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THE IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP AND CULTURE ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT:

A CASE STUDY OF A SUCCESSFUL RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

by

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Bachelor of Science
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1984

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

**Doctor of Education Degree in Executive Educational Leadership
Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education**

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ABSTRACT

**The Impact of Leadership and Culture on Student Achievement: A Case Study of a
Successful Rural School District**
by

Donald Jay Clark

Dr. Patti L. Chance, Examination Committee Chair
Associate Professor of Educational Leadership
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

The purposes of this study were to (a) identify how leadership in a successful

rural school districts has helped raise student achievement levels beyond those of

comparable school districts as measured by state and federal mandated test scores, (b)

investigate the district leadership that aligns with identified effective practices, and (c)

investigate leadership, culture and the resultant student success. Three research questions

guided the study:

1. What are the factors in the academic and extra-curricular programs that support a

   rural school district which has exceeded academic expectations?

2. What are the factors in leadership practices that support a rural school district

   which has exceeded academic expectations?

3. What are contextual cultural factors that support a rural school district which has

   exceeded academic expectations?

A qualitative case study method was employed, with data collected from interviews,

formal and informal observations, surveys and questionnaires, and artifacts. The data

were triangulated enabling the researcher to capture and explore the intricate details of the phenomena.

The study focused on a K–12 rural school district located in a Western State. The district was selected for making consistent progress towards its Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) growth target consistently over a six year period.

Findings from this study indicated the use of data driven decisions to select specific curricular programs across all schools led to outstanding academic improvements. Further, the Superintendent acting as a visionary leader inspired the district's stakeholders to share their academic expectations and begin the process of implementing stakeholders' goals. Finally, the cultural shift, led by the Superintendent, occurred after veteran staff and community members began to introduce new staff to their established expectations.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my family. My wife Erika, my sons Jay, Cody, and Matthew have had to endure unbelievable turmoil in order for me to accomplish this educational goal. I love all of you and am blessed to have your support.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview of the Study

Effective school leadership demands vision. Vision stems from an individual's

knowledge base and innate intuition. Thus, the ability to blend the science of leadership

with the art of leadership determines the effectiveness of a school leader. The importance

of school leadership cannot be underestimated (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Effective

high-performing schools require the presence of visionary leadership. A school leader

that expects high student achievement through the instruction of highly effective teachers

must be able to determine the exact culture and academic needs of their school or district.

Creating a vision of what is required and how to achieve that vision is the measure of an

effective leader (Chance, 1992b).

Individual leadership in rural schools and rural districts is even more acutely

important than in urban schools and urban districts. In rural schools and districts the

leadership often times is consolidated among very few individuals, therefore leaders often

must take-on multiple roles. An effective leader in a rural school or district can

dramatically effect student achievement and the culture of their workplace (Barley &

Beesley, 2007).

In the past 30 years the American public, as well as government legislators, have been

very vocal regarding the myriad of reports on low student achievement in the United

States. The National Assessment of Education Pregress (NAEP), No Child Left Behind (NCLB), along with other standardized assessments, have produced multiple national report cards that indicate American students generally perform in the bottom quartile on international comparisons of student achievement (Odden, 1995). In response to public sentiment, much of the recent literature regarding high performing schools claims that in order for students to meet the challenges of the changing world, more students than ever before need to be educated at higher levels so they can compete successfully in the increasingly technical job market, participate in our democratic system, develop strong moral and ethical values, and reach their individual potential (Agee, 1992). Gerstner, Semerad and Doyle (1994) claim that job-skill requirements have escalated steadily while techniques, curricula, and performance have not changed much since World War II. In order to compete more effectively with the global economy, Magaziner and Clinton (1992) argued that, "we must mobilize our most vital asset, the skills of our people – not just the skills of the 30 percent who will graduate with baccalaureate degrees from colleges, but those of the frontline workers" (p.11).

There is much documentation on schools where student achievement is performing at or above statewide targets; however, much of this literature has been focused on suburban, homogeneous, high socioeconomic locales. Additionally, although students in many rural schools perform at high levels, data from the 1998 and 2000 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) mathematics, reading, and writing exams indicate that students at the fourth-, eighth-, and 12th-grade levels in rural schools perform less well than students in suburban schools, although better than the average student in a central city school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). According to

Imazeki & Reschovsky (2003) these national data hide a great deal of variation among the states, including the fact that student performance in rural schools in a number of Southern states is exceptionally weak.

They further stated, for many rural districts, a central issue is that they will have to spend substantial amounts of money per student in order to meet state and/or federal student performance standards. If we assume that state-imposed standards define what has, in the language of the courts, been called an "adequate" education, we can refer to the amount of money necessary to achieve educational adequacy as the "cost" of education (Imazeki & Reschovsky, 2003).

The Rural School and Community Trust, a nonprofit organization devoted to improving schools and communities together, has identified 10 states as having rural situations that require urgent attention (Williams, 2003). The primary area of attention that needs to be improved in these 10 rural states is in the high percentages of core curriculum classes and students in rural settings that have teachers without a major or certification in the subject they teach (Williams). The percentage of classes taught by such teachers in high-poverty schools (34 percent) is nearly double that of low-poverty schools (19 percent). The 10 highest-priority rural states follow a similar trend, with Kentucky and Louisiana reporting that more than one-half of secondary classes in high-poverty schools have teachers with no major or minor in the subjects that they teach (Educational Watch, 2003a; 2003b). Hiring and retaining qualified teachers in rural schools will add to the overall cost of operating quality rural schools.

Teacher quality has a powerful impact on student achievement, so it should come as no surprise that wide gaps persist between the test scores of the privileged and those of

the not so privileged, especially in our 10 high-priority states (Education Watch, 2002).

Children of color and poverty, who most often live in geographic areas without the resources to supplement their educational experiences, disproportionally have the weakest, least experienced, and least qualified teachers (Williams, 2003).

According to National Education Association President, affluent suburban school districts already insist on the most stringent standards of teacher quality. It is inner-city and rural-schools hard hit by the teacher shortage-that will have to resort to hiring teachers with watered-down credentials. This will simply perpetuate second-class system that exists today. And it will betray the promise to "leave no child behind" (Weaver, 2002, p. 1).

Although the outlook of many rural schools appears dismal, there are some notable schools in rural America where success is an everyday part of life.

The federal government responded to the growing opposition to unequal educational opportunities for disadvantaged children by enacting the Elementary and Secondary Educational Act (ESEA) in 1965, which allocated one billion dollars to provide children from disadvantaged backgrounds with extra educational services (Odden, 1995). Other federal policies and civil rights legislation have taken form since the 1970's to ensure all disadvantaged and disabled children would have equal access to high-quality schooling designed to meet their individual needs. Examples include attention to the limited English population through XII, P.L. 94-142 which focused on students with special needs, and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which made discrimination of access to school services illegal. Soon thereafter, individual states followed the federal government's lead in designing programs to meet the needs of the economically

disadvantaged population. Given the current context of public education in the United States, there is little doubt that the public eye is keenly focused on education leaders to provide an answer to this situation (Bennet, 2002). In fact, data exist that directly relates leadership to learning outcomes (Krug, 1993).

Growing evidence suggests that instructional leadership activities are clearly associated with a variety of positive school processes and outcomes such as the overall effectiveness of the school, positive school climate and increased student performance (Murphy, 1988). While there is ample literature highlighting schools that are successful, and research that identifies effective leadership strategies, the purpose of this study is to identify how leadership in successful rural school districts has helped consistently raise student achievement levels beyond those of comparable school districts as measured by state and federal mandated test scores. Producing these new and higher levels of achievement will require educators to look more closely at the school program, leadership configuration and organizational culture to better understand the process of change and influence successful outcomes in public school districts.

Recent enactments of state and federal accountability legislation and legal challenges to the constitutionality of state funding systems, specifically for rural schools, have brought about positive and negative results. Traditionally, rural school districts have been allowed to operate with little or no state or federal oversight. This is no longer the case. High stakes testing and accountability have brought about severe examination of all aspects of rural schools by state and federal agencies. This examination has brought about additional opportunities for funding. In particular, rural school districts have benefited from recent court decisions like, The Kentucky decision, *Rose v. Council for*

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Better Education, Inc. (1989). This case helped bring about a shift from equity to equity and adequacy (Ladd, Chalk, & Hansen, 1999). In contrast to equal treatment under equity, the goal of adequate funding is to ensure that state school finance programs provide the funds needed to ensure that all students have access to the programs and services needed to meet state accountability standards (Jordan & Jordan, 2004). Imazeki and Rechovsky (2003) and Mathis (2003) have emphasized the importance of conducting comprehensive research studies to determine the level of funding required to provide equivalent programs and services in all schools in the state.

In a study of school size, school climate, and student performance, Cotton (1996) found that a variety of researchers had concluded that "small schools produce equal or superior achievement for students in general; the effects of small schools on the achievement of ethnic minority students and students on low socioeconomic status are the most positive of all" (p. 5).

This era of high-stakes assessment and associated accountability has changed the current context and culture of public schools. While there is no single agreed upon definition of culture, Deal and Peterson (1990) conceptualized it as the "deep patterns of values, beliefs, and traditions that have formed over the course of [the school's] history" (p. 3-4). A school's culture has been identified as a critical component to developing student achievement.

Changes in American society and society's expectations of public education have added significant new pressures on the instructional leader. Beyond those previously mentioned, other pressures include inadequate funding, rising criticism of public education, difficulty interpreting compliance with federal and state initiative, and

growing social pressures. The pressure of increased student achievement and school accountability requires a fresh look at school leadership, where most of the burden of school success is placed (Bottom & O'Neill, 2001).

Researchers have struggled with gaining a clear understanding of what makes certain school leaders, more specifically superintendents, more effective than others. There are a variety of theorized models that identify the key elements in effective instructional leadership. One such framework developed by Murphy and Louis (1994) focused on four dimensions: development of mission and goals, managing the education production function, promoting an academic climate, and developing a supportive work environment.

The Statement of the Problem

From the research, much is known about student achievement, standards-based curriculum, high-stakes testing and accountability, effective schools and districts, and good school leadership. Researchers have identified high achieving schools and districts across the nation and have produced an incredible amount of literature on the factors associated with their success. What has had limited examination is the impact district leaders have on improved student achievement in school districts, especially rural school districts, that have defied publicly held low expectations for their student populations.

Purpose of the Study

The purposes of this study are to (a) identify how leadership in successful rural school district has helped raise student achievement levels beyond those of comparable school

districts as measured by state and federal mandated test scores, (b) investigate the district leadership that aligns with identified effective practices, and (c) investigate leadership, culture, and the resultant student success.

Research Questions

The following research questions serve as the basis for the case study's data collection, analysis and discussion of the data:

1.   What are the factors in the academic and extra-curricular programs that support a rural school district which has exceeded academic expectations?

2.   What are the factors in leadership practices that support a rural school district which has exceeded academic expectations?

3.   What are contextual cultural factors that support a rural school district which has exceeded academic expectations?

Summary of Methodology

A qualitative case study approach was used to identify the factors that have enabled the selected school district to exceed its student achievement expectations. According to Gall, Borg & Gall (1996) case study methodology offers flexibility in design and brings to life a phenomenon that is of interest to the researcher. Using a qualitative design approach versus a quantitative design allows for interaction between the researcher and the subject and data collection through the use of observation, interview, and review and analysis of relevant literature and supporting documentation.

Limitations

The data collection for this study was conducted during a three month period of time at an identified rural public K-12th grade school district in a low socioeconomic region in the Western United States. Therefore, results of this study may not be applicable to private, charter, urban or suburban schools. As stated by Creswell (2007, p. 246-247), "As a general rule, qualitative researchers are reluctant to generalize from one case to another because the contexts of cases differ." The investigation was subject to the qualitative case study approach. A final limitation concerned the researcher's subjectivity in terms of observations, interviews, and documentation analysis. Because the researcher is a rural school district administrator and has been an educator in rural school districts for over 20 years there may have been some unintentional biases in his observations and interpretations of data.

Delimitations

The design of this study was qualitative in nature and was limited to one rural school district in the Western Region of the United States that demonstrated student academic achievement growth over a six year period as measured by State and Federal mandated test scores. This study focused solely on the stories and examples of leadership recognized as having an impact on student achievement and school culture. Qualitative case study research is not generalizeable; however, the consumers of this research may find that the findings have applications to other contexts (Creswell, 2005).

Assumptions

The author assumed the data available from the state's Department of Education was accurate and valid. Further, it was presumed that the data and information provided to the researcher by the schools and district was accurate and up-to-date.

Significance of this Study

The study has identified unique rural school district cultural components and programs that promote exceptional student achievement. Further, there was opportunity to compare the rural context with similar studies conducted in urban and suburban schools, which may be enlightening regarding unique characteristics and circumstances of rural school districts.

Definitions

Culture: "The culture of a group can now be defined as a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems." (Schein, 2004, p. 17)

Rural: To define rural, the researcher used the urban-centric codes developed by the U.S. Census Bureau. These codes are found in the REL Southwest (2007) report. Code 32 states, *"Town, distant:* Territory inside an urban cluster that is 10 miles and less than or equal to 35 miles from an urbanized area." (p. 7) Code 33 states, *"Town, remote:*

Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 35 miles from an urbanized area." (p. 7) Code 41 states, *"Rural, fringe:* Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area as well as a territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster." (p. 7) Code 42 states, *"Rural, distant:* Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area as well as a territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster." (p. 7) Code 43 states, *"Rural, remote:* Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 mile from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster." (p. 7)

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

High performing school districts, urban, suburban and rural, produce students equipped to function successfully in a rapidly changing society. Much of the recent literature regarding high performing school districts maintain that in order for students to meet the challenges of the changing world, more students than ever need to be educated at higher levels so that they can compete successfully in the increasingly technical job market, participate in our democratic system, develop strong moral and ethical values and reach their individual potential (Agee, 1992). To that end, according to Senge (1990) some of the most exciting discoveries about teaching and learning have occurred in the last 15 years. Therefore, reassessing the culture of a school and the importance of continual, embedded professional development is key for long-term success in today's schools (Blankstein, 2004).

The current movement in educational practice is away from basic skills education and toward higher level thinking curriculum in order to prepare students for the high performance job market (Fennimore & Tinzman, 1990). A number of futurists suggest that because of the nature of future society, students and citizens must be able to think critically (Benjamin, 1989; Resnick & Klopfer, 1991). The higher level thinking curriculum calls for a recognition that all real learning involves thinking and that the

ability can be nurtured and cultivated in everyone (Resnick & Klopfer).

Our nation's economy and the American workplace have changed dramatically in the past 40 years. The skills needed for successful living have altered radically, primarily as a result of the technological revolution and its impact on most jobs and professions. Unfortunately, American schools are geared towards producing students for a nation that, in many ways, no longer exists (Wise, 1996). This was made abundantly clear by the outcry of the public in response to *A Nation at Risk*. Bracey (1998) suggested, "Lousy schools are producing a lousy workforce and that's killing us in the global marketplace" (p. 36). Despite decades of calls for reform, most schools today look similar to one another – and much the same as they did 50 years ago (Jamentz, 1998). This is not surprising given that the past quarter century has produced a number of failed reforms, which leaves little doubt that schools, in general, are resistant to change (Wilms, 2003).

Additionally, ethnicity and background are more than ever significantly impacting American schooling and its effect on student achievement. There have been numerous national reports that have examined the impact of race and poverty. For example, based on the Mullis, Owen, and Phillips (1990) study of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) reports from the 1970's and 80's, it was concluded that minority students from low income families achieve at a lower level than their white counterparts from higher income families. Hillman (1996) concluded that the negative difference in educational performance between schools in advantaged areas and those in disadvantaged areas, more specifically urban and rural, is increasing (p. 1-13).

In recent years there has been a growing public awareness of serious problems associated with the financing of public schools in rural areas. These problems have taken

on an added sense of urgency since passage of new federal education legislation known as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (20 USC 6301) (Imazeki & Reschovsky, 2003).

Although students in many rural schools perform at high levels, data from the 1998 and 2000 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) mathematics, reading, and writing exams indicate that students at the fourth-, eighth-, and 12th-grade levels in rural schools perform less well than students in suburban schools, although better than the average student in a central city school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). These national data hide a great deal of variation among the states, including the fact that student performance in rural schools in a number of Southern states is exceptionally weak (Imazeki & Reschovsky, 2003).

For many rural districts, a central issue is that they will have to spend substantial amounts of money per student in order to meet state and/or federal student performance standards. If we assume that state-imposed standards define what has, in the language of the courts, been called an "adequate" education, we can refer to the amount of money necessary to achieve educational adequacy as the "cost" of education (Imazeki & Reschovsky, 2003).

The Rural School and Community Trust, a nonprofit organization devoted to improving schools and communities together, has identified 10 states as having rural situations that require urgent attention. The primary area of attention that needs to be improved in these 10 rural states is in the high percentages of core curriculum classes and students in rural settings that have teachers without a major or certification in the subject they teach (Williams, 2003). The percentage of classes taught by such teachers in high-poverty schools (34 percent) almost doubles that of low-poverty schools (19 percent).

The 10 highest-priority rural states follow a similar trend, with Kentucky and Louisiana reporting that more than one-half of secondary classes in high-poverty schools have teachers with no major or minor in the subjects that they teach (Education Watch, 2003a, 2003b). Hiring and retaining qualified teachers in rural schools will add to the overall cost of operating quality rural schools.

Teacher quality has a powerful impact on student achievement, so it should come as no surprise that wide gaps persist between the test scores of the privileged and those of the not so privileged, especially in our 10 high priority states (Education Watch 2002). Children of color and poverty, who most often live in geographic areas without the resources to supplement their educational experiences, disproportionally have the weakest, least experienced, and least qualified teachers (Williams, 2003).

Although the outlook of many rural schools appears dismal, there are some notable schools in rural America where success is an everyday part of life. Rural schools that have achieved the U.S. Department of Education 2007 No Child Left Behind -- Blue Ribbon School Program status include: Richard Johnson Elementary School Metlakatla, Alaska; Blunt Elementary School, Blunt, South Dakota; Pineville Middle School, Pineville, West Virginia; Tatum High School, Tatum, New Mexico; Nauset Regional High School, North Eastham, Massachusetts. These are just some of the outstanding rural schools in America. As students from rural backgrounds struggle to overcome environmental and social obstacles, the federal and state governments have raised the bar for what students are to know and be able to do through the implementation of high-stakes accountability legislation, such as No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (20 USC 7341).

The federal government responded to the growing opposition to unequal educational opportunities for disadvantaged children by enacting the Elementary and Secondary Educational Act (ESEA) in 1965, which allocated one billion dollars to provide children from disadvantaged backgrounds with extra educational services (Odden, 1995). Other federal policies and civil rights legislation have taken form since the 1970's to ensure that all disadvantaged and disabled children would have equal access to high-quality schooling designed to meet their individual needs. Examples include attention to the limited English population through XII, P.L. 94-142 which focused on students with special needs, and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which made discrimination of access to school services illegal. Soon thereafter, individual states followed the federal government's lead in designing programs to meet the needs of the economically disadvantaged population.

