transition

Stage 1: Ending
- Dealing with the loss. Each stakeholder will deal with the loss of current processes differently.
- Letting go. It is important to understand that letting go happens different times.
- Saying "good-bye." Learning to say "good-bye" is easier said than done.
- Dealing with disruptions. The school and the district must continue to go on with constant disruptions.

Stage 2: Searching
- In-between time. Many people and processes will be stuck between the current reality and the path forward.
- Uncertainty. All stakeholders will deal with a period of uncertainty in regards to how plans will impact them. This level will be different for different stakeholders and roles.
- Finding support. Stakeholders will rally around each other for support.

Stage 3: Engaging
- Opening a new chapter. Each stakeholder must find how to open a new chapter.
- Renewal . As new ideas and learning happen, a sense of renewal will occur for most people in the school or district.
- Refocusing/recommitting. After the renewal, people will begin to refocus and recommit to the new change.

(Deshler & Smith, 2011)

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Appendix B

Expectation Indicators:

- Participate actively in the creation of plans
- Analysis of school assessment data
- Development of school Land trust budgets
- Develop school improvement plans
- Approve school improvement plans
- Assist in implementing school improvement plans
- Advise school administrators
- Establish meaningful, measurable goals
- Implement research-based programs and processes
- Encourage increased participation of the parents
- Participate fully in the development of school improvement plan
- Participate fully in the development of school land trust plan
- Participate fully in the development of professional development plan
- Report on plans, programs, expenditures for professional development
- School actively engages parents and families as partners in the learning process through a variety of programs, resources and instructional materials
- School builds collaborative networks of support with community members and groups
- Meaningful partnerships are established that extend learning opportunities for students and provide resources to support their achievement
- School establishes a comprehensive consensus-building process that involves representatives of each stakeholder group working together in defining goals
- Study teams composed of representatives of each stakeholder group actively work together to produce executive summaries to assist in developing the school's goals
- Mission statement serves as a call to action for the school's stakeholders
- There is extensive use of effective, collaborative decision making processes that provide significant and meaningful opportunities for stakeholder involvement
- Provides parent education workshops and information about child development and home conditions that support learning
- Suggestions about strategies that parents can use to support student learning at home
- Communicates with families about school programs and student progress
- Encourages families to attend school functions, yearly conferences and school performances
- Different types of partnerships require different sets of knowledge and skills.

- School administrators are responsible for forging a consensus on mission and goals and their underlying values and beliefs that support their work
- School administrators must be able to engage the community in a way that sustains this collaborative work
- Develops ongoing school committee that focuses on family and community partnerships
- Institute structural leadership changes that allow for meaningful involvement in decision making by students, teachers, family members and the community
- Support effective communication with all stakeholder groups
- Formalize participation of student, teachers, family and community members in site-based decision making teams
- Offer families significant opportunities to monitor student progress on a regular bases
- Encourage family and community members to become involved in curriculum and fiscal conversations
- Meet with families on weekends, at home or accommodate work schedules in other ways
- Each high school will establish a site council and accord other meaningful roles in decision making to students, parents and members of the staff
- Ask for volunteers
- Conduct elections
- Ensure that the team is all-inclusive, diverse and a place where everyone is comfortable and willing to participate
- Provide a written mandate for the site council with ground rules and power and accountability
- Provide training on conducting meetings
- Create mechanisms for establishment of teams and bylaws or other guidelines
- Give teams the power to make decisions, not just make recommendations, within parameters agreed upon between principal and team
- Process includes a comprehensive consensus building process with all stakeholders involved
- Leadership at the site extends beyond the principal and administrative team to the staff and important stakeholder groups
- School has gone to great lengths in an effort to involve all stakeholder group in the process
- Including conducting meetings at times which are more convenient for parents and students
- Translating parent an student documents into other languages
- Scheduling student focus groups during the day
- Various stakeholder groups have had an opportunity to play a meaningful role in the process

Appendix C

Protocol for Interviews

These interviews are semi-structured and open-ended. Latitude will be given to researcher to ask questions in a natural order to the conversation and dismiss questions as needed to elicit information in a timely, effective and comprehensive manner.

Interview Guide

Opening Statement

Thank you for participating in this interview. I am going to be asking you a few questions and possibly a couple of follow-up questions. I am looking at parental engagement in the school improvement process. I am using the state accreditation Self-Studies and site visits because that is Utah's process for review of the continuous improvement process. I am going to be asking some questions about your experiences within the both the self-study along with your individual site visits.

The questions will be included in three separate domains: personal experience, personal understood definition of full engagement, general alignment of stakeholder group definitions and activities.

Personal Experience

1. For how long have you been involved in the accreditation visiting team process?
    a. How long have you been a visiting team chair?
2. How many accreditation visits approximately have you participated in?
3. What training did you receive prior to becoming a chairperson?

Definition of Full Engagement

1. How would you define full parental engagement in the school improvement process?
2. What would you accept as evidence of or what would you expect to see and experience during the site visit of full parental engagement?
3. In your experience, what are you finding in schools as you visit?
4. What evidence are you finding within the Self-Study reports?
5. In particular to (actual school) what did you find in regards to parental engagement?