Given the current context of public education in the United States, there is little doubt that the public eye is keenly focused on education leaders to provide an answer to this situation (Bennett, 2002). In fact, data exist that directly relates leadership to learning outcomes (Krug, 1993). Therefore, this study endeavors to paint a picture of educational context, organizational characteristics, and leadership factors that are present in order to enhance student achievement in rural school districts.

1. An examination of the historical context of rural education and its connection to the modern public school milieu;

2. An exploration of the current environment in which rural educational leaders must work and students achieve;

3. An investigation into the factors that are present in successful

organizations;

4. A review of the extensive research on effective school district characteristics;

5. Finally, a presentation of identified leadership traits considered essential to producing desired student academic achievement results.

Definition of Rural

Defining rural correctly has been difficult because rural is a multifaceted concept, with no single attribute capable of characterizing rural places (Hart, Larsen, & Lishner, 2005). To define rural, the researcher used the urban-centric codes developed by the U.S. Census Bureau. These codes are found in the REL Southwest (2007) report. Code 32 states, *"Town, distant:* Territory inside an urban cluster that is 10 miles and less than or equal to 35 miles from an urbanized area." (p. 7) Code 33 states, *"Town, remote:* Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 35 miles from an urbanized area." (p. 7) Code 41 states, *"Rural, fringe:* Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area as well as a territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster." (p. 7) Code 42 states, *"Rural, distant:* Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area as well as a territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster." (p. 7) Code 43 states, *"Rural, remote:* Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 mile from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster." (p. 7)

Historical Purpose of Schooling

The importance of education was clear to some Americans from the very beginning.

Perrone, (1998) in the book *Toward Place and Community,* outline the beginnings of

education in regional areas of rural America. New England took the lead in 1642 and set

provisions for schools in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Other New England settlements

followed suit and schools were common there in the early nineteenth century.

The Land Ordinance of 1785, drafted by Thomas Jefferson, reserved one lot in each

"Northwest" township for public schools in the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois,

Michigan, and Wisconsin, while the Homestead Act of 1862 opened land in Minnesota,

the Dakotas, and Nebraska that ushered in the "agrarian movement." Thousands of

families streamed west and claimed title to free land. These Midwest farmers were

extremely involved in their schools. "The people of the district voted for its construction,

picked the place where it would stand, and controlled its use when it was completed"

(Perrone, 1998. p.25). Democracy was important in the midwest and citizens had a voice

in every aspect of the school from hiring teachers, levying taxes, and the sufficient length

for the school day and school year.

In the South, education was done at home prior to 1860, but by 1880 there was a duel

system of "common" schools – one for African Americans and one for Caucasians

(Tyack, 2004). During this time period many Americans were looking for opportunities

that the west had to offer, especially in the gold fields of California. As women and

children arrived in these areas small schools were built (Wyman, 2000).

In 1908, Theodore Roosevelt created the Commission on Country Life to study the

"rural problem" of city migration of American farm youth and families. Liberty Hyde

Bailey, of Cornell University, was chosen as chairman of the commission. Schools based on John Dewey's progressive philosophy and Danish Folk Schools inspired Bailey. He believed that education was the single most important factor in creating vital farm communities (Perrone, 1998. p. 38). To Bailey, schools and communities created a "natural reciprocity." Elwood Cubberley, a member of the commission and writer of this period, placed the success of country life reform on the rural school. He promoted the abandonment of city ideals and standards suggesting instead the development of curriculum with reference to the environment, local interests, and needs (Perrone, p. 41). In 1914, Joseph K. Hart, a rural sociologist and educator at the University of Washington, told his students that "education was complete only when the child was thoroughly equipped with the skills and desire to continue the traditions and interests of the community" (Perrone, p. 42).

The report of the Country Life Commission identified three strategies for sustaining rural communities: cooperation, education, and the application of scientific practices (Perrone, 1998). Cooperation was necessary because a single farmer could not survive dealing alone with the large corporations, business enterprises, and railroads that were necessary for him to deliver his crops to market. Cooperative organizations of farmers would have more power and strength, argued Horace Plunkett, one of the commissioners (Perrone, p. 41).

Critchfield (1994) wrote that American farms began with human power and only moved to horsepower during and after the Civil War. Horsepower gave way to mechanized farming during the World Wars due to lack of manpower and high farms prices. It is during this time period from the Civil War to the World Wars that many rural

citizens left their farms and small town to move into large industrial cities because of the abundance of jobs and the relative ease in lifestyle.

By the mid-1900's, American society had embraced the economic culture of industrial mass production, and so too did American schools. Schools began to exhibit characteristics that could also be found in American factories such as the development of rigid policies and procedures, departmentalization, structured curriculum, and a one size fits all attitudes. Much to their detriment, many schools still operate along the same lines as they did so long ago (Wilms, 2003).

Schooling should be able to identify and respond to factors that affect the achievement, the well-being of students, and the development of society. More broadly, Ramirez-Smith (1995) claimed that the purpose of schooling is to advance students' social, emotional, and academic development toward the goals of becoming successful citizens. We know this responsibility has not been carried out because of the stunning results of student achievement data now available. For example, more than 20 percent of American students drop out of high school, 50 percent in the inner cities (Magaziner & Clinton, 1992). The problem with schools, therefore, is that they have not been forced to continually adapt themselves to meet these changing needs of society and the economy (Gerstner, Semerad, & Doyle, 1994).

Reform Issues

The Standards Movement

Standards-based reform efforts arose from the public response to data indicating that students in other economically competing nations were outperforming American students

(Lewis, 1995). This opinion was also intensified by the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1993). Beginning in the mid-to-late 1980's standards-based systemic reform had been translated into policy strategies at both the federal and state levels (Massell, Kirst & Hoppe, 1997). The development of standards-based systemic reform is believed to not only result in better teaching and learning, but will also guarantee that schools are accountable for the success of all students (McKeon, 1994).

On the other hand, many educators are skeptical of the prospect of setting high standards for all students without securing changes in the system that supports them in doing so (Jamentz, 1998). For the 2.6 million children classified as limited English population (LEP), meeting content standards in core discipline areas may be disproportionately difficult and unfair without a strong English language program (McKeon, 1994). An area of concern relevant to the policies designed to create higher standards is the need for teacher preparation and training to meet the specified standards (Wise, 1996). Standards-based reform encourages teachers to plan and assess lessons for student progress and achievement towards the standards versus the traditional "cover the curriculum" model of pedagogy in the past (Jamentz).

High-Stakes Accountability

"Accountability" did not become a term commonly associated with education until the late 1960's when Lessinger (1970), an associate commissioner in the United States Office of Education, coined the term. At that time "accountability" was a means by which agencies reported funding used to develop student achievement. In the late 70's and early 80's data-based accountability in education was a process originally put in place to evaluate and measure the consequences of state dollars to state reform efforts

(Guthrie, 1984). Education data collection and analysis attempts were primarily directed at questions of finance equity and the distribution of categorical funding. Since then there has been a shift of accountability from money to achievement (Cavazos, 2002).

The current goal of standards-based education is to set clear and public targets for student performance and encourage the use of assessment tools that are designed to measure student progress in achieving those standards. Proponents for test-based accountability systems assert that the use of national or state standards and aligned assessments allow comparison data of achievement, promote equity to students, and enable students to transfer schools and remain on target (Jamentz, 1998). Additionally, it is argued that there is evidence that reliable state assessments can challenge teachers to change their instruction to help students meet the standards (Lewis, 1995). Benson (2001) challenged the use of a single index, such as Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), because it does not encompass factors that may affect results such as school and student demographics and the quality and quantity of academic instruction.

Hoxby (2002) stated that the costs of accountability programs are minimal especially with regard to the expense of other major student achievement reforms such as class size reduction or higher teacher salaries. Conversely, Benson (2001) found that the cost of implementing a large scale assessment in not cost effective for students of special populations and suggested that the costs between schools varies depending upon school leadership, programs, and pre- and post-test activities. The current demands of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) demand that all special student populations as well as collective student populations be "accountable" and "proficient."

Small, rural schools by their very nature do not do well under NCLB's requirements

for "adequate yearly progress." Statistically, the small numbers of both classes and subgroups will skew the test results of rural schools, and schools that are making progress will be unfairly labeled as having failed (Lewis, 2003). As Tompkins (2003), head of the Rural Trust, pointed out in a recent commentary in *Education Week*, when public reporting shows a handful of students in fourth grade are below the proficient level in reading, everyone in the community can figure out who they are. "Putting pressure on adults to perform better as teachers and school administrators is one thing," she wrote. "Publicly humiliating children is another" (p. 31).

The Hazards of School Accountability

Inherent problems exist within the policies designed to enhance student achievement through the development of standards. Many educators struggle to determine who should develop the standards and how centralized the process should be (Jamentz, 1998). The No Child Left Behind Act is the latest example of the "one size fits all" education policies that have been so detrimental to the nation's rural schools – nearly one-quarter of the public schools in America. Under the No Child Left Behind Act, hard-to-staff schools will become harder to staff, as teachers abandon schools classified as needing improvement and are lured to schools in prosperous communities that can afford to pay top dollar for highly qualified teachers (Tompkins, 2003). For example, thirteen states have rural teacher salaries that fall behind urban/suburban salaries by more than $5,000 a year. In a handful of states, the difference is even more dramatic: $8,573 in Illinois, $7,896 in New York, $7573 in Pennsylvania, $6,868 in Iowa (Tompkins).

A major requirement of the No Child Left Behind Act is that each state develops accurate student achievement tools. In almost all cases these tools take the form a

standards based tests. The differences in these tests vary widely from state to state. Many states have set goals for aligning their tests to new state standards. Additionally, some states have chosen to utilize authentic assessments, while others are using more traditional norm-referenced exams (Massel, Kirst, & Hoppe, 1997). Elford (2002) proposed the development of a comprehensive instructional management information system that uses both standardized tests and incorporates teacher judgments to assess student performance. The goal then would be to establish an accountability system that is school-based rather than state-based. However, this type of unique and individualized assessment system would be in direct contradiction to the requirements of the current No Child Left Behind Act.

As with all new requirements imposed upon education there is a perceived threat upon an individual school's culture. Deal and Kennedy (1982) asserted that individuals form strong bonds with their idols, icons, routines, celebrations, and ceremonies – especially those in their workplaces. Because of these strong attachments, they concluded that any change can strain relationships and leave employees confused, angry and hostile. Simply stated, educational reform is technically simple and socially complex (Fullan, 1982). In a study conducted by Marsh (1988) to determine the key factors associated with effective implementation and impact of California's educational reform effort of Senate Bill 813, he found that there was a strong and positive relationship between the pattern of implementation and the impact of the reform on student achievement. It was concluded that state initiated "top-down, content focused" reform in secondary schools was successful when "a) the content of the reform fit the priorities of the district, and b) districts and schools are able to transform the reform into their local

agenda and context" (p. 19). Therefore, states, districts and individual schools may find it difficult to fit the standards movement into their local context.

Modern Rural Education

In this era of NCLB all schools are facing pressure to perform. Some of the unique pressures that face rural school districts include: attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers, professional development for superintendents and principals, acquiring adequate funding; meeting the requirements of special education laws, developing standards based instruction, and school consolidation (Arnold, Gaddy & Dean, 2004). These pressures are not unique to rural school districts but the challenges that they impose upon rural school systems are unique.

The limited size of rural districts, compared to suburban and urban districts, can create resource capacity issues (Stephens, 1998). As stated by Harmon, Gordanier, Henry & George (2007), some of the specific challenges facing rural districts include "low fiscal capacity, fewer management support services, greater per pupil costs, higher numbers of teachers teaching outside their specialty area, less competitive salaries and benefits, less specialized space and equipment, less availability of planning support services, and fewer evolution support services" (p. 8).

Fortunately for rural school districts there is an inherent support system to help them overcome some of these challenges (Barley & Beesley, 2007).

> Not only are the (rural) school and the community interconnected, but the strong positive nature of the connections seems to lend support to both. The school is an essential element in the community and the community's support

makes success possible, often with few fiscal resources. The community-school

connection also provides support for the high academic expectations found in

each case study school. These rural areas have a less transient population, which

means that many residents, including parents of current students, went to the

schools themselves and therefore identify with it. (p. 10).

The rural school as "community center" helps to fill in where there might be a gap

in funding or other resources that help rural schools be successful.

High achieving rural school districts share many attributes that non-rural schools

generally do not utilize in order to become successful. Being small can be an advantage

in achieving student success. Smallness makes possible team teaching, consensus

building, integrated curriculum, cooperative learning, and performance assessments

(Rural School and Community Trust, 2004). Additionally, effective and innovative

leadership is the driving force for rural school districts success. Leaders who are

positive, flexible, creative and collegial empower teachers. Together they work towards

a common goal of meeting each students needs (Rural School and Community Trust).

Factors Leading To School Improvement

Attempts to identify effective schools have been taking place since the 1970's.

Primarily this identification process was driven by the desire to identify specific reasons

for the obvious differences in academic achievements between students of varying

backgrounds (Bliss, Firestone & Richards, 1991). With schools being scrutinized more

than ever, today's schools continue to examine specific aspects of student achievement

and success. Cunningham (2003) expressed concern that voters are becoming concerned

that political leaders, school boards, and district level administrators are out of touch with schools and day-to-day classroom and community life. These examinations generally attempt to identify reform strategies that result in improved student achievement.

Lezotte (1992) stated that to convert traditional schools into effective schools administrators must become visionary transformational leaders. He further stated that new administrators must not fit the traditional mold of just being efficient manager. Additionally, administrators must encourage risk taking on the part of their staff. Finally, Lezotte points out that school leaders must be open to the possibility that traditional practice, if ineffective, should be eliminated.

Good schools have been poorly defined in that the traditional definition omits equity in terms of students' cultural, linguistic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds and the school's ability to meet those needs (Obiakor, 2000). As a result, Obiakor attempted to change the meaning of effective schools to include schools where environments enable all students to maximize their full potential. Sergiovanni (1984) recognized that excellence is multifaceted and argued that excellent schools should not be measured only by high morale and high student test scores. The more expansive view holds that excellent schools exceed the expectations necessary to be considered satisfactory (Sergiovanni). Adding to the more universal definition of effective schools, Hoy and Miskel (1987) stated that school effectiveness concepts are multi-dimensional and are dependent upon the views and bias of multiple stakeholders. Glass (2005) asserted "For schools to work, they must have timely and appropriate support from their corporate headquarters – namely the central administration. A smoothly functioning management base can significantly improve your district's efficiency in terms of dollars and test scores

alike" (p. 39). To date, the definitive definition of an effective school remains hard to pin down; nonetheless, there are clearly identified characteristics throughout the literature.

According to Wisconsin Equity Framework (2003), "educational excellence" describes the condition that exists when educational programs challenge learners-regardless of their race, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or socio-economic status to perform at the boundary of their individual abilities and to test and extend their limits in school, at home, at work, and as citizens. This condition reflects fairness and high expectations for all learners and also provides alternatives and support to help students reach them.

Edmonds (1979), as well as Brookover and Lezotte (1979), established the traditional characteristics of highly effective schools. These characteristics consist of a high presence among staff as to goals and purposes, a clear sense of mission, and the active presence of purposing.

Duttweiler (1990) synthesized more recent literature on effective schools into the following characteristics: (a) effective schools are student-centered, (b) effective schools offer academically rich programs, (c) effective schools provide instruction that promotes student learning, (d) effective schools have a positive school climate, (e) effective schools foster collegial interaction, (f) effective schools have extensive staff development, (g) effective schools practice shared leadership, (h) effective schools foster creative problem solving, and (i) effective schools involve parents and the community.

Since the inception of public schools in this country there have been formal and informal efforts inside and from without to improve them. Currently, the efforts to improve or reform schools have focused on promoting student achievement in terms of

preparing students for the modern work force. The means by which politicians are promoting this wave of reforms is centered on standards-based education and accountability that focus primarily on restructuring the educational organization.

Characteristics of a productive educational organization, according to North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (1996), consist of clearly defined academic focus and vision for learning; relatively stable goals; rigorous, challenging learning for all students that engages them with the school and its academic mission; clear and focused standards and incentives for academic performance; sufficient time and resources to build teacher knowledge and expertise in pedagogy and subject areas; a school climate that combines academic press and personalism; high performance management of student learning at the local school level; structural conditions that promote professional community; external agencies and networks that provide support in achieving high levels of student learning; and high levels of student achievement. Despite a clear outline of what characteristics constitute a productive educational organization according to Hanson (1991), "The structure of the school, in terms of its organization and management, will indeed make a difference in student achievement up to the point where time and materials, teachers and students, facilities and security can be brought together at the right time and place and in the appropriate quantities" (p. 45). Further adding to the complex nature of school organizations is the pressure from within and from outside to implement various reforms.

Getting all of the stakeholders involved in specific school reforms is often cited in current research as being the most successful means to bring about successful change in schools. Lawler (1994) described "high involvement" as giving more decision-making

control to lower level employees, changing the physical layout to encourage interaction, getting rid of executive perks, providing employee training, and sharing information (p.18-19). This type of organization is most effective in non-linear conditions, which is characterized by dynamic environments, loose management connections, rich cultural connections, multiple and competing goals, unstructured tasks, unsure operating procedures and unclear and competing lines of authority (Sergiovanni, 1991).

The holistic approach to implementing change, or in other words growing the change from the bottom of the organization up, flies in the face of the more traditional top down style of management. Social systems theory advocates a more collective approach to management than is supported in classical theory (Bausch, 2001). The human relations approach emphasizes practicing democratic principles of management and advocates employee participation in structuring the work environment and in establishing open channels of communication (Hansen, 1991). Empowering all stakeholders is the key component to effective change implementation according to social theorist. According to human resource theorists the process of collective decision making by all employees will increase morale and productivity by providing the workers with a since of ownership in the organization, thereby giving all employees the feeling of greater responsibility for their organization. By limiting the authority of management and empowering the members the organization is better able to make positive changes (Mayo, 1933).

Top-down change efforts are characterized when decision-making authority rests in the power that is aligned at the top of an organization. Top-down refers to higher level employees, most typically management, coordinating and controlling the work of subordinates at lower levels through devices like authority, rules and policies, and

planning and control systems (Bolman & Deal, 1997, 2006). Top-down change strategies are evident in organizations that adhere to traditional management style otherwise known as classical organization theory. The underpinnings of classical theory are rooted in the ideas of scientific management, which postulates that an organization is composed of the following elements: the formation of a hierarchy, scientific measurement of tasks, defined order of roles and division of labor, defined rules of behavior and the belief that there is one best way of performing a task (Hanson, 1991). Therefore, communication, information and goal-setting in the organization is downward and is not responsive to collaborative efforts of decision-making, needs of the subordinates or pressures from the external environment.

According to Senge (1996), most people who reach the top of an organization soon find they have little unilateral power to control its complex workings. Leaders find themselves with limited power to bring about change. They articulate new strategies. They devise new cost-cutting campaigns. And, most popular of all, they restructure their organizations. They do so because there is little else they really can do.

Impact of Change Efforts on the Organization

The more things change, the more things stay the same. Sergiovanni, (1995) asserted that this all too familiar saying still haunts us in education. Real change comes hard. Although we can all point to new programs and other innovations that have been adopted in our schools, most just do not seem to matter very much. Some changes quickly fade away, some changes stay, but few changes touch teachers and students and few changes affect teaching and learning in the long run (Sergiovanni).

Deal (1987) stated that there is a basic contradiction between culture and change. Culture is something people invent in order to find meaning. Its purpose is to provide stability, certainty, and predictability. Meaning is derived through symbols that create a sense of control. Change challenges all of this; it threatens to eat away at the very essence of what culture is supposed to do for people. In a sense, change requires the creation of a new culture, and that is difficult to accomplish (Deal).

Somewhat unexpectedly, a study by Moeller (1968) examined the effects of structure on morale in two school systems. One system was structured loosely and encouraged wide participation in decision-making while the other was tightly controlled with a centralized chain of command. Surprisingly, it has been found that the morale of the faculty was high in the district with the tighter structure (Bolman & Deal, 1997; 2006). In this example, any attempt to implement reforms or change through decentralized means would result in undue stress, anxiety and low self-efficacy on the part of those unprepared to make decisions.

Leadership roles are often left undefined in organizations led by administrators compelled to decentralized reform and promote a sense of "we are in this together" atmosphere (Rural School and Community Trust, 2004, p. 3). Once committed to the bottom-up decision making model schools face significant challenges. Principals face the greatest change and challenge when they empower others (Prestine, 1991). For a school administrator learning to lead by facilitating rather than simply making decisions this can present a myriad of trials. Another obstacle in grassroots organizational change is the time and efficiency factor. Collaborative decision making takes enormous amounts of time compared to top-down decision making. Additionally, bottom-up decision making

is characterized by undefined roles, collaborative teams, and shared decision-making. As a result, there is a lack of defined roles that may lead to confusion, job overlap, and conflict.

Leaders who attempt to change an organization traditionally used to using the bottom-up decision making model to one that is more top-down oriented can also produce hardship and grief (Bolman & Deal, 1997; 2006). This shift in organizational structure may cause subordinates to look for ways to respond to these constraints by becoming withdrawn and, apathetic, and they may form divisive coalitions (Bolman & Deal). Top-down leadership may lead to a loss in initiative of the workforce. Mayo (1933) suggested that workers can dictate the means of production process, autonomous of the demands of management, thus making it possible that top-down strategies can and do meet with a significant amount of resistance. Finally, centralized management theories assume that structure and extrinsic rewards enhance the production function and promote efficiency. This belief, however, has been contradicted in a number of studies where top-down change has been implemented. For example, a study conducted by McLaughlin and Marsh (1978) to examine the effects of extra pay for teachers as an incentive for participating in change efforts, found that teachers desire the opportunity to gain intrinsic professional rewards far more than other types of rewards.

Today's school organizations have never been called to change and implement new standards and methodologies as they currently are. The ability to effectively implement new programs and adjust to new information regarding specific academic needs, tests each school administrator. Knowing when to utilize top-down or bottom-up strategies is a key component of any successful administrator.

Organizational Culture

The aforementioned characteristics of successful schools are embodied in the multi-faceted concept of organizational culture. The impact of school culture, therefore, is paramount to an effective school's ability to enable all students to achieve. According to Barth (2002), "A school's culture has far more influence on life and learning in the schoolhouse than the president of the country, the state department of education, the superintendent, the school board, or even the principal, teacher, and parents can ever have" (p. 6). Sergiovanni (1995), espoused,

> All schools have cultures, but successful schools seem to have strong and functional cultures aligned with a vision of quality schooling. Culture serves as a compass setting to steer people in a common direction; it provides a set of norms defining what people should accomplish and how, and it is a source of meaning and significance for teachers, students, administrators, and others as they work (p. 95).

Furthermore, collaborative cultures, while not easy to develop, support a shared sense of purpose, focus on long-term improvement, and engage professionals in sharing, collegiality and meaningful dialogue (Peterson, 2003). According to Deal & Peterson, 1994, when school principals or leadership teams attend to both administrative imperatives and the desire to shape a meaningful culture, high-performing organizations are the predictable result.

The vital need to understand the influence of organizational culture on any organization, particularly a school district for the purpose of this study, could be understood by the following "bottom line" statement about the reason organizational

culture matters as noted by Schein (1999):

> Culture matters because it is powerful, latent, and often an unconscious set of
> forces that determine both our individual and collective behavior, ways of
> perceiving, though patterns, and values. Organizational culture in particular
> matters because culture elements determine strategy, goals, and modes of
> operating. The values and thought patterns of leaders and senior managers are
> partially determined by their own cultural backgrounds and their shared
> experience. If we want to make organizations more efficient and effective, we
> must understand the role the culture plays in organizational life (p. 14).

Schein (1999) informally defined organizational culture as things such as "the

company climate" or "the way we do things around here" (p. 15). Additionally, Owens

(2001) states, " Organizational culture is the body of solutions to problems that has

worked consistently for a group and that is therefore taught to new members as the

correct way to perceive, think about, and feel in relation to those problems. Overtime,

organizational culture takes on meaning so deep that it defines the assumptions, values,

beliefs, norms, and even the perceptions of participants in the organization. Though

culture tends to drop from the conscious thoughts of participants over time, it continues

to powerfully create meaning for them in their work and becomes 'the rules of the game'

(p. 174). Furthermore, Schein (2004) stated that in order "to define culture one must go

below the behavioral level, because behavioral regularities can be caused by forces other

than culture. Even large organizations and entire occupations can have a common culture

if there has been enough of a history of shared experience" (p. 22). Schein's (2004)

formal definition of organizational culture is: "a pattern of shared basic assumptions that

was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (p. 17)

According to Schein there are three levels of organizational culture, one of which is artifacts. Artifacts refer to the tangible and easily observable things noticed when entering an organization. Artifacts induce an emotional sense and appeal to what one sees, hears and feels. Schein (2004) distinguishes the fact that it is dangerous to try and surmise deeper assumptions from artifacts alone as the interpretations one has is directly a projection of one's own feelings and reactions. Consequently, the placement of artifacts at level one, the beginning level, of the organization's culture gives rise to the "climate" of the organization and is vague. Observers must gain evidence about why they exist before the artifacts become more clearly understood by them.

The next level of organizational culture explains Schein (1999) is that of espoused beliefs and values of an organization. These predict the behaviors that can be observed at the artifacts level. The strategies, goals and philosophies are the asserted values or justifications for actions that take place in the organization. However, to get a more thorough understanding of the organizational culture, one must decode what is going on at the deeper level of underlying assumptions.

The final and deepest level of organizational culture is the underlying assumptions. Schein (1987) defines underlying assumptions of organizational culture as what can be considered the "norms" or a set of assumptions or expectations held by the members of a group or organization concerning what kind of behavior is right or wrong, good or bad,

appropriate or inappropriate... and are usually not verbalized, but can be stated by members if asked to do so. These assumptions become taken for granted and are very powerful in an organization. As new members join the organization they are indoctrinated with the organizations assumptions and live by them as part of the social unit of the organization (Bray, 2007). "In fact, if a basic assumption comes to be strongly held in a group, members will find behavior based on any other premise inconceivable" (Schein, 2004, p. 31).

Schein (2004) asserted that organizational culture can be studied in numerous ways but the purpose of the study must match the chosen method. It is vital to properly assess organizational culture without error in order to truly make use of assessment. With regards to the three levels of organizational culture, artifacts, espoused values and beliefs, and underlying assumptions, Schein (2004) notes that one can gather information and draw conclusions about organizational culture by observing and assessing the artifacts. "If we are going to decipher a given organization's culture, we must use a complex interview, observation, and joint-inquiry approach in which selected members of the group work with the outsider to uncover the unconscious assumptions that are hypothesized to be the essence of the culture" (Schein, 1987, p. 277).

Owens and Steinhoff (1976) declare there is a vital need for authenticity in developing a work culture in an organization by the leader. Schein (2004) makes clear that, "organizational culture is created by shared experience, but it is the leader who initiates this process by imposing his or her beliefs, values, and assumptions at the outset" (p, 225). He further describes that culture essentially emerges from three sources:

    a) The beliefs, values, and assumptions of founders of organizations.

b) The learning experiences of group members as their organization evolve.

c) New beliefs, values, and assumptions brought in by new members and leaders. (Schein)

As is expressed in the first and third sources, leaders start the culture formation process by imposing their own assumptions on a new group either as the founder of the organization or as the new leader of the organization. Schein argued that, "the simplest explanation of how leaders get their message across is that they do it through charisma— the mysterious ability to capture the subordinates' attention to communicate major assumptions and values in a vivid and clear manner. The problem with charisma as an embedding mechanism is that leaders who have it are rare and their impact is hard to predict" (p. 245). Schein defined primary and secondary embedding mechanisms that are available to leaders to teach their organizations how to perceive, think, feel and behave based on their conscious and unconscious convictions.

The following are primary embedding mechanisms:

a) What leaders pay attention to, measure, and control on a regular basis.

b) How leaders react to critical incidents and organizational crises.

c) How leaders allocate resources.

d) Deliberate role modeling, teaching, and coaching.

e) How leaders allocate rewards and status.

f) How leaders recruit, select, promote and excommunicate.

The following are secondary articulation and reinforcement mechanisms:

a) Organizational design and structure.

b) Organizational systems and procedures.

c) Rites and rituals of the organization.

d) Design of physical space, facades, and buildings.

e) Stories about important events and people.

f) Formal statements of organizational philosophy, creeds, and charters.

Schein (2004) describes the importance of these embedding mechanisms by stating that, "the important point to grasp is that all these mechanisms do communicate culture content to newcomers. Leaders do not have a choice about whether or not to communicate, only about how much to manage what they communicate" (p, 270). Schein states that, "when we examine culture and leadership closely, we see that they are two sides of the same coin; neither can really be understood by itself" (p. 10-11) and therein is the importance of leadership in any organization.

Schlechty (2005) assists school leaders by outlining six critical systems that define the norms and expressions of a school's organizational culture. In organizations like schools, rules, roles and relationships are predisposed to become organized around tasks that are critical to the operation of the endeavor. The norms that define this structure are the language of the culture of the organization, and it is these cultural terms that are referred to when the expression social system is used. Among the more critical of these systems are:

1. The recruitment and induction

2. The knowledge development and transmission system

3. The power and authority system

4. The evaluation system

5. The directional system

6.   The boundary system

It is from these six systems that school leaders can develop strategies for revitalizing their schools and districts.

Leadership

According to Deal and Peterson (1994):

> The dilemmas that arise in schools every day suggest the need for new ways of
>
> thinking about how to combine leading and managing. We need to think of
>
> leadership as tied with management into a complex knot. This knot is interwoven
>
> with the need to manage people, time, and instruction while at the same time
>
> infusing a school with passion, purpose, and meaning. (p. 41).

Bower (1989) recommended that leaders assist people to think, to seek their own answers, and to make decisions within the boundaries of a dynamic continuum. Leaders encourage followers to be spontaneous and orderly, creative and precise, imaginative and factual. Adding additional pressure to the position of school leader is the proliferation of current data that suggest leadership is directly linked to learning (Krug, 1993). As a result, school accountability and student achievement is placed squarely on the shoulders of the school leader (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001). Therefore, a school leader of the future must be an instructional leader, a proactive and positive change facilitator and be comfortable with collaborative, data-driven, decision-making structures and accountability (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000).

Instructional Leadership

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) (2001) framed

instructional leadership in terms of "leading learning communities." In NAESP's view,

instructional leaders have six roles: making student and adult learning the priority; setting

high expectations for performance; gearing content and instruction to standards; creating

a culture of continuous learning for adults; using multiple sources of data to assess

learning; and activating the community's support for school success (Lashway, 2004).

The current role of an instructional leader includes a deep involvement in the "core

technology" of teaching and learning, carries more sophisticated views of professional

development, and emphasizes the use of data to make decisions (King, 2002). DuFour

(2002) claimed that there has been a shift in attention from teaching to learning, and some

now prefer the term "learning leader" over "instructional leader."

Traits of an Effective Leader

Today's school leaders must be visionaries (Chance, 1992b). Deal & Peterson (1994)

stated that a *vision* is a mental image of a better and more hopeful future. Visions engage

people's hearts as well as their head—especially when widely shared. An effective

school leader must be able to communicate his/her vision and assimilate the visions of

key stakeholders and provide the leadership and support for enabling the organization to

implement the agreed upon and articulated vision.

In today's rapidly changing, world school leaders are also required to anticipate the

needs of students and be able to implement corresponding changes. Therefore, school

leaders must be able to determine or anticipate occupational conditions in the future, and

they must be able to design and implement curriculum that enables students to succeed

(Hoyle, Fenwick, & Steffy, 1993).

The ability to manage the change process is another key quality effective school

leaders must possess. Without careful planning and support, implementation will be fragmented and will ultimately fail. Finally, teachers need to feel comfortable with organizational change (Jellander, 2004).

The most recent reform efforts in schools have focused upon restructuring the educational organization. Primarily, these reform efforts have centered on "high involvement" decision making processes. Lawler (1994) described "high involvement" as granting more control of the decision-making process to non-management employees, reconfiguring the layout of the work site to promote formal and informal communication, eliminating perks for management, providing employee training, and openly sharing information. Wide spread involvement from school staff requires school leaders to give up control and coordinate from the sidelines (Murphy, 1988), learn how to share power, and become facilitators rather than bosses.

Given the failure of many past educational reform efforts, researchers have identified one of the missing links as the transformation of the culture of the school (Maehr & Parker, 1993). Bolman and Deal (1997) charge school leaders with the responsibility for establishing the culture at a school, thereby enhancing the school community's commitment to increasing student achievement. Therefore, the nature and impact of school culture must be a major concern to school leaders (Maehr & Parker).

The Superintendent

Fundamental to the academic success of a district's students is the effective leadership a superintendent can bring (Waters & Marzano, 2006). The superintendent can create a culture of positive change and academic achievement by making it a priority to get to know the people, the school district, and the community to be served (Bjork &

Bond, 2006).

A school superintendent must accept three leadership responsibilities proportional to
the school system's culture:

1. The superintendent must become personally knowledgeable of the
    organizational culture and then educate others about this culture.

2. The superintendent must take a leadership role in helping to plant a vision
    for the school system that guides the organization.

3. The superintendent must assume leadership in implementing the
    organization's vision for the future. (Norton, Webb, Dlugosh, Sybouts,
    1996, p. 78).

Superintendents, more than any other school district leader, have the capacity to bring
about systemic change. "The school superintendent can make people in the organization
aware of the culture in which they exist by bringing its values, and behaviors to the
surface and providing the framework for interpreting what they see" (Norton, Webb,
Dlugosh, Sybouts, 1996, p. 79).

The superintendent can also to be detrimental to any positive progress a district may
try to make. The position of school superintendent is by its nature political. The
partnership between school boards and superintendents are thought by many researchers
to be key elements in the effectiveness of a school district (Chapman, 1997). It is for this
reason that the high turnover rate of superintendents maybe a substantial reason many
school district are not able to become effective (Chance, 1992a).

A school superintendent has three primary roles: instructional, managerial and
political (Cuban, 1998). All three of these roles require active engagement from the

superintendent and district leaders in order to shape the future by encouraging activities, making strategic decisions, and providing strategic action that moves the district closer to its collective vision (Duffy & Chance, 2007).

Effective superintendents face a multitude of challenges. They must determine which services are appropriate for their students. They must lead by sharing power. Superintendents must create learning environments that are individualized yet inclusive of the broader cultural concerns. Finally, due to the impact technology is playing in our society superintendents will have to operate schools where learning occurs virtually twenty-four hours a day (Houston, 2001).

Conclusion

Successful rural schools demand effective leadership and a positive culture within the school community. The challenges that face school leaders in the era of No Child Left Behind and Standards Based Education are immense. Some may say these challenges are insurmountable, especially in rural school districts. Nonetheless, professional educational leaders will attempt to meet the demands of current and future legislation, public demands, local requirements and their own conscience. To this end, Cawelti (2006) stated, "Ultimately, public schools must offer a common curriculum that helps perfect a democratic society and that provides all students with a broad array of knowledge and skills for success both in an out of school" (p. 68). Given these challenges facing educational leaders, preparation and training will have to change in order to satisfy future needs. School leadership programs will need to include study, observation and practical application in organizational analysis and structure,

instructional leadership, organizational culture, and reform management in order to

combat the challenges that face American education (Jellander, 2004).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Chapter Three conveys the qualitative design, sample, instrumentation, data recording

procedures, and data analysis process of the current investigation. The purpose of the

study was to examine the relationship of leadership and school culture to student

achievement in a district where student achievement data exceeds its expectations. The

focus was to identify how those two factors, leadership and culture, help to facilitate the

district's success. One rural school district was selected in order to answer the three

established research questions:

1.   What are the factors in the academic and extra-curricular programs that support a

       rural school district which has exceeded academic expectations?

2.   What are the factors in leadership practices that support a rural school district

       which has exceeded academic expectations?

3.   What are contextual cultural factors that support a rural school district which has

       exceeded academic expectations?

The qualitative case study approach was employed to identify factors that verify the

selected school district is exceeding it student achievement expectations. The case study

tactic allowed the researcher to explore a single entity and collect detailed information on

the phenomena through a variety of data collection techniques (Creswell, 1994). The

research utilized a methodological triangulation approach where multiple methods were used to study the school district (Patton, 1987). The combined data collection approach included surveys/questionnaires, interviews, observations, and artifact/document analysis in order to enable the researcher to alleviate some of the deficiencies of any one source of data (Patton, 1987).

Sample and Population

This case study examined a single K – 12th grade rural school district. This school district was selected on the basis of having made consistent progress towards meeting its state's academic growth target and NCLB goals. Further selection criteria included a student population that consisted of a large English Language Learner (ELL) population and significant participation in the National School Lunch Program, commonly referred to as the free and reduced lunch program. The free or reduced lunch program is sponsored by the Federal government under the administration of the United States Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service. It is a federally-assisted meal program that provides *free* nutritious meals to students whose family incomes is at or below 130 percent of the poverty level or *reduced price* meals to those who qualify between 130 percent and 185 percent poverty level (USDA, 2007).

Overview of the School District

The school district studied was located in a Western state. There were five schools in this district, one comprehensive high school, one middle school, two elementary schools, and one continuation high school. Four of the schools were located in one community, while one of the elementary schools was located in the nearby village. The county had a

predominately agricultural based economy. Most of the citizens living and working in this area either owned farms or work on them. Therefore, migrants worked on almost all of the farms as labors.