Alignment of Stakeholder Group Definitions and Activities

1. How are schools encouraging parental engagement in the school improvement process?
    a. How are parents participating in the school improvement process?
2. How does that participation align with the state's expectations of parental engagement?
3. How do you think schools are defining full parental engagement in the school improvement process?
4. How did (school) define parental engagement?
5. On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate the alignment between the state's expectations for parental engagement and (school)?
6. How would you describe the congruency between what you expected to find as of your training, experience and (school's) self-study report and what you actually found in regards to parental engagement in the process?
7. How accurate do you feel most of the self-study reports are?
    a. How do you know that?
8. How would you rate the adequacy of your training in regards to the state's expectations of parental engagement?
9. How would you rate the adequacy of the school's training for engaging parents fully in the school improvement process?
10. The wording in state law for community councils just changed from parents helping to "develop" school improvement plans to "creating" school improvement plans. How do you think this may impact schools and the school improvement process?
    a. How might this impact the accreditation process?
11. What suggestions might you have to improve the school improvement process?

Curriculum Vitae

Michael Dennis Smith II

Degrees

2011 Ed.D. Administrative Leadership for Teaching and Learning
"Parent Engagement in School Improvement Processes: High School Perceptions"
Walden University, Minnesota

2006 Masters of Education – Educational Leadership
Leadership Preparation Program, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah

1996 Bachelor of Arts -- Education
Southern Utah University, Cedar City, Utah

Educator Experience

2009-2011 Educator – Olympus High School
Leadership Team Member
Chair – Accreditation Team
Head Football Coach
Sports Marketing, Leadership Principles (concurrent UVU)
Member state accreditation visiting teams

2006-2009 Senior Assistant Athletic Director – Southern Virginia University
Compliance Officer – Official Representation with NAIA
Athletics/Academic Liaison – Working with Provost
Facilities Director – controlled and maintained facilities for 17 intercollegiate sports teams and on –campus student athletic participation including budget and all employees
Recruiting Coordinator – facilitated all recruiting for 17 teams and 360 athletes
Retention Coordinator – All student-athlete academic registrations - study hall

2005-2006 Administrative Intern – Matheson Junior High School, Lone Peak Elementary School, Jordan High School
Leadership Preparation Program – Brigham Young University
Co-Chairman – Jordan School District High School Progress Team Committee
Responsible for all high school reform in Jordan School District
Member state accreditation visiting teams

2000-2005 Educator – Copper Hills High School

- Japanese 1,2,3, Physical Education, Marketing
- Head Football Coach, Assistant Girls Basketball Coach, Assistant Track Coach, Assistant Softball Coach, Assistant Baseball Coach, DECA Club Advisor
- Chairman of School Improvement Committee
- Head of Accreditation Committee – Received score of 6-clear
- Created Smaller Learning Community Plan and received $400,000 Smaller Learning Community Federal Grant
- Member Jordan School District Smaller Learning Community Committee

- Member state accreditation visiting teams

1996-2000	Educator – Dixie High School • Japanese 1,2,3, Physical Education, Marketing, DECA Club Advisor, Letterman's Club Advisor • Head Football Coach, Head Wrestling Coach, Assistant Girls Basketball Coach • Won 3A State Football Championship 1998, 3 State Champion Wrestlers

Leadership Experience

2009 – 2011	Chair school leadership accreditation team – Olympus High School
2006 – 2009	Senior Assistant Athletic Director – Compliance Director SVU - NAIA
2006 – 2009	SVU Athletics/Academic Liaison
2005 – 2006	Co-Chairman – Jordan School District High School Progress Team Committee
2001 – 2005	Chairman – Comprehensive School Improvement Committee – Copper Hills
2002 – 2005	Member School Community Council – Copper Hills High School
2001 – 2005	Chairman School Community Council – Fox Hills Elementary
2005 – 2006	PTA President – Fox Hills Elementary School
2005 – 2006	Member School Community Council – Fox Hills Elementary
2009 – 2010	Head Football Coach – Olympus High School
2007 – 2009	Head Football Coach – Southern Virginia University
2008 – 2009	Head Baseball Coach – Southern Virginia University
1994 – 1996	Head Wrestling Coach – Dixie High School
1997 – 2000	Head Football Coach – Dixie High School
2000 – 2005	Head Football Coach – Copper Hills High School
1994 – 2001	Assistant Chairman – 1A, 2A, 3A State Wrestling Tournament at Southern Utah University

Professional Activities

Spring 2000	Presentation to Utah Football Coaches Association
Fall 2003	Presentation Jordan School District Board of Education
2001 – 2006	Member Jordan School District Smaller Learning Community Committee
2005 – 2006	Chairman of Jordan School District's High School Progress Team
2003 – 2006	Member of State Accreditation Visiting Teams
Summer 2004	Attend Professional Learning Community Conference – Las Vegas
Fall 2004	District Representative Federal Smaller Learning Community Conference – Washington D.C.
Spring 2005	Professional Learning Community Summit – Arizona
Spring 2005	Chaired Smaller Learning Community Team at San Francisco National Meetings
2001 – 2005	Member District Smaller Learning Community Committee
2006-Present	Member National Football Coaches Association
2002-Present	Member Utah State Visiting Accreditation Teams