The 1200 person student enrollment in the school district reflected a diverse population with varying needs. The 2006-07 student populations consisted of the following percentages: 77.8% Hispanic, 12.2% White, 4.1 % African American, 0.8% Filipino-American, 0.2% Asian, and 4.7% other. Approximately 37% of these students were considered to be English Language Learners and nearly 81% participated in the free and reduced lunch program.

Student achievement data indicates that most grade levels had experienced an increase in student achievement over the period from 2002 to 2006 on the reading and math standards tests. The school district has steadily improved its state academic base scores since 2002. In 2003, the district did not meet the AYP requirements under NCLB, but they have met the AYP requirements every year since.

The school district received financial categorical support to meet the needs of their diverse population including, but not limited to, funding from the School Improvement Program, Economic Impact Aid, Title I, Title II, Title IV, Title V, Special Education and Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) programs.

The school participated in a class size reduction program in grades K-3 which limited class size to 20 or less. All other grade levels average approximately 23 students per class.

Superintendent, Site Administrator, Teaching and Staff Descriptions

There were two district level administrators, the superintendent and assistant

superintendent. Historically there has been very little turnover in these positions in this district. However, in 2006 the long time superintendent retired and the then village elementary school principal was hired as the new superintendent. This study focused on both of these superintendents who led the school district from low student achievement on the state's standardized assessment to steady improvement on the state's academic growth target.

Each school had its own administrator or a teacher in-charge. Most of these administrators had been with the district for many years, averaging over 10 years. The middle school and the high school also had assistant principals.

The teaching staff was made up of seventy-two state certified teachers. Fifty-three were fully credentialed. Four were university interns. One was a district intern. Six had emergency credentials. Eight were on waivers. Full and part-time specialists included a Reading Specialist, Reading Mentor, Speech/Language Specialist, Special Day Class teachers, Resource Specialists, Psychologist, and Counselor. Teacher evaluation and assessment were performed on a continuing basis and teachers requiring improvement were given assistance and recommendations for improvement. The staff also included eighteen paraprofessionals, twenty office/cleric staff, and thirty-two support staff.

Research Design

The case study's research design was based on Yin's (2003) model. A case study model is advantageous when meaning is desired and the focus of the study is on an existing experience within some real-life context. Sociological case studies, in agreement with Yin (1994), are generally process-oriented and focused on an issue. In this study,

the issue is student achievement greater than expected and the process is through district level administrative leadership and school culture.

As espoused by Yin (2003), a study's research questions determine an appropriate research design. The purpose of this study and its research questions warranted an exploratory model. The research questions guiding this study were what and how questions, often indicative of exploratory investigation designed to bring meaning to little understood events such as academic success beyond expectations.

The researcher of the case study typically uncovers more variables and data points since only a few subjects are studied. This aspect of case study research has its advantages and disadvantages. Yin (2003) noted that these advantages and disadvantages depend on three key factors: (a) the research question(s) identified in the study; (b) the degree and level of control the researcher has over the behavioral events; and (c) the emphasis on either contemporary or historical phenomena.

Yin (2003) and Creswell (1998) described three types of case studies - descriptive, exploratory and explanatory - viewed as feasible methodological tools. Any of the three approaches to case study research can be achieved from a single case or multiple-case study.

Qualitative research implies a direct examination with experience as lived and felt (Merriam, 1998). In contrast to quantitative research, this dissects a phenomenon to investigate the component parts; qualitative research works toward examining all the parts to uncover how the parts fit together.

The methodology chosen emulates Yin's (2003) approach to designing case studies. The researcher's design connected data collected with the proposed research question(s).

Operationalizing case study designs enables the research to be more distinct and is accomplished through an explanation of the theory to be studied. Yin identified five key components: (a) the study's research questions; (b) its propositions, if any; (c) the unit(s) of analysis; (d) the logic linking data to the propositions; and (e) the criteria for interpreting the findings.

Propositions

Each proposition directs the focus to something that should be investigated within the scope of the study (Yin, 2003). The case propositions derived from the research questions and focused the study's objectives. However, the "how" and "why" questions do not correlate with what to study. Only when the researcher puts a stake in the group and specifically states the study propositions can the research move in the right direction. Since this study is an exploratory case study, the researcher cannot specifically draw conclusions or identify predictions regarding what outcomes to expect. Instead, Yin suggested in instances where exploratory case studies are being conducted the researcher needs to state the purpose as well as the criteria by which an exploration will be judged as successful. For this reason, the researcher has restated the purpose, identified the rationale for the exploratory case study, and concluded with how the outcome will be judged successful.

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to investigate how leadership and culture in a rural school district can impact student achievement. The criteria by which this exploration will be judged successful are by providing a rich depiction of the leadership practices and cultural events that impact student achievement in this one rural school district.

Units of Analysis

The unit of analysis for this case study was one rural school district, specifically its district leadership and its cultural events that impact student achievement.

Linking Data to Propositions

The researcher considered pattern matching as a tool to link data to the state propositions. The idea was to uncover how several pieces of data from the study are related to the theoretical proposition (Merriam, 2002). Trochim (2000) described pattern matching as linking two patterns, one is the theoretical pattern and the other is the observed or operational pattern.

Criteria for Interpreting Findings

Case study protocol included procedures and regulations that were defined in advance. Yin (2003) outlined a common protocol approach as including: (a) an overview of the case study project; (b) field procedures; (c) case study questions; and (d) a guide for case study report. These four aspects were clearly defined by the researcher. Finally the researcher used multiple forms of evidence such as interviews, surveys, observations and artifacts.

Data Collections

This case study examined a K-12th grade rural school district as an educational organization by studying the programs, leadership configuration, and culture that contributed to the district's success. The data presented was collected through surveys and questionnaires, extensive interviews, observations and analysis of artifacts/documentation over a three-month period (see Appendices III to). An

instrument developed by the state's Department of Education was used to help generate survey and questionnaire questions and as a guide to identify key successful practices in the district's programs by assessing 1) School and District Leadership; 2) Curriculum, Instruction and Professional Development; 3) Classroom and School Assessments; and 4) School, Culture, Climate and Communication. The three research questions provide the framework for data collection.

Survey/Questionnaire

The researcher created an anonymous five question open-ended survey for site faculty and staff to complete. Attached to each survey was a letter of introduction from the researcher that also reviewed the purpose of the study and reinforced the confidentiality of responses. With the help of the school district's Administrative Assistant, surveys were placed into teacher and staff mailboxes located in each school's office or staff room. Each survey included a self- addressed, stamped envelope with a request for participants to return the survey to the researcher within two weeks of receipt. The researcher also placed a reminder notice in the faculty and staff mailboxes one week after initial distribution. The researcher coded the surveys to allow for follow up questions or interviews.

Interviews

Interviews, both formal and informal, were conducted with the former and current district superintendent, the assistant superintendent, two board members, the current principals, the administrative assistant, the office managers/secretaries, ten teachers representing a variety of grade levels including a union representative, the reading specialist, the technology coordinator/teacher, the head custodian, and the president of

one of the school's parent organizations. The semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendices 4-7) was based upon questions created by the researcher. However, the researcher was flexible to move beyond the confines of the established questions to seek further insight into areas of interest. Interviews with the aforementioned people were in person and lasted approximately one hour; however, additional responses and clarifications were later given upon request via telephone or e-mail communications. Additionally, the researcher was open to interviews of persons not included on the original list should the study indicate a need. Interviews followed the protocol suggested by Creswell (1994) including follow-up on key questions to solicit more information, note taking, and tape-recording sessions. Informal interviews were documented on paper using some of the interview guide questions and were shorter in length. Due to the nature of this study, students were not interviewed.

Observations

Observations of the school district were guided by an instrument used by the state's Department of Education. The researcher conducted observations in ten classrooms and focused on teacher behaviors, instructional strategies, and student responses and behaviors. Informal observations included extensive common areas of the school such as the playground, the teachers' lunch room, and the teachers' workroom. Employees and students were quietly observed while on task and at various times throughout the data collection period.

Informal and formal observations were recorded by the researcher using Cornell Note-taking strategies (Allen, 2004) where documentation of events was recorded on the right side of the paper and reflective analysis was written on the left side of the paper.

Artifact/Document Analysis

Analysis of documentation included, but were not limited to, the schools' Single Site

Plans, School Accountability Report Cards, achievement test results, the schools' safety

plans, the established goals of each school, and the district's objectives and mission

statements, program materials, individual student achievement reports, teacher

handbooks, daily bulletins, memos, and school newsletters.

Data Collection Process

According to Huberman and Miles (1984), the process should consider the following

elements of a study prior to data collection: the setting, who will be observed or

interviewed, the events to be documented, and the process by which the collection will

occur.

In September, 2005, prior to the collection of the data, the school district's

superintendent was contacted. The researcher sent a proposal to the superintendent and

scheduled a phone conference for the purpose of introduction and presentation of ideas.

Qualitative designs lend themselves to much interpretation which, in turn, reveals

there is no "right way" to analyze the data (Tesch, 1990). The purpose of the study was

to identify leadership and cultural factors that help to explain how a rural school district

had exceeded student achievement expectations. The data collection strategies served to

find answers to the three research questions.

Table 1

Data Collection Timeline

Date	Activity	Participants
September, 2005	Contacted and Sent Proposal to District Superintendent	Superintendent Researcher
December, 2007	Apply for IRB approval for the study.	UNLV IRB Panel Researcher
February, 2008	Contact and meet with Superintendent.	Superintendent Researcher
February, 2008	Attend staff meetings to introduce study and timeline.	School Faculty and Staff Researcher
February, 2008	Meet with Administrative Assistant and Office Managers to obtain district and school documents and artifacts.	Administrative Assistant Office Manager Researcher
February, 2008	Disseminate surveys to all faculty and staff.	Administrative Assistant Researcher
February – April, 2008	Schedule and conduct district and site interviews. Consent to Participate Forms delivered and collected to all interview participants.	Superintendent Principals Teachers and Staff Researcher
February – April, 2008	Conduct district, site and classroom observations.	Superintendent Principals Teachers and Staff Researcher
February – April, 2008	Schedule and conduct District personnel, Board Member and community member interviews.	District Personnel Researcher
April, 2008	Contact the Superintendent for a closing meeting.	Superintendent Principals School Staff Researcher

Data Analysis

Survey/Questionnaire

A five question, open-ended survey was distributed to site faculty and staff. Directions and a self-addressed, stamped envelope were attached to the survey so respondents could return them to the researcher. Responses were word processed, coded and categorized by the researcher to identify similar patterns and emerging themes.

Interviews

All interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed in order to identify common themes among the interviews.

Observations

Both formal and informal observations were documented through field notes, and the researcher recorded written reflections on each experience. Formal observation included shadowing the superintendent and two of the principals for a half day and observing teachers for twenty minutes per classroom. Observations also entailed attending staff meetings, grade level meetings, and parent meetings. Observations were conducted in ten classrooms of varying grade levels. All formal observations were conducted where the role of the researcher was known and the researcher observed without participating. This type of observation lends itself to exploring topics that may be uncomfortable for participants to discuss (Creswell, 1994).

Document/Artifact Analysis

The researcher utilized constant comparative analysis to triangulate the data to look for overarching themes that emerged from the research questions. According to Creswell (2005) the process of triangulating qualitative evidence from different individuals, types

of data, or methods of data collection in descriptions and themes ensures that the study will be accurate and credible because the information draws on multiple sources of information, individuals, or processes.

This study analyzed data inductively, reaching conclusions based upon observations. The heart of inductive analysis is that categories, themes, and patterns emerge from the data collected during open-ended observations, interviews, and examination of artifacts (Janesick, 1994; Patton, 1990). The advantage of this thematic approach to analysis is that it directly represents the perspective of the participants rather than that of the researcher. In qualitative research, analysis is ongoing. In this study data analysis involved the concurrent coding of raw data and the construction of categories that captured relevant characteristics of the data being collected.

The primary source that guided the researcher's data analysis came from the work of Miles and Huberman (1994). According to Miles and Huberman, data analysis consists of three major activities: data reduction, data display, as well as a conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction involves condensing the data through "selecting, focusing, and simplifying, abstracting, and transforming" (p.10). Some of the typical tasks in data reduction include summarizing and coding. Qualitative data analysis should start while data collection is in process (Miles & Huberman; Patton, 2002). Analyzing the data collected during the beginning phases of field work helps generate patterns, themes, and hypotheses, all of which help inform later data collection that tries to confirm and disconfirm emerging themes and patterns.

Data display refers to activities that organize and assemble information into matrices, graphs, charts, and networks. Miles and Huberman (1994) noted that by display they

mean a visual format that presents information systematically, so that the user can draw valid conclusions. This study used matrices and charts as a means to display the mass of text that was written or transcribed. As with data reduction, the process of displaying data was part of the interactive nature of the data analysis.

The third data analysis activity is conclusion drawing and verification. This occurred from the start of the data collection and involved the noting of regularities, patterns, explanations, possible configurations, causal flows and propositions. To achieve this, the researcher used exploratory data displays, as well as the analytical memos written on the information gathered.

During the initial stages of data collection, as themes emerged from the data, the researcher redefined and discarded codes that were not applicable or those that were ill-fitting. The researcher focused on ensuring that the codes were related to one another, to the structure of the research questions, and were distinct from others in meaning (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data analysis was largely done manually and with partial aid of a word processor. Notebooks and file folders (Miles & Huberman) were used to systematically store the coded field data for easy retrieval during analysis.

Summary

This chapter presented the design and procedure for the qualitative case study. The chapter discussed the purpose of the selected approach, the types of collection procedures, including survey/questionnaire, interview, observation and artifact/document analysis, the procedure for recording the information, and the process of forming conclusions (themes) based on the data collected.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF THE DATA AND INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS

Introduction

Chapter Four presents an analysis of the data collected for the current study. The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship of leadership and school culture to student achievement in a rural school district whose student achievement data exceeded widely held expectations. Qualitative case study methodology was used to ascertain data from a rural school district whose student achievement data, based on the statewide assessment reports, demonstrated remarkable growth over more than a six year period.

Data from the years 1999 – 2008 were examined for this study. All of the interviews were conducted in the spring of 2008. The framework for this study was based upon the three research questions:

1. What are the factors in the academic and extra-curricular programs that support a rural school district which has exceeded academic expectations?

2. What are the factors in leadership practices that support a rural school district which has exceeded academic expectations?

3. What are contextual cultural factors that support a rural school district which has exceeded academic expectations?

While the factors in each of the research questions occurred simultaneously, they will be examined separately in this analysis.

Despite having very poor test results early on, when the case study's state was establishing benchmarks for their assessment tests, the case study school district only failed to make Annual Yearly Progress once. As a result, they have been able to steadily make achievement progress almost every year they have administered their required state assessment tests. As demonstrated in Table 2, The Hidalgo Unified School District, a pseudonym school district located in the western United States, currently has outstanding assessment results in all of its schools. Figure 1 shows the growth of Academic Performance Indicators (API) Assessment Results for the Hidalgo Unified School District over a 10 year period.

Table 2

School District Assessment Results

	High School		Primary School		Junior High School		Elementary School	
	API	Made AYP	API	Made AYP	API	Made AYP	API	Made AYP
1999	509		632		562		484	
2000	508		668		588		555	
2001	515		675		616		585	
2002	568		734		623		613	
2003	619	No	778	Yes	662	No	625	No
2004	672	Yes	783	Yes	649	Yes	639	Yes
2005	696	Yes	815	Yes	706	Yes	673	Yes
2006	646	Yes	857	Yes	725	Yes	691	Yes
2007	673	Yes	837	Yes	766	Yes	688	Yes
2008	716	Yes	822	Yes	756	Yes	743	Yes
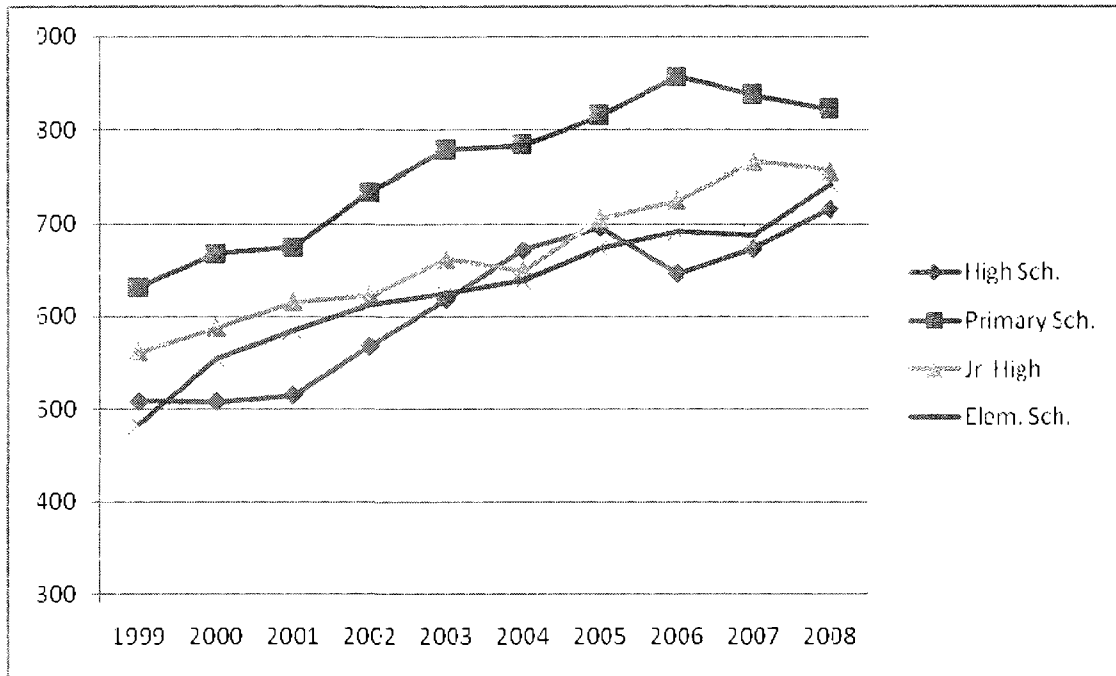
Figure1. School District API Assessment Results

The following instruments were used to collect the data and respond to the three

research questions developed for the study:

    a.   An open-ended questionnaire of the district faculty and staff:

    b.   Interviews with site and district faculty, staff, board members, and

          community members. All names are pseudonyms, but represent

          individuals involved in the study;

      i. Mr. Martinez, the superintendent from 1986 to 2006.

     ii. Mr. Reeves the current superintendent and former elementary

          school principal in the district's most remote school.

    iii. Two board members who have served on the board for more than

          two terms.

    iv. Mrs. Updike, assistant superintendent since 2004

v. All four current principals

1. Mrs. Castillo, an elementary school principal since 2006
    and former teacher in the district.

2. Mrs. White, an elementary school principal since 2007.

3. Mr. Escobar, the junior high school principal since 2005.

4. Mrs. Blanco, the high school principal since 2004.

vi. Mrs. Tello, the Administrative Assistant since 1980

vii. Ten teachers (3 high school, 4 elementary and 3 junior high). All
of these teachers had been teaching in the district for the past 5
years.

viii. Mr. Dawkins, the Technology Director since 2008.

ix. Mr. Clink, the Head Custodian since 1982.

c. On-site formal and informal observations;

d. Analysis of school, district and program artifacts/documentation.

The following is a presentation of each research question, corresponding data, and discussion of the findings as they related to the study.

Hidalgo Unified School District Background

The Hidalgo Unified School District, like many rural school districts, has experienced little demographical change in the past ten years. According to citydata.com, the town in which the case study school district is located had a population in July 2007 of 7,638 citizens. This is a slight increase since 2000 of 4.7%. Also, according to citydata.com, the estimated median household income in 2007 was $31,003. It was $30,962 in 2000.

The racial makeup of the case study school district community is comprised of the following groups: Hispanic (57.3%), Black (21.3%), White Non-Hispanic (19.9%), Two or more races (2.2%), American Indian (1.2%). This total can be greater than 100% because Hispanics could be counted in other races, as cited by citydata.com.

Citydata.com reported that the most common occupations in the case study school district community for men are as follows: agricultural workers, including supervisors (18%), law enforcement workers including supervisors (11%), building and grounds cleaning and maintenance occupations (7%), driver/sales workers and truck drivers (6%). Citydata.com goes on to claim that the most common occupations for females in the case study community include: office and administrative support workers, including supervisors (7%), child care workers (6%), supervisors and other personal care and service workers except personal appearance, transportation, and child care workers (6%), bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks (6%), teachers and instructors, education, training, and library occupations (5%), agricultural workers including supervisors (5%).

The Hidalgo Unified School district consists of five schools. There are two elementary schools. The elementary school in town has a student population of 356. The other elementary school in a nearby village has a student population of 119. The junior high school for the district has a student population of 323. The one high school in the district has 358 students that attend. Finally, the district has one small continuation high school.

Martinez had been the Hidalgo Unified School District Superintendent since 1986. For the first ten years of his superintendence, the district's student achievement performance was below the average of comparable rural school district's. Additionally,

the turnover rate of certificated staff was high. A veteran teacher explained, "Because of our low pay and poor academic record, staff usually came and went within a few years of joining our district." However, starting in 1999, when Martinez introduced his vision for improved student achievement to all the stakeholders, (staff, board members, parents, and students) improvements steadily began to take place.

Reeves, having been with the district since 2000 as one of the elementary school principals, assumed the superintendent position in 2006 when Martinez retired. The district has enjoyed relative stability in its administration throughout this improvement process. In 2006, Reeves was replaced by Castillo at the district's smallest elementary school. Castillo had attended school in the district as a child. White is the newest administrator in the district. She replaced a retiring principal who had been with the district for over 20 years. Escobar became the junior high school principal in 2005. Prior to becoming a principal in the district, he taught at the junior high school for three years. He, too, grew up in the district. Finally, Blanco, who had grown up in a town about 15 miles away from the Hidalgo Unified School District, became the high school principal after Martinez and the former high school principal openly disagreed in a staff meeting. Martinez believed that all students could learn and the former high school principal did not. Martinez told this former principal that he should look elsewhere for work.

As with many small rural communities in America, the pace of life tends to remain fairly constant. Change, if it occurs, happens slowly and with a high degree of skeptism. Hidalgo Unified School District, the case study school district, and its community were no different. Even Martinez, the former superintendent, who had been in his position since 1986, was slow to accept the idea that his district needed to become somewhat

innovative. It was not until he attended a workshop sponsored by Far West Laboratories in 1998 that he had a self-described "epiphany." There were hundreds of principals and assistant principals in attendance at this conference, but Martinez was the only superintendent. When others in attendance broke out in small groups to complete assigned activities, Martinez worked alone. The primary task asked of the attendees was to create their ideal school. This activity, along with the encouragement of the workshop facilitators, inspired Martinez to think about his district in ways that he had never considered. While at the workshop, Martinez worked with one of the facilitators until the very early hours of the morning brainstorming ideas. Martinez related, "He comes over in his pajamas and on some of the mats in the room we start making some notes. He developed a model and came up with ideas that I have used in our schools." Martinez and the facilitator realized that in order to bring about real meaningful change in his district they would have to first develop a belief system. They came up with what they called their six pillars. Martinez described the pillars as "100% defensible and something that nobody would challenge." The first one was simplistic – All students can learn. From there, Martinez and the facilitator continued to expand their vision for the new belief system.

When Martinez went public with his proposed vision in 1999, that his school district needed to take the lead in the accountability movement, many on his staff and those in his community were reluctant to embrace his proposed changes. First, Martinez took his late night work back to his staff for their input. His ideas for change were initially met with overwhelming resistance. In fact, according to Martinez, one of his principals indicated that he could not accept the idea that all students had the capacity to learn. This

admission was quite distressing to Martinez and he had a difficult time believing that an administrator in his district really believed that some students could not learn. Martinez told that administrator, "Walk out those double doors in the back of the cafeteria and go find a job somewhere else." This admonishment was done in front of the entire staff. At that the principal got up and walked out. He later became an elementary school principal in a neighboring school district.

As a result of this critical event in 1999, the staff went on to develop 22 basic beliefs on which they could all agree. Martinez admits that some of these beliefs were pretty complex. However, the process encouraged them to begin thinking differently about their district and it helped them to come together as a district wide staff. Teachers and staff members began to realize that having different textbooks throughout the school and district was counterproductive to their goals. "We needed to become a more unified staff rather than the autonomous collection of teachers that we had become," proclaimed Martinez.

It was raining during the meeting at which Martinez decided to present the 22 basic beliefs to the board. The room used for this meeting developed a major leak. In fact, just as Martinez was asking the board for their support, the ceiling collapsed. Martinez used this opportunity to remind the board that budget oversight of the building maintenance fund was their responsibility. According to Martinez, the average assessed valuation of a home in his district was less than $22,000. Due to the vast amount of farm land within the district's boundaries, there was enough of a tax base to support a bond. Convincing the community's agricultural constituents to support a bond would not normally be easy. During this time, there was considerable turmoil in the county regarding assessed taxes

on farm land, so when the idea of supporting a bond for schools was presented the farmer

landowners did not want to appear unwilling to support the local economy. Therefore,

the farmers reluctantly supported the bond initiative. The district began immediately

looking at floating a bond. It took three votes before a bond finally passed, but working

as a cooperative group, the staff and board were successful. Today, the Hidalgo Unified

School district has three beautiful school complexes all within one large city block.

These facilities are the source of school and community pride.

After the district successfully built its new schools, the next area to address was the

need to properly train personnel in bilingual education. Martinez contacted the local

university and requested its assistance. The university was excited to help. Beginning in

2002, Martinez scheduled this training during school hours and made it mandatory for his

staff.

Next, in 2003, the district began to examine its teachers' credentials. Many of the

teachers were teaching grades and subject areas that they did not have the proper

credential to teach. Initially, some of the teachers felt as though the district was saying

that they were "bad" teachers. However, as Martinez stated, "We knew the teachers were

working very hard. They just needed to work smarter. If the district could help them

work smarter then we should do everything possible to bring that about." It took a lot of

work and persistence to get the staff and board to accept the idea that they could make

their district better. Through the leadership of Martinez, both board members and staff

began to believe they could be a part of the solution rather than just an invisible member

of the district.

The community also played a huge role in helping the change process occur. In 2003,

community members were asked to attend public meetings to share their school improvement ideas. Both English and Spanish speaking parents and community members attended to share their concerns and ideas. The district also introduced them to the 22 basic beliefs developed by the staff. According to Martinez, "We put English on one side of the room, Spanish on the other. We had translators." At this meeting, the facilitators placed large sheets of paper on one side of the room. They asked the parents to write down what they thought the district was doing well. On other pieces of paper, they asked them to write down what they would like to see changed in the district. The 400 people that attended this first meeting took the opportunity seriously. Some of the comments were, according to Martinez, "real personal matters." As one teacher remembers, "Primarily people wanted their schools to meet their students' needs." Their suggestions are included in some of the following comments: "Teach my son to read at his grade level." "Help my student to be better prepared for life after school." "Give my child's teachers the tools they need to teach my child." "Hire staff that knows our community issues." Martinez and the other administrators took all of these comments and suggestions back to the staff for consideration.

As the staff and community gained feelings of empowerment, attitudes and perceptions began to change. Martinez recalls, "Our people, both staff and community members, began to feel some ownership and pride for their schools." As additional meetings were organized for specific improvement topics, staff and community members willingly attended. "Our stakeholders came together during these early meetings because they felt like they could help make a positive difference," according to Reeves.

The district began to look for means by which it could implement some of the ideas

that had been generated by both the staff and the community. According to Martinez, "We probably should have prioritized our improvement plan ideas but we really didn't need to. At subsequent meetings our staff and community members decided where our immediate areas of need were and worked to address them."

One of the first procedures to be implemented as a result of these early meetings was an early release of students on Wednesdays so that teachers could have weekly staff development time. "This was very, very important," stated by Martinez. Additionally, he says, "Giving our staff the time to collaborate and plan was critical to the overall gains we made in student achievement."

According to Martinez, getting the parents involved meant one had to get them to the schools. He went on to say, "What we found out was to get them here, we had to feed them. Feed them when they come; if they come." Martinez realized that a majority of parents worked in the fields. Many were too tired at the end of a day to plan a meal for their family and attend a meeting. He provided the meal and a babysitter and parents came in overwhelming numbers; 400 attended their earlier meetings. Martinez recalls how parents readily bought into the new belief statements and were prepared to hold the district accountable for their implementation.

Another idea that the administration and teachers believed would help improve student achievement was the hiring of as many qualified local people as possible. Martinez and the principals began to employ as many local people for both classified and certificated positions as they could. "Small, rural communities need the support of their local folks," said Martinez. This study's data indicated that almost all of the classified staff members were raised in the community in which the case study took place. In

recent years, many of the teachers and administrators hired have also been locals. Martinez and Reeves, the retired and current superintendents, claimed that the support the district demonstrates for its local citizens is reciprocated by the community for its schools.

At the staff's suggestion, and with the support of the parents, one of the next programs to be developed was the free breakfast program for all students. The board, as described by Martinez, fully supported this idea. They approved the implementation of the free breakfast program for all students in 2004. According to Reeves, this free meal program is still popular with the students. "By having our students' nutritional needs met, it meant they would perform both academically and behaviorally better in our schools," said Escobar, the junior high school principal.

As these changes began to take place and people began to see positive results, some of the more reluctant staff began to feel the pressure from others, according to Martinez. "Some of this pressure was verbal and open and some of it was…self-inflicted," indicated Martinez. He remembers that, without much prompting, many of these reluctant staff members began to realize they needed to raise their expectations.

Eventually, it became apparent to Martinez and the rest of the staff that the current evaluation process was not adequate to meet their newly developed goals. In the past, the district's typical evaluation only praised the teacher without making any real suggestions for improvement. In 2005, working cooperatively, the stakeholder groups developed a completely new evaluation process and instrument. It took some time for all the staff to understand that the new evaluation process was not designed to be punitive but, instead, helpful. According to Martinez, the new evaluation process was designed not to tolerate

mediocrity. As he said, "You cannot change what you will tolerate. So, if you want excellence from your teachers, you cannot allow less than excellence from them. Change will only take place when we no longer accept the status quo."

As ascribed by Martinez, the heart of the new evaluation process was its data driven base. "Data is the foundation of all of us," according to Martinez. However, he went on to say that the new evaluation process had prompted a rise in the professional expectations for all staff members.

One of the last major accomplishments for Martinez before he retired in 2006 was to raise the standard for hiring staff; most notably, the hiring of principals. As described by Martinez, "With a small community like this, it is critical that they know your expectations and they see examples of them all the time." Prior to this time, the board hired the principals. Martinez convinced the board to step aside and let him do the hiring. Getting each part of the educational community to do its part without stepping into other peoples roles has made a fundamentally positive change for the Hidalgo Unified School District. Martinez mentioned that he believes a key aspect to the success his rural school district has experienced in making academic improvement is the hiring of outstanding school principals. In his words, "Do not underestimate the value of a good principal. You can have a group of good teachers. But that does not necessarily mean the job is getting done." Martinez points out that the current junior high principal, Joe Escobar, is the best principal in the county. This is an opinion echoed by all of the personnel interviewed at the junior high school. Martinez credits the success of this principal to his work ethic. "No one works harder than Joe." He has high expectations and inspires his staff. As a result of this principal's example, Martinez claims that there is no more dedicated staff

than the junior high school.

Martinez created a climate in which change was possible. Today, Reeves, the current superintendent, carries this torch. He continues to remind staff that data must drive decision making. He holds the line on hiring the best possible staff regardless of the political ramifications. He maintains the same high standards that were established almost 10 years ago so that all students in his district have all of their educational needs met.

Findings for Established Programs

History/Background of Program Implementation at the District

Martinez revealed that during the late 1990's and early 2000's the district's test scores had been flat and that they were consistently low. However, school and district employees were comfortable with their status because the turnover in certificated employees was so high that no one took ownership of these low test scores. The increase of state and national attention toward school accountability and standards-based education was the catalyst for the district to focus attention on the negative implication of low student achievement.

In the past, the school district prided itself on offering extra-curricular activities and programs that were not necessarily academic in nature, but provided students with activities that were fun and in an environment that was safe. According to a veteran third grade teacher, the school offered after-school programs such as sports, art, and cultural activities. During 2003, in response to the low achievement data and rising accountability movement, the district began to focus attention on researching and

implementing best practice and academic programs for all schools.

The shift in focus is evident in the school district's mission statement: "The Hidalgo Unified School District is committed to providing all students in the district a quality educational program with qualified, professional, trained staff in a safe school environment. All schools in the district share, with the home and community, the responsibility to provided educational opportunities for all students to increase their learning experiences, make them critical thinkers, to acquire academic skills, and to develop the values necessary for effectively competing in a global society." The mission statement draws attention to the district's belief that, "...All schools in the district share with the home and community the responsibility to provide educational opportunities for all students". According to Escobar, his school has embraced one of the military creeds, "There is none more professional than I." Escobar claims, "This has made all the difference." As outlined by Escobar, the following are just a few of the attributes of the teachers in the Hidalgo Unified School District:

        a. Loyalty to school and students

        b. Integrity to the teaching profession

        c. Duty to the teaching profession

        d. Selfless service to students"

Timing played a large role in the resources that were made available to support the implementation of the district's new academic focus. Under the direction of Martinez, the district started its own accountability system. As this accountability system was put in place, it become apparent that the district was extremely weak in two fundamental academic sub-group populations: (a) special education students and (b) English language

learners students. During this initial stage of the accountability system, there were teachers and board members who thought these two sub-groups did not count. Martinez claims this was his struggle; to legitimize education for all the students of his district. He had to find programs that would work and gain support from the staff for their implementation. Added to the findings of the new accountability system was a report from a district assessment report that advocated for decentralization of every aspect of the schools, especially at the high school. As a result, the district office had no oversight of curriculum, instruction, funding, or staffing. Martinez claims that convincing the board that this report's findings were contrary to sound educational practices was his greatest challenge.

While at the Far West Laboratory workshop in 1998, the former superintendent, along with all of the attendees, was asked to design a school district from scratch. With the assistance of one of the workshop facilitators, Martinez developed his vision for transforming his district into an educational institution of excellence for all students.

Getting the staff to embrace the task of improving curriculum and instruction was difficult. Some of them claimed that the administration was using this improvement process to point out that they were poor teachers. Martinez told the teachers that he admired their dedication to the profession. He told them that he saw their cars in the school's parking lot late into the afternoon and evenings. However, they needed to begin to work smarter. They needed to focus more on accentuating the positive work they were doing while eliminating the negative or ineffective work. Some of the teachers decided that they needed to leave the district, but most were excited to stay and embrace the new positive energy that was beginning to develop.

As more and more new programs were successfully implemented, staff began to have more confidence in the improvement process. As the staff's confidence in the district grew, the levels of trust also began to rise. Improved levels of trust allowed the district to begin looking within to enhance the performance of their teachers. For example, if one teacher was having success in an academic area, they were made a mentor or facilitator for the other teachers in that grade or subject area. As a result, buy-in from the staff grew. This process helped the younger teachers become successful at a more rapid rate. Thus, these students experienced greater success than ever.

Martinez identified four critical aspects of his district that needed to be developed in order for his vision of district improvement to be successful.

        a. Data-driven decision making

        b. Parent educational opportunities

        c. Staff development

        d. Meeting every student's needs

Utilizing the data analysis expertise of the district's assistant superintendent, Updike, data soon became the driving force for positive change. Updike was able to teach the staff to gather and then analyze data to assess student achievement. Martinez required all staff members to use these data to help determine their own successes or failures. The board and the staff really began to support this approach to change. As a result, the data began to reflect the fact that the Hidalgo Unified School District was doing a better job of educating students than its neighboring school districts. In the early stages of this change process, there were not as many assessment instruments as there are today. Martinez said that the district used norm-referenced tests as a guide. However, some of the best

assessment instruments were developed in-house. Teachers would use their own assessment data to help determine success and failure of their instruction and curriculum.

As more and more community members became involved in their schools, it quickly became apparent to Martinez that the students were not the only group of people who needed new educational opportunities. He saw that his students' parents would benefit from the opportunity to learn to speak and read English. For some parents, the ability to acquire their high school diploma or GED meant the possibility of attaining a better life. Martinez reported that as a result of improving the parents' education he believed their students' achievement levels correspondingly improved. Adding adult education classes and workshops encouraged parents to come to the school site. This unintended result allowed for better communication with the parents. Ultimately better communication resulted in improved community relations with the parents and other stakeholders in the community.

Staff development was also an area that had to be addressed in this new climate of change. In order to improve student achievement, teachers had to have time to work on their areas of need. The district implemented an early release day each week so that the staff could have an hour and a half dedicated to their development. This focused approach to improvement yielded positive results.

Finally, Martinez pointed out that the most important aspect to bringing about meaningful change to a school district is getting everyone to focus on individual students' needs. Prior to instituting these changes, Martinez and Reeves agreed that the staff did not accept that it was possible or practical to meet every student's needs. In fact, 10 to 15 years ago it was unacceptable to think that a teacher was responsible for meeting every

students needs. In other words, it was acceptable to have students "slip through the cracks" and fail. It was necessary for the district to remove those teachers who believed it was not their responsibility to work to meet every student's needs. The board and the administration had to support the concept of unifying the district's belief that all students could learn and that it was everyone's responsibility to make sure that all students had the opportunity to fulfill their potential.

Factors in the Academic Extra-Curricular Programs

Research question one asked, "What are the factors in the academic and extra-curricular programs that support a rural school district which has exceeded academic expectations?" The purpose of this question was to identify the extent to which the programs offered by the district promote student achievement and success. Data for question one were collected via faculty and staff surveys and questionnaires, interviews, formal and informal observations, and review of program literature and student achievement reports. Multiple data collection procedures were employed to provide a triangulation of data to sufficiently answer the question.

During the time period of this study, the district implemented the following categorical programs: School Improvement Program (SIP), Miller-Unruh Program (Reading Specialist), Economic Impact Aid/Limited English Proficient (EIA/LEP), and After School Programs.

Table 3 identifies the programs in the elementary schools of the district during the data collection effort that had an impact on increasing student achievement at the Hidalgo Unified School District. A description and analysis of each will be presented thereafter.

Table 3

Academic Intervention Strategies and Core Curriculum Programs

Name	A.K.A.	Focus	Time	Description	Dates of implementation	Intervention Strategy or Core Curriculum
Accelerated Reader®	AR®	K-6 Students	Before/ during lunch, after school	Computer software reading program used for individual instruction and assessment	2004	Both
Accelerated Math®	AM®	K-6 Students	Before/ during lunch, after school	Computer software math program used for individual instruction and assessment	2005	Primarily an intervention strategy
After School Program	ACES	K-12 Students	Noon to 6:00p.m.	Individual and small group academic remediation, recreation and art programs designed by the school and district	2004	Intervention strategy
Step Up To Writing	Step Up To Writing	K-12 Students	During school	District-wide adopted writing program	2006	Core curriculum
Character Counts	Character Counts	K-8 Students	During school	Elementary and Jr. High School programs adopted to improve student character	2005	Both

Accelerated Reader®

Background

Reflecting upon the low student achievement records, Martinez was focused on researching and implementing effective programs to improve reading and math scores throughout the district. He convened several meetings of the district principals to discuss a program called Accelerated Reader® (AR®). Subsequent meetings included teachers and parents who quickly embraced the program. Staff were trained and the software, equipment, and reading books were purchased for all elementary classrooms and libraries.

The state's Academic Performance Index (API) was the key to moving school and district officials in the direction of using data to tailor programs to help students succeed. Updike credits the API with "really helping the school district to zero in on students that needed assistance; to help find those kids and really focus in on reading and vocabulary." In the view of Updike, anything that could increase vocabulary would help their students' achievement levels on state-mandated tests. It was the philosophy of the group of staff to focus on individual student needs to raise student achievement and AR® served that purpose well.

Focus

In the first years of implementation of Accelerated Reader® the main focus was to help the schools improve their reading scores. The focus for reading intervention through the AR® program was not limited to those students who measured low on grade level standards, but also students who were advanced in their reading capabilities. A 20 year teacher credited Martinez and Escobar with recognizing the benefit of offering

enrichment activities for advanced level students. Martinez and the site principal

identified advanced students and created interventions for them as well.

Description

Accelerated Reader® is a component of the Renaissance Learning Program whose

software solutions enable schools to ensure success for every student, meet the

requirements of the No Child Left Behind legislation, supplement curriculum and help

students master state standards in a fun and meaningful way. The program serves as a

conduit between the library and the classroom. Technology is also an important strand

that ties the program together. Students choose books from the library based on their

reading level which was derived from a computerized quiz that is connected to the

materials. Students select books based on interest and their established reading level. A

computerized test is given to the students after they have completed the reading. The

program grades the quiz and offers an instant reward of points based on the length and

difficulty of the book. The software keeps track of which books the students have read,

the results of their tests, and their cumulative points. Teachers are able to modify the

program to meet their classroom instructional needs and time.

The strength of AR® lies in its ability to provide teachers, principals, and

superintendents the immediate diagnostic feedback they need to monitor student

progress, adjust instruction, and evaluate the strengths of the school wide standard-based

program.

Evidence

The greatest indicator of program success is the voluntary use of the program by

students. They regularly gave up recess or after school activities to work on the program.

Martinez and Updike, the current assistant superintendent, credit AR® and the After School Program for the district's gains in API scores at the two elementary schools. A first grade teacher credits the AR® program for allowing student to, "experience written words." The teacher went on to say, "The vast majority of my students are really into it [the program] and they are learning to read."

AR® is a data-driven program that uses ongoing individualized assessment to move student achievement upwards. Updike credits AR® for contributing to continual gains in API scores because "it was just so much more targeted." Reeves claims that the focus on data-driven, site level improvements has emanated throughout the district and has become a part of the district's practice and culture.

Accelerated Math®

Background

A year after seeing the success of AR® and the impact the program had on the district's standardized test scores, Martinez became interested in exploring the Accelerated Math® (AM®) component of the Renaissance Learning program. The district made staff development time and money available for training in AM® the following year. Utilizing AM® in conjunction with their adopted math textbooks and curriculum has had very positive results throughout the district.

Need

Martinez, along with the principals, noticed that students were not performing at grade level. All elementary schools started first with interventions in reading and then targeted at-risk students in math. Initially, the emphasis was placed on those students who performed slightly below grade level. Martinez felt the result for this group would

be timelier. Once the program was in place and improvements were being realized, they began working with students who were more at-risk.

Focus

AM® was used by some teachers to supplement their mathematics instruction, and was also used as an intervention for at-risk students in math. AM®, as an at-risk intervention, was offered to students in the After School Program facilitated by a teacher.

Description

AM® was an optional program for teachers to use with their students in math and was similar to the AR® program mentioned previously. A retired elementary school principal described using it in her school and pointed out that it went right along with her math instruction. Those students identified by test scores as at-risk in math were encouraged to attend before school, at-lunch, and after school tutorial sessions.

Resources

Similar to the resources highlighted for AR®, AM® is contingent upon working technology, teacher training, and time. AM® is not a required program and, therefore, is not as widely used as AR®. However, AM® is used as an intervention tool for at-risk math students and requires computers to be available for all tutorial sessions.

Evidence

One of the principals praised the program because of "how much the kids like it". He went on to comment that the students just couldn't wait to do math and the program was based on state standards.

In an interview with a former principal, she noted that it was a very popular program with parents, too. Parents supported the after-school program by not only allowing their

children to attend, but several also volunteered to help. One of the parents interviewed exclaimed, "I am very grateful for this program. My son's scores are improving every year."

<center>*Step Up To Writing®*</center>

Background

Step Up To Writing® is a series of writing strategies produced by Sopris West, a Colorado publisher. All district elementary and language arts teachers had been trained in the *Step Up To Writing®* strategies. The *Step Up To Writing®* strategies support standards-based, state-adopted writing programs already in place in the local schools. These user-friendly strategies remove writing barriers, as well as demystify the writing process for all students. Primary grade students learn the importance of organization and begin to talk-draw their first paragraph by the end of their kindergarten year. Students in 1st and 2nd grades produce well-written, expository, single paragraphs, as well as generate short fictional narratives. Students in grades 3-12 produce well-written, multi-paragraph, expository essays and creative narrative stories. Since reading and writing are inseparable, and many skills from one domain transfer to the other, reading comprehension and vocabulary development are embedded in the training.

Over 80% of teachers at the case study district reported that the *Step Up To Writing®* strategies enable hesitant writers to quickly embrace classroom writing activities. A third grade teacher stated, "I love this program. Our students produce more writing that is significantly above grade level than they ever did before." Through the use of *Step Up To Writing®,* students produce pre-writing outlines that are the basis for concise, well-organized essays. They also develop pre-writing story-maps that serve as templates for

creative, focused narratives. The *Step Up To Writing®* strategies provide additional linguistic resources for these students that consequently enable them to enhance their writing quality. Due to the high English language learner population in the Hidalgo Unified School District, the program *Step Up To Writing®* has been especially effective in improving writing scores. With these additional tools the students strategically augment their organization, improve sentence structure, and select appropriate text structures.

Researchers, (Hayes & Flower, 1980; Berninger, 1994; Berninger & Swanson, 1994; Berninger, Abbott, Whitaker, Sylvester, & Nolen, 1995) have concluded that writing is a function of several processes that work recursively with one another. Writers must generate and organize their ideas initially, then they must translate their ideas into words, and finally they must revise. Each of these critical steps in the writing process must be taught directly (Gersten & Baker, 2001) and practiced repeatedly (Swanson, Hoskyn, & Lee, 1999) if students are to write coherently and fluently. *Step Up to Writing®* is a program whereby teachers can utilize techniques that incorporate a systematic means by which the writing process is learned and relearned by students.

As a direct result of the *Step Up To Writing®* program, one elementary school principal noticed a significantly improvement in students' writing for all subjects.
Focus

According to both a second- and third-grade teacher, the systematic use of *Step Up To Writing®* by all teachers directly improved their school's API and AYP scores. From the first day of school to the end of the school year, every teacher follows the principles outlined by *Step Up To Writing®*. This uniform approach to writing in the case study

district allowed students to have continuity in their teachers' expectations. "This predictability," as stated by one teacher, "offers a safe environment in which our students feel confident to write. Therefore, they write more often and with far greater fluency than they ever have."

According to Blanco, students, on a daily basis and led by their teachers, follow the prescribed format established by the *Step Up To Writing*® program. Teachers read a story or some genre of literature to spark student interest in developing a written product. Key words from the reading sample are brainstormed by the class. Students then use these keywords to generated additional thoughts and examples. A skeleton worksheet is used to outline the beginnings of a story or essay. Eventually a first draft is penned with subsequent re-writes as the teacher or another student proofreads the first draft.

Evidence

The impact of the *Step Up To Writing*® program was validated during interviews with several of the current principals. Each stated independently that their students were writing better due in large part to the utilization of *Step Up To Writing*®.

Step Up To Writing® was adopted by the Hidalgo Unified School District simply because of the overall awareness of administrative staff in the standards movement. They knew their data, based both on norm-referenced exams and classroom observations, indicated that many of their students were not writing effectively. The staff supported the adoption of a comprehensive K–12 writing program that the researchers had showed was helpful for general education students as well as English language learners. *Step Up To Writing*® met these requirements. Finally, the staff also wanted to be trained quickly in the *Step Up To Writing*® methods of teaching writing.

Many of the staff members, especially K–5th grade teachers, had been especially impressed with the overall effectiveness *Step Up To Writing*® had had on their students. Over 80% of the teachers interviewed claimed that their students were currently testing well above grade level due, in large part, to the techniques that *Step Up To Writing*® had provided to the students and teachers.

Character Counts

Background

Character Counts is a nonpartisan, nonsectarian coalition of schools, communities, and nonprofit organizations working to advance character education by teaching the Six Pillars of Character: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. In 1992, the nonprofit Josephson Institute of Ethics hosted a gathering of experts in ethical and character education to find ways to work together, primarily by developing a common language of core ethical values that transcend religious, political, and socioeconomic differences (http://charactercounts.org/overview/origins.html).

From the outset of developing a plan for improving academic achievement at the Hidalgo Unified School District, it was obvious to Martinez that character education needed to be a part of any improvement plan. As stated by Martinez, "Our students, and even some of our staff, needed to learn how to be successful in general terms before they were going to be successful in specific areas. A program like Character Counts offered our students daily reminders and programs that helped our students learn techniques that enable them to be successful in our classrooms and in our community."

The junior high school principal is the leading proponent for Character Counts in the district. His school utilizes the principles of Character Counts on a constant basis. From

the moment students arrive on campus each day, they are greeted by the principal and his use of the Character Counts principles. The six pillars of Character: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship are his primary focus with each student he encounters. He believes, "It is the responsibility of our school to produce well rounded and well educated students. We can't just fill them full of facts and information and think our job is done. We must help our students to become outstanding citizens, too." Before the implementation of Character Counts, many of the students in the Hidalgo Unified School District lacked the necessary social skills to be successful once they left school. Now graduation rates and post secondary attendance by these students have been dramatically improved.

Need

The administration and teaching staff believed that character is as important as academic excellence. According to Martinez, the staff and the community wanted their students to be excellent people as well as high achieving students. Character Counts seemed to be a natural fit for the Hidalgo Unified School District as it embarked on its cultural rebirth. "I think it's a good idea because sometimes kids don't know about that kind of stuff, like being loyal to friends," said a junior high school teacher.

Character education, whether a specific program or an attitude that is meant to permeate schools, is popular and reflects a nationwide trend. At least 14 states mandate character education in public school. "People felt we all shared a set of common values and it was time that our schools return to a mission that had always been theirs to participate in instilling a common set of principles and values among our children," said Escobar.

Evidence

"It's not just slapping posters on the wall and occasionally talking about good character," said one of the elementary school principals. By design the program makes it clear that character is everyone's responsibility and modeling good behavior throughout the school needed to be a daily occurrence. As one junior high school teacher pointed out, "You don't design a program to change the children. You design a program to change the environment. ... People say it will change the children in the end, but it won't if you don't change the culture."

The assistant superintendent noted that character should also be integrated into the curriculum. Instead of writing a book report, students could be asked to examine a moral dilemma in the story, how the character dealt with it, and how it affected other characters. "You should look at everything that goes on in a school to create the kind of institution you want it to be in terms of embodying values," she said.

While our parents want our schools to help teach character, an elementary school principal discovered that the movement did not always get as much support as it did early on. Nonetheless, the point of teaching character, according to an administrator, was emphasizing values that are "widely shared"; values like respecting others, assuming responsibility, being honest, and being fair. She referred to these as our "basic human values." On these generally shared values, the community does tend to support the school district when an issue arises.

The emphasis on character was taught during weekly assemblies, in lessons on bullying, and in regular goal-setting. Students were asked to set goals for themselves. If, for example, they were missing class assignments and their grades were suffering, they

established as a goal to hand-in all work. This goal was put in writing and taken home for a parent signature.

At school, the student's teacher monitored their progress and kept track of when a goal was accomplished. As Escobar said, "Children are making good decisions. They want to do the right thing, they help each other out. They know what the qualities are for being a good person. We have very few office referrals. They care about the school, and they know the adults care about them, too."

Related Findings for Program(s) Success

Frequently cited in survey documentation, interviews, and observations were the support elements that enabled teachers at the district's schools to not only pursue and successfully implement programs, but also institutionalize and maintain use of the programs despite recognized challenges. Presented in Table 4 are the two most often acknowledged reasons for program success at the schools within the district.

Teacher Training and Collaboration

Reeves proudly shared that his district had possibly created the best integrated staff development program of any district around. For example, the district adopted a brand new state-sponsored reading program and provided Senate Bill 472 Reading

Training to K–8th grade district teachers. The district sponsored 40 hours of reading training for all teachers provided by the publisher during either the summer or the regular school year. While reading was the focus during this training, the district had subsequently conducted similar training for math during that same adoption year.

Table 4

Program Support

Name	AKA	Focus	Time	Description
Teacher Training/Collaboration	Wednesday grade level meetings	Teachers	12:30 - 2:30	Early release for students. Weekly staff development time.
Site and district ongoing assessment	Beginning, mid-, and end-of-the-year assessments running records	K-6 students reading and math	Ongoing	Classroom-based, schoolwide, district-wide individualized assessment.

The district-to-school collaboration effort continued through the training of the administrators. The goal of the training was to teach principals to use data effectively and how to encourage the use of data analysis at their sites and with their teachers. Martinez's vision was to "get teachers to start accessing data on their own and ask for more." A conceivable challenge for principals was to motivate the staff to continue the ongoing effort. Blanco recognized that everyone was a bit overwhelmed and there was more work to be done with the new reading and math programs. Her plan was to bring her leadership team on board first and rely on their input for process.

Martinez was able to get parents to agree to maintain the same number of instructional hours per weak, but increase the length of four school days each week. The end result was the allocation of minutes for staff development time. Students were released at one-thirty one day a week, while teacher remained for planning activities in the afternoon. The teachers used this time in ways that were supported by their principals, but not necessarily directed by the administration. A former principal's philosophy was to avoid having the staff feel "meetinged to death." She would make an

effort to meet with grade levels on Wednesdays, but with a different grade level each week. When asked if the release time helped student achievement, a teacher responded, "I know that it has helped teachers achieve so it must help student achievement. Because you are not going to get any improvement in student achievement without the teachers having their stuff together."

Finally, teachers at the Hidalgo Unified School district were receptive to professional development and training if it correlates with improved student learning. This was most evident in a story shared by a teacher during an interview. According to this teacher, the staff throughout the district had been willing to attend trainings during the summer, on weekends, and in the evenings as long as they felt that their time was going to be rewarded with valuable classroom programs and methods that would help generate higher levels of student achievement. The staff was rarely disappointed.

District and School Ongoing Assessment

One of the former principal's self-proclaimed passions was "keeping data on every kid and making sure they were not stagnating." The intervention programs introduced to the district were data-driven and provided immediate individualized reports on standards-based student achievement. The value of the software programs was their ability to identify individual kids, examine grade levels, observe whole school trends, and/or classroom instruction gaps.

Reeves noted that the principals had access to a myriad of reports to share with their staff in order to generate conversation and promote positive change. When asked how teachers initially responded to using data and assessment, Reeves said there was some resistance but most of that was overcome. Teachers quickly saw that this approach to

improving student achievement made sense.

This study revealed an enormous amount of data resources for teachers to use to guide their instruction and tailor support for individual students. The district's Site Plans claimed that the "results of standards-based performance assessments are routinely analyzed and utilized to drive instruction. Multiple measures are also used to monitor student achievement and make program changes." The measures include, but are not limited to, state norm-referenced tests and criterion-referenced tests, SABE 2, publisher tests for reading and math, running records, promotion-retention criteria, standards-based report cards, AR®, AM®, GATE Screening, AP Exams, SAT, ACT, chapter tests in all content areas, transition criteria, and redesignation/reclassification criteria.

Summary of Findings for Research Question One

The purpose of research question one was to identify the programs the school had implemented that were regarded as having raised student achievement and overall district success. Five programs were most prevalent in faculty and staff surveys, interviews, and observations. Each program was academic in nature, individualized per student need, and provided immediate feedback regarding individual student achievement. Programs benefited both at-risk students and high achieving students by offering meaningful, challenging, and rewarding instruction and assessment.

The data revealed that an overwhelming majority of teachers, staff, and district personnel believed that the programs provided the necessary foundation for ensuring academic success for all students. Though the programs had been affected by budget cuts, there was wide support for the continuance of the commitment to the targeted academic programs. This was evident by the continued financial support from the district

to fund personnel to facilitate the programs and the increased use by students and classroom teachers during the after-school program. District-wide implementation of these programs helped demonstrate the district's leadership and support of these programs.

There was evidence that the content of the intervention programs aligned with the district's goal as outlined in the sites' and district's vision and mission statements and single school plans. The district's focus was on improving reading, developing math skills, providing early intervention for at-risk students, and supporting language development in the ELL population. Each of the five programs supported the state content standards and provided students, parents, and teachers immediate feedback on student areas of need and improvement.

Just as crucial to the effective use of the programs was the painstaking research into their developing motivation to implement them successfully. The district and school sites leadership, described in the following section, was the catalyst for bringing the programs to life on campus.

Leadership Practices that Support a Rural School District

Research question two was, "What are the factors in leadership practices that support a rural school district which has exceeded academic expectations?" The purpose of this question was to identify the formal and informal structures of leadership, discuss decision-making processes at the district and site levels, and assess the impact of leadership on student achievement. The instruments used to answer the research question were faculty and staff survey/questionnaire, site and district interviews, formal and

informal observations, and document/artifact analysis.

Multiple methods of data collection were used to answer the question in order to alleviate any deficiencies.

Background and History of Site Leadership

Approximately 10 years ago, Martinez, the former Hidalgo Unified School District Superintendent, was a man who, according to most of the staff, including the current superintendent, had little support among his staff. According to the Reeves the district was functioning in a "leadership vacuum" and they needed a strong leader to work with key team members to get the focus onto what was really important – student achievement. This sentiment was repeated by a teacher who had been in the district for more than 20 years. From her perspective, the district was really divided and the role of the superintendent was to "make sure each site had its minimal needs met but with no desire to unify the district's schools in any real sense." Ten years ago the environment of the district was much different. The each school site and their staff were completely autonomous. And school site level administration enjoyed the freedom to choose programs and instructional materials without interference from the district. Therefore, there was no coordinated curriculum or instruction at the district level and frequently no coordinated curriculum within an individual school. As a veteran teacher viewed it, the district was in disarray. Martinez claimed that the missing ingredient in this district was "accountability." By having everything decentralized, there was no accountability at the district level and little accountability at the site levels.

Strategies and Practices of Leadership

Martinez decided that putting an accountability system in place before it was

mandated by the state or federal government would be something worth pursuing. He

was met with immediate resistance to this idea and his proposed program. In particular, a

former board member was concerned that if the district began to hold itself accountable

for the achievement levels of ELL and special education. students they [the district]

would look bad. Martinez pointed out that this type of thinking was tantamount to

believing that these subgroups "did not count." By repeatedly pointing out that many

stakeholders, including several board members, had historically accepted the practice of

neglecting the needs of ELL and special education students, Martinez was able to change

people's acceptance of this long time practice. The stakeholders quickly realized that no

group of students should be allowed to be neglected. Within months board members,

staff, and community members came to understand that ignoring these subgroups was

irresponsible.

Another big challenge for Martinez was to convince the board that a decentralized

district was ineffective. He was challenged in the district and in public by the high

school principal on this issue. Martinez cited an example of the high school having

$68,000 in its student body fund as a reason that the district needed to have oversight of

the schools. Additionally, Martinez pointed out that it was not uncommon to go from one

second grade classroom to another on the same campus and find each teacher using

completely different instructional materials. Getting people to see the value in working

together to improve student achievement was something Martinez knew he needed to do,

but he admittedly did not know how to accomplish this task.

When attending a workshop sponsored by the Far West Laboratories, Martinez was

unexpectedly given the answer to how to unify the district and thus improve student

achievement in his rural schools. The presenter told him that he needed to develop a district wide "belief system." Martinez drafted the framework of a belief system that he then took back to his staff for their input. Some of the staff rejected Martinez' ideas and some of them even left the district. However, many staff members embraced his desire to move the district forward. It is these staff members that are today sharing the established district expectations with new staff members.

Most prominently supportive of this new philosophy were the site level principals. They strongly supported the efforts of the district to unify and meet every student's needs. They believed working as a team of collaborative professionals they would be able to better address those needs. The principals began looking at data to drive academic improvement efforts. When a school's staff found that one teacher was having success in a particular area, the principal would organize meetings so that this teacher could share his/her methods. As a result, a small fire of success began to burn in each school.

Martinez and the other administrators then began to examine the evaluation process to help support academic achievement. The district completely re-did the evaluation instrument to help teachers become more successful. At first, teachers were not pleased to receive an evaluation that pointed out areas for improvement, as they were used to getting evaluations that told them they were doing fine.

While all of this internal change was occurring, the superintendent decided to hold a parent meeting to get their feedback on areas the district needed to address in order to make meaningful improvements. It did not take long for things to get pretty heated. There were no sacred cows. Everything was open to criticism. Individuals and

institutionalized programs were publicly criticized. Feelings were hurt, but eventually the air was cleared. By the end of the meeting everyone had a chance to let the district know how they felt.

Some of the specific ideas that came out of this meeting included: (a) beginning a free breakfast program for all students, (b) firing an assistant principal at the high school, (c) providing more staff development time, (d) allowing more parent involvement in the classrooms, (e) using data to make decisions, and (f) improving the hiring process. Getting these ideas in place at each school site took time and collaboration among the district, the staff, and the community. However, according to Martinez, as long as people kept their focus on the primary goal of meeting every student's needs, the work got done. As described by Martinez, the work was hard but very rewarding.

Reeves claimed that each time he had a conversation with a new teacher or principal they still echoed the things that were put in place by Martinez. In small rural school districts, these kinds of conversations are personal and change is possible much quicker than in larger school districts. For example, if you need to make a change in a fourth grade classroom you do not have to collaborate with 20 fourth grade teachers. As stated by the new superintendent, "There are only 3 or 4 fourth grade teachers in the whole district, so getting people to agree to new ideas is much easier and can be quicker than in larger district."

After finally getting the district achievement scores moving up for several consecutive years, from 2001 to 2005, the superintendent decided it was time for him to retire. The school board decided to move a former principal into the position of superintendent. Building upon the success established by Martinez would be the chief

priority of the new superintendent. As students and staff came and went, the challenge of meeting every student's needs continued to be the priority of the new superintendent.

When asked about leadership and its impact on student achievement at the school sites, using surveys and interviews, the most prevalent response was giving credit to the principals' leadership. Simply stated by Martinez, "Do not underestimate the importance of having the right principal at each site." Many people echoed this sentiment. In describing her principal, one teacher said, "He is as effective as any principal I've ever worked for." She goes on to say, "It's hard to be effective and not become unpopular...he is able to do this. In his five years, he has done a remarkable job." Because Martinez had the foresight to hire or retain effective principals, the district has been able to move forward in its desire to improve student achievement.

Description of Leadership Practices at the District Level

Ability to Forecast Trends

Martinez had a knack for becoming well ahead of just about everyone in terms of educational trends, policies, and recognizing implications for the schools sites and the district. Repeated over and over again throughout the data was his ability to access current research in order to stay ahead of the curve.

Martinez was able to predict needs in the classrooms and find ways to satisfy those needs. For example, as a newer teacher at one of the schools commented, Martinez regularly visited her and gave her insights into her most at-risk and challenging students. She believes Martinez was, "perceptive and knew what was going on in each classroom."

Ability to Motivate

The district's unhealthy culture, negative spirit, and low student achievement were a

daunting challenge for Martinez. According to Reeves, Martinez had a rare trait where he could tell the staff, community, and board members what they needed to hear without breaking their spirit. He presented the message that "We're not doing as well as we should be. Our test scores are low. We must improve. Our students deserve better." The difference between his message and other school leaders' approaches was his attention to crafting a "we can do this" message. Not everyone supported this message. In fact, some of the staff in the early stages of this change process decided that they needed to leave the district rather than be a part of this change. However, most of the staff did not perceive the message as criticism. But rather it was thought of as a rally cry to make a difference. Because he was able to push the staff hard for the needs of the students without upsetting them or making them feel like it was personal, many people, including Reeves, felt that he had the perfect leadership qualities needed by the district at that time. By accepting the position that the district needed to take ownership for its circumstances rather than blaming the state, the federal government, the community's demographics, economic circumstances, or any number of other challenges, the district was able to move forward and make real progress. In delivering this message, Martinez created a climate that enabled people to feel empowered and become part of the solution rather than being part of the problem. Demonstrating great tact, diplomacy, good listening skills, and a lot of good counseling enabled Martinez to motivate without alienating people. He created a climate in which people wanted to improve things rather than blame others or remain apathetic.

Superintendent as Visionary

Reeves believed the district was successful because of Martinez's vision. In his

mind, he believed that his predecessor had a vision of what had to happen and was good at finding resources, especially by identifying people who were particularly talented in certain areas.

The most significant change to the culture of the district was a movement towards having an academic focus. An 11 year veteran teacher recognized Martinez's main objectives immediately upon entering the district. Martinez was focused on "identifying at-risk kids and getting interventions going for them. He also identified advanced students and got interventions for them because they affected test scores as well." Reeves perceived the culture to be a "partnership" with a common thread "focused on student achievement." He thought it was part of Martinez's "we're in this together" and "how can we help each other help students" attitude that attracted so much support and participation in the achievement his vision.

Martinez was also uncertain if standards-based instruction had truly become part of the district. His vision was to get all teachers utilizing state standards in their classrooms so that student achievement could be measurable and meaningful. Upon reflection of his many years as superintendent, he was proud of the fact that his vision of creating a data-driven culture had developed. Through the implementation of effective, results-driven interventions, individualized student achievement reports, and staff development time, teachers were more equipped with research to help them improve instruction and, in turn, student achievement. The district became so data-driven that even Martinez used student data reports as a model for other districts to follow. The sites generated reports that the district could then use to identify each child, in each grade level, and all of the interventions with which these children were involved, and track their improvement.

Collaboration and Shared Decision-Making

Martinez was an expert at establishing a core group that could help him realize his vision. By developing good rapport and building a strong leadership team, he was able to develop a bond throughout the district. Even today, Martinez is awestruck about how he was able to form this leadership team. "We lost some very good teachers to other districts because they did not share my vision for our district improvement. However, the vast majority of our staff stayed intact and supports our goals. In fact, some of the most negative people actually stayed and were prominent in helping bring about the improvements we are seeing today."

Martinez was also skilled at identifying strong individuals and bringing them on board. Martinez proudly reported that one of the most negative, but highly respected individuals on staff at the time, a third grade teacher, became one of the most valuable assets to his leadership team. The district office wanted to develop a Writing Intervention Program and the superintendent choose this individual to head the program not only because of her background but also due to the influence she had with the staff. In order to gain her support for any new program, Martinez knew this teacher would have to play a key role in choosing the program. Martinez asked her if she would be willing to examine several writing intervention programs and possibly attend some training for the various programs. The teacher agreed and became the district's leading authority on writing intervention programs. People who respected the third grade teacher were quick to come on board and the program soon spread throughout the district. According to Martinez, "Getting the third grade teacher on board proved to be more difficult because it took her a while to trust me." However, as they began to work together on improving the

school sites they saw that they thought alike and this provided them with common ground to work from.

Martinez not only accessed the human resources available at the district, but recruited some very talented individuals. One of the most significant people that helped to focus the district on data-driven improvements came from the County Office of Education. This administrator helped the district examine and analyze its student data. Martinez remembers that many of the conversation this county administrator and he had were quite heated because they did not always agree on each other's final analysis. Nonetheless, because of their common interest in bringing about district-wide student achievement improvements, they were able to find countless opportunities to focus the staff on looking at data for decision making. This was a completely new approach to decision making in this district. Prior to this time, most decisions had been made on a case by case basis rather than on any type of guiding principles. Getting staff to look at the data and to make meaning of it was a challenge, but by working together Martinez and the county administrator achieved numerous successes for the district.

Another example of Martinez being able to bring in excellent talent to help the district improve occurred during the interview process for the district's middle school principal. The field was narrowed down to three candidates for the superintendent and the school board to consider. Two of the candidates were highly qualified. They had excellent recommendations and many years of experience. The other candidate had just completed his administrative credential process. He was very young with only a few years of teaching experience. However, he was very intelligent and extremely passionate about this potential position. He was also a "local". He had grown up in this community and

was very well respected by its people. Martinez and the school board decided to take a chance and hired the local candidate. According to Martinez this was the best hire he had ever made. Echoing this opinion, two teachers at the middle school stated that they were quite dubious of their colleague being hired as their new principal. However, today they give him the credit for leading them to reach such high levels of academic achievement. Martinez cites the following attribute as the reason Escobar is so outstanding, "His expectations for his students, staff, and himself are sky high and never wavier." Ironically, the principal gives his teaching staff all the credit for doing what needed to be done to bring about this powerful change on this campus.

With the support of the local university, Martinez became adept at identifying local stand-out student teachers and aides who could potentially develop into contributing members within the school district. Martinez actively recruited and encouraged local student teachers and aides in the hopes that they would become excellent teachers in his school district. During this time, the pervious superintendent hired a number of novice local teachers. These teachers were catalysts in providing support for Martinez's vision of district wide improvement. These local staff members provided insights that would have taken other traditional recruits years to obtain. The hiring of these talented local teachers enabled the district to achieve the levels of success it did years earlier than if they would have used a more traditional hiring strategy.

The Leadership Team evolved as a result of Martinez looking for people to develop some ideas that made sense for meeting student needs. His experience showed Martinez that he "had to convince everybody to get on board with restructuring. Basically, within the rules of restructuring, you have to get a critical mass of people with you." Therefore,

when he began the process of restructuring he purposefully, "had to target key people who had so much influence with the teachers that had been there, that they just brought them along." The leadership team represents various groups within the district, based on interest and/or grade level. The group serves as a conduit between the administrators, teachers, faculty, staff, and community. The group is predominantly philosophical in nature and discusses problems and solutions for the school in order to maximize its potential to help students achieve. The team meets several times a year to discuss long-range goals, benchmarks, and progress towards the goals. Reeves, who utilized the team, paid tribute to the previous superintendent for developing as a group of key people in leadership positions.

The district's leadership is not limited to formal leadership structures and certificated teachers. Martinez and Reeves acknowledged that much of what was accomplished in the district was due to their very strong staff. The current district office manager has served in this position for many years. During her tenure in the district, she has developed a strong rapport with the schools and community. Oftentimes, Martinez relied on her because, "she kept me out of so much trouble. When I started to go into an area where she thought I was going to be creating a problem for myself, she would, you know, give me history and insights. I was very grateful for her courage to speak out."

Martinez did not rely only on the leadership team to help promote acceptance of approved programs, oftentimes, he went straight to the staff. Leadership was viewed as the primary reason for the district's success by one teacher on staff who, during an interview shared, "Teachers are part of the decision-making process as much as could be expected. Because we are a small staff in a small school district it is possible for the

administration to include us in the decision making process. The administration often

times will seek out our opinion so that we know we are valued for our thoughts and ideas

and are treated like professionals." Another teacher commented that, "We are a very

cohesive staff. We discuss and we put it to a vote in staff meetings."

Much of what was accomplished at the Hidalgo Unified School district was a result of

the ties between the school sites and the district office. Martinez suggested that a "great

principal without the collaboration of the district office isn't going to make it. So, it had

to be the district office and the schools working together as a team. Otherwise, one gets

in the way of the other." For example, the principal had, along with his staff, developed a

strong vision focused on reading both during and outside of the school day. Accepting

the idea of in-school interventions posed a challenge for the superintendent who was into,

"Let's do everything after and before school." Escobar's school became the leader for in-

school interventions. Working together was a driving philosophy for Martinez. He

believed that without respect between the district office and the site, conflict was

inevitable, staff developed a fear of taking risks, and cover-ups became common place.

At the time, change of leadership and change of culture at the district office was

critical in order for the case study school district to reach its envisioned success.

Martinez visualized a culture of sharing and believed strongly that we all learn from one

another. As a result of the cultural transformation, Martinez believed that "As we just

started working together, all of the distrust seemed to melt away." This culture of sharing

between the district's sites continues today, despite the induction of new leadership.

From Reeves perceptive, this affords school leaders the opportunity to work together

instead of the principals just saying, "here it is…which, doesn't go over well". Reeves

concluded his interview by asserting that the district's success was a result of "the team approach between the district office, the principals, the school's leadership, the teachers, the parents, and the school community. They've created a partnership focused on student achievement." This focus has not been perceived by the stakeholders as a push by the administration, but instead as a message to improve the lives of their students.

Resource Building

One of the biggest challenges facing all school leaders in today's society is coping with budget constraints. Frequently cited in the data was the common description of Martinez as being "creative at using and getting money". Martinez described money alone as not being important. The staff claimed that Martinez's ability to effectively use money was huge. They cannot believe how effective he was in getting and using money. One of the principals claimed, "He knew how to work the budget." Due to his leadership, the district and most of the sites had ample Title I money, SIP funding, and API rewards, just to name a few funding sources, and was able to use all of it when the money was available. Martinez was also good at finding money in order to realize the district's vision. For example, a board member commented that, "It was because of his financial leadership that the district was able to pass a bond to build three new schools." Reeves explained, "He was probably one of the best users of the seven different programs that the state had for academic intervention." However, a lot of that money is now drying up. An example was the loss of the state-sponsored Miller-Unruh funding for the sites' reading specialists. Many of the programs put into place, which were previously supported by categorical funds or expired grants, have become the responsibility of the district or school sites. For instance, many of the reading intervention tutors' salaries,

including the reading specialists, had been paid for through the district's and site's budgets. The school's site councils, charged with allocating categorical funds, were also responsible for presenting the budget to the school's staff for approval. It was important for Martinez to get his principals to see the value of the intervention programs so he could continue to fund the personnel necessary for those programs. He authorized funds that allowed release time for staff such as the technology director, reading specialist, and other support personnel to make sure teachers were using the programs correctly and properly utilizing student achievement data.

Not only did Martinez creatively look at the funding, according to his successor, he "creatively looked at the people". He was a superintendent who "tapped into" and built upon strong relationships with the local county's Office of Education and fostered relationships with universities and their teacher education programs. The value of using student teachers, according to Reeves, was that it allowed principals to: 1) get the chance to look at new people; 2) get an extra set of hands to work with students; and 3) use them to provide interventions, which, in turn, gave them an opportunity to learn how to provide small group instruction. One teacher in the district had student teachers on several occasions and testified to the interest Martinez had for using them. She remembered when Martinez would come in and ask, "What do you think?" and was constantly questioning, "Where can I implement this person? Should she start doing the intervention program?"

Time as a resource was highly valued at the Hidalgo Unified School District because it gave teachers and staffs the opportunity to work with one another, receive training, and discuss student achievement data. As previously mentioned, students are excused from

school early on Wednesdays to allow teachers to work in grade levels or as teams to discuss school business, instruction, and/or student achievement. Martinez adopted and implemented this idea from his leadership team. Today he claims, "It was the first step in getting teachers working together on teams. Once you freed them up, gave them some time, gave them some programs, got them to work together, then it just sort of built." During an after-school visit to one of the schools in the district, an observation revealed multiple groups of teachers working in grade level meetings geared towards improving instruction. Martinez was also aware of teachers' time and using it effectively. He quickly learned that Wednesday meetings were not effective when topics only related to one group or campus; therefore, he "...really believed in meetings with specific agendas, not bird walk style meetings that seemed to waste everyone's time." When it came to monthly administrative meetings, Reeves stated, "One of the things about culture you will find out around here is we have short, meaningful staff meetings."

Also present in the data was a constant focus on Martinez's ability to get people what they needed. As Martinez stated, "I believe one of my chief responsibilities is to assist the staff in acquiring the tools they need to be as effective at their craft as they can be." Both the former and current superintendents were acknowledged for their attention to getting people the materials they needed to get their jobs done. Supporting this statement, a sixth grade teacher commented, "Material directly related to instruction was always made available to us." The same is true of the schools' libraries, which, in the opinion of Martinez and current administrators, are considered to be among the finest in the county and certainly have the highest circulation between the Accelerated Reading® program and other material.

Knowledgeable and Supportive Leadership - The Leadership Team, administrators, and other staff use a collaborative model to facilitate improvement throughout the district. However, as most people stated in their interviews, it was Martinez who was the driving force for change in this district. One of the qualities highlighted by Reeves regarding Martinez was his ability to not only say to his staff, "here is the data, and here are the interventions we have" but go a step further and add, "this is what the kid needs, so let's put him here." He took the extra step that was required to get people to accept new programs or ideas by making them feel supported and giving them a sense of confidence in their ability to accomplish a task. Others praised Martinez for treating them professionally. This was most acknowledged by the fact that administrative meetings are not called systematically every Monday, but periodically and only when necessary and valuable.

Reeves believed the greatest source of support was in Martinez, style which gave credit where credit was due. He described an environment where there were modest celebrations of success and achievements and how credit was given where it happened – in the trenches. A middle school teacher recalled that Martinez never took credit for anything, instead gave the staff credit for all the district's achievements.

General Findings on District Leadership

The commitment of the district office to support schools through curriculum and instruction is evident in the number of district-wide programs in place. By focusing district-wide, student achievement efforts on the predominantly Spanish-speaking, low-income population, according to one of the principals, made the most significant impact on improving student achievement. Prior to this fundamental change the district had put

much of its effort into allowing individual sites to determine their own curriculum and instructional practices. The district had no curriculum that was aligned to the state standards or even coordinated within the district. A second grade teacher explained that prior to 2000, "one school could adopt one reading series; another one could choose another program. Every school could adopt whatever they wanted to, as long as it was on the state approved list." It was possible that within the district and even within a specific school site, they could have had three or four different reading series in use. Curriculum alignment was not limited to reading, but was also adopted in core subject areas such as math and science. More recently, under the leadership of Martinez, the district began implementing instructional support materials that were proven to work. The district spent time and money taking small leadership teams, made up of site and district leaders, to visit schools outside of the district to observe best practices. Martinez identified an area of concern by recognizing, "A lot of districts missed the opportunities to do best practices because they didn't want to acknowledge other districts were going good work that they should have been doing, too." Additionally, he commented that, "Many districts failed to see the accountability trend coming. We wanted to get our house in order before the state and feds told us how to do it. So, we embraced improving our student achievement early because we knew we were going to have to do it eventually anyways." Martinez is proud of having the vision necessary to build such a team.

Along with district-wide curriculum was support for the use and implementation of newly adopted materials. As mentioned earlier, the district had focused much attention on providing professional development opportunities for teachers to work with instructional tools, curriculum, and student achievement data. Given the current budget

climate, Reeves continues to name professional development as a district priority where they continue to "use a lot of money and pool a lot of stuff. We ask people to come in and do the training during the day and we bring in substitutes."

In recent years, district leadership has also demonstrated some creative funding avenues to ensure schools are successfully implementing programs, seeing results, and treated equally. While discussing the district's history, Reeves shared that Martinez had historically used Title I dollars in the targeted schools with little or no coordinated effort. At the time the concerted effort to improve student achievement began, these funds, as well as others, were specifically coordinated so that more students would reap the benefits of these programs. Further, demonstrating a willingness to be creative in the use of money allocated for staff development, Martinez solicited textbook publishers to provide in-service opportunities for teachers to learn how to effectively use instructional reading materials.

Summary of Findings for Research Question Two

Pervasive throughout the data was the finding that leadership at the Hidalgo Unified School District was a function of Martinez. Martinez was credited for leading the way towards improved student achievement and district-wide success.

Martinez's ability to create a vision for the district that was built upon need for both the students and the staff was critical to the success of his mission. Martinez not only identified at-risk students and improved their academic achievement levels, but also identified high achieving students and provided appropriate interventions for them. Identifying the needs and creating plans to improve deficiencies within the district's environment helped improve morale, which in turn, translated into improved student

outcomes. The environment of the district in previous years was described by many as "negative, apathetic, detached, uncaring, and hopeless." Martinez explained, "I needed to take charge of this district and move it forward or I was going to be responsible for the academic failure of hundreds of children. By getting the staff and community to buy into the use of data to be the catalyst for improvement we were able to impact test scores and student achievement."

Martinez was recognized for his ability to encourage his staff to embrace his vision by delivering a message that was demanding, but achievable. Teachers felt supported and included in the decision-making process and appreciated being treated like professionals. His ability to recruit well-respected people to join his leadership team and use them to garner support from the rest of the staff proved to be incredible valuable.

As programs were implemented, teachers began to talk about and share data regarding student achievement. Martinez was excited that people were using data to make decisions. Having the administration share that enthusiasm with teachers and community members to breed culture for the importance of using data to make decisions was an important step. The implementation of instructional programs that were academically-oriented and data-driven made it easier for all stakeholders to identify improvement. The provision of time, through weekly professional development days, allowed teachers the opportunity to work together and share ideas. Martinez was also recognized multiple times throughout the study for his skill in creatively accessing much needed resources. He was praised for his ability to get teachers what they needed to do their jobs.

The dramatic transformation in the culture of the district from low achieving and

complacent to high achieving and relentless in the pursuit of excellence was profound in

its rapid acceptance by the staff and community. It is equally commendable that these

achievements continued.

Cultural Factors that Support a Rural School District

Research question three asked, "What are contextual cultural factors that support a

rural school district which has exceeded academic expectations?" This question is

focused primarily on identifying cultural constructs within the case study school district

to better assess how the district is supporting improved academic achievement by its

charges. Sources of data used for analysis and interpretation came from faculty and staff

survey/questionnaire, site and district interviews, formal and informal observations, and

document/artifact analysis. The instruments used provided a triangulation of the data,

which served to answer the research question in depth.

The application of Schein's (2004) definition of culture to analyze the major

components of the organization will be used to present the findings. His definition of

culture states, "The culture of a group can now be defined as a pattern of shared basic

assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation

and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and,

therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in

relation to those problem." (p. 17)

Background and History of District and Site Culture

In the early 1990's student achievement in the district was viewed by the community

as inconsequential. According to Martinez, most residents were fairly apathetic about the

overall student achievement within the district. There was a modest concern from parents about their own child's academic achievement but very little for other students. The standards and accountability movement at the state and federal levels for public education fundamentally changed the way schools did business. The culture, described by Martinez, was "used to keeping students safe and reasonably well educated but there was little thought or discussion about district or even site level academic excellence for all students."

During an interview, Martinez described the climate of the district in 1999 as having "not a very cohesive staff" and being "a district where nobody was working together." Most of the staff and parents within the district were unaware of the standards-based movement that had yet to be put in motion by the state and federal governments. As a result, Martinez had to be the primary resource for the district to begin making people aware of the impending standards-based movement.

Apathy towards the district and individual school sites was not limited to parents, but was also evident in the Hidalgo Unified School District's faculty and staff. According to Martinez, "Most staff and parents operated with little regard for the overall well being of every student." Martinez described the unhealthy culture as gossipy, back-biting, and totally lacking in any effort to work together.

Martinez's goal was to "unify the staff and to make both the parents and the staff aware of the imminent standard-based movement." He succinctly stated, "Focus the major stakeholders in on what the important issues were to improve student achievement within the district for all students." He decided that he needed to become the "point person" because that was what the district needed and he knew little impact would be

made unless he "was working with them and was being a positive role model." The shift in culture from then to now is presented below.

Organizational Culture

According to Barth (2002), "A school's culture has far more influence on life and learning in the schoolhouse than the president of the country, the state department of education, the superintendent, the school board, or even the principal, teacher, and parents can ever have" (p. 6). Therefore, establishing a positive culture within a school must be one of the top priorities for all educational leaders.

Assessing organizational culture, according to Schein (2004), can be accomplished by gathering information and drawing conclusions by observing and assessing artifacts. Interviews, surveys and observations established a basis for examination of the case study school district.

From the moment Martinez realized that he needed to be the "point person" for creating a new focus on academic achievement and positive culture within the district, changes began to happen. Martinez's vision was to "create an environment where learning was the top priority for all students." Making the staff and parents excited about meeting every students needs seemed to be an exhaustive job, according to the previous superintendent. He recalled that there were certainly times that he was not sure he was going to be successful. He was challenged by staff, including site level administrators, on numerous occasions. The autonomy that individual schools enjoyed prior to this time of unification was not easily given up by many staff members. Martinez recalled how hard he had to fight to make the meeting every student's academic needs job number one. The culture within the district and at most school sites was static. The goals for the

district shifted to developing collaborative practices to discuss, identify, and find solutions to helping all students achieve. As expressed by Reeves, the district's goals now center on helping all students become independent readers, meet grade level mathematics standards, provide early intervention and remedial support, provide professional development, and communicate student progress to the parents and the community. According to Reeves, the parents had been extremely receptive to the change because they "supported the district desire to hold the staff accountable for each student's academic achievement." Martinez claimed that the parents were no longer apathetic towards the schools; rather they were supportive and involved.

The academic focus has also changed the structure of the school day for the students and teachers. Many of the intervention programs are embedded with the school day, where teachers either take their classes to the library or computer labs or students receive small group reading, writing, or mathematics instruction within their classroom. Before- and after-school programs have affected parents as well. The district and each school site had to seek cooperation and commitment from the parents to get their children to school early and to let them stay later in the afternoon. Based on the number of students who participate in the co-curricular before and after school programs, a teacher responded, "Parents seem to love letting their students come early or stay late at school because they know their student is getting the extra help that they need to be academically successful."

Martinez and Reeves adhered to leadership practices that were extremely participative. This is evidenced by the fact that nearly every administrative decision was made collaboratively by the leadership teams at the district and site levels. The members of the leadership teams brought input from all interest areas of the district and site levels

through their associations with teachers, students, and community members within the gamut of their assigned responsibilities. As well, in order to gain consensus before making any final decisions, the administrators utilized collaborative decision-making structures whenever possible. This was confirmed by the existence of a multitude of groups and teams within the district and school sites that represented every possible interest. There were both formal an informal schedules for meetings of these various leadership teams. The administrators met on a regularly scheduled basis. Some of the site levels teams met at regularly scheduled dates and times, other groups met as needed. The principals met regularly with program coordinators, grade level teachers, and parent and community advisory groups such as the Parent Teacher Student Organization (PTSO), school site council, GATE, and the leadership team. All of the principals adhered to a practice of high involvement. Exemplifying the desire to insure a change in culture occurred more from a bottom-up model rather than from the more traditional top-down model, the administrators' high involvement in all groups was necessary to encourage all stakeholders to participate in the decision making process. Bolman and Deal (1997) put forward that workers are more empowered and dedicated to the success of the organization when given opportunities to participate. According to Sergiovanni (1991), this type of organization is most effective in non-linear conditions, which is characterized by: dynamic environments, loose management connections, tight cultural connections, and unstructured tasks, all of which described this district's structure.

The formal structure of the district and school sites included multiple opportunities for collaboration and professional development. Staff development was scheduled on district buy-back days, at staff meetings, and at weekly grade level meetings. It became

district-wide practice for all schools to lengthen the school day four days a week and have an early release day for students on Wednesdays. Parents agreed to adjust their personal schedules to allow this program change with the promise that this early release time would be used to help the teachers meet each student's academic needs. The time allotted was now used for weekly grade level meetings which allowed teachers to focus on content and performance standards. One teacher described the time as "invaluable, because it allows us time to have serious, deliberate discussion with other staff members about things we used to never have time for." Martinez commented, "This schedule change was one of the first steps needed to get our teachers working together." As one primary teacher shared, "We have a unified staff, especially at grade levels, due primarily to this early release time. We now know we are going to meet each week without fail."

Leadership of Organizational Culture

As Schein (2004) stated, "Organizational culture is created by shared experience, but it is the leader who initiates this process by imposing his or her beliefs, values, and assumptions at the outset" (p. 225). It was the leaders who began the process of establishing a healthy or unhealthy organizational culture.

In order to transform the unhealthy organizational culture of the case study district to a healthy organizational culture, both the former and current superintendents adhered to a regimented view of high visibility and accessibility. Teachers and other staff rarely had to seek out the superintendent or principals for advice and/or consultation. District level and site level administrators were often seen in classrooms, on campus, and at school activities and events, thereby facilitating their accessibility and enhancing communication. One junior high school teachers conveyed that, "Administrators are

always in my classroom. They are constantly in classrooms. They are out and about all of the time." The benefit of such visibility was the established connection between the district's and sites' formal leadership and the students and staff.

The establishment of trust, especially in this case study district, was critical to a healthy organizational culture. Martinez said for any of his visionary changes to be successful he had to find ways to open lines of communication and decentralize the decision-making process in order to begin the development of trust within this district. Martinez made a concerted effort to make himself available to all staff. Over 80% of the staff interviewed mentioned that Martinez was a constant presence on their campus. This presence gave the staff many opportunities to share their ideas and concerns with him. Through this development of close relationships with his staff Martinez was able to further increase the levels of trust on his campuses. Martinez says that he knew trust was an integral component that would help facilitate and maintain healthy, long-lasting, and strong relationships as well as help the district realize its envisioned goals. Guided by Martinez' leadership, trust at the Hidalgo Unified School District became notably high. Faculty and staff openly communicated with the administration and one another because they believed their input was valued.

The district and individual schools offered a broad range of professional growth and development opportunities for their teachers and staff. As previously mentioned, the requirements associated with greater school accountability required teachers to increase their knowledge and specialties to meet the increasing needs of the student population. The case study district was committed to supporting that growth. The staff development offered within the district was provided to increase staff proficiency in the knowledge

and implementation of standards-based curriculum and assessment of student performance.

As stated earlier, at the outset of this fundamental change from autonomous school sites to a unified school district there was opposition from some staff. This fact required Martinez to garner support from the board before implementing any organizational cultural changes.

Martinez had to choose between two distinct courses of action. The first course would have kept the district on the academic path it had grown comfortable with, a path of apathy and below average accomplishment. The second and more challenging course required great courage and vision on Martinez's part. To suggest to the board, staff, and community that their district could do better by making fundamental changes in their approach to education was potentially politically dangerous for Martinez. If any of these stakeholder groups disagreed with Martinez he could have faced failure and possibly removal from the district.

Fortunately, the majority of board members, staff, and community members supported Martinez. Those stakeholders who did not initially support the proposed changes were either later convinced of the soundness of these changes or they left the district. As Martinez stated, "The staff was simply looking forward to working together and that made all the difference." The leadership of building principals had great influence with the teachers.

The depth of change that occurred at the Hidalgo Unified School District was evident in numerous artifacts and symbols that were displayed in various places. Martinez proudly stated, "I doubt there is a person in our community that does not know what our

priority is – academic achievement for every student. It's what we talk about, it's what we value, it's what we celebrate, and it is what is led by our administrators and staff."

One of the most visible and observed symbols of the district's philosophy was expressed on almost every publication at the junior high school as "There is none more professional than I." This was further defined in both the student and staff creeds. The first sentence of both these creeds begins, "I am a member of the finest school in this valley." The teachers and students attempted to translate the school's creed into classroom reality. It was included in behavioral objectives, wall posters, and standards of achievement. Many community/school partnerships on and off campus encouraged students to achieve excellence in their education and to access the help available from others in the community.

The district also articulated it philosophy through its mission statement which establishes that the Hidalgo Unified School District is committed to providing all students a quality educational program with qualified professionally trained staff in a safe school environment. All schools, along with parents and the community, share the responsibility to provide educational opportunities for all students to increase their learning experiences, make them critical thinkers, acquire academic skills, and develop the values necessary for effectively competing in a global society.

A foundation of the district's mission was the goal for all students to develop their potential. The district consisted of a dynamic, energetic faculty who worked together to create new learning opportunities that met the needs of all students. The change in leadership, both at the superintendent level in 2006 and at the site level administrative positions from 2004 to 2007, gave rise to new ideas, opportunities, and enthusiasm to

expand upon and enhance the instructional programs and extra-curricular activities of the district.

Further, the mission's focus on academic excellence was evident in the recognition of students and staff. These celebrations and recognition events played a big role in the case study school district. Each school made recognizing student achievement a huge part of their operating practice. Students were recognized by their teachers on an almost daily basis as goals were achieved. On a larger scale, school wide celebrations of student achievement were held after each grading period, in which parents and the local media were invited. Students not only received certificates of achievement but were given the opportunity to win cash prizes that had been purchased by the local Parent/Teacher/Student Organization (PTSO). The principals also published Honor Roll recipients in their monthly newsletters. Students who exhibited good citizenship were eligible for a "Student of the Quarter" award. Staff members were also recognized for their achievements. As teachers or classified staff completed training or certification, or met goals related to student scores, they were recognized and celebrated during staff meetings. Teachers closely monitored not only the scores of their own classes, but also those of their peers. Successes and accomplishments were recognized at staff and board meetings.

Why a Cultural Change Occurred

As Martinez asserted, "Leading up to 1999, all of the major stakeholders in the Hidalgo School District had grown satisfied with mediocrity." However, the staff and community always had a deep rooted, albeit silent, desire to see their students excel. By tapping into this uncultivated desire for excellence, Martinez was able to bring to light

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that commonly held norm.

Schein (2004) defined culture as the process of compelling stakeholders to examine their shared basic assumptions. Through this series of stakeholder meetings and problem solving activities, Martinez helped awaken the prevailing culture of his group. First, Martinez met with his staff and they documented 22 basic beliefs. Next, he took those beliefs to the board for their input and support. Finally, Martinez scheduled a series of parent meetings that allowed them to express their concerns and beliefs. The groups shared their basic assumptions through the problem solving activities in which they took part. This process focused the stakeholders on commonly held values and beliefs concerning academic excellence. The process of external adaptation of common beliefs helped the group begin to internalize their educational values and confirm their rightful ownership of their district's expectations. As new programs and ideas, like the Wednesday early release and the intervention programs, were successfully implemented, stakeholders recognized the validity of their assumptions. New programs and ideas created during these stakeholder meetings were given the primary reason student achievement in this district dramatically improved. Eventually, values and beliefs expressed during these early stakeholder meetings were translated into mission statements, slogans, and were incorporated into policies and practices that were shared with new staff. Data generated from interviews of administrators, teachers, board members and parents suggested that, in general, stakeholders credited the ideas generated during stakeholder meetings and later implementation as fundamental to increased student achievement. During the period from 1999 to 2006, Martinez guided the district through the process of creating a culture of excellence. Martinez provided parents and

staff with a forum to express and validate their deep rooted desires to see their students excel.

According to Reeves, the current superintendent, the culture of excellence in the district is now so strong that the staff and parents will not allow acceptance of anything but the best for their students. As evidence to this standard of excellence, when new staff and students joined the Hidalgo Unified School District they were quickly made aware of this expectation. During an interview, an elementary school teacher who had been in the district for only 2 years described the culture of her campus as a supportive group that would settle for nothing less than every person's best.

The Hidalgo Unified School District represents an organization that promoted higher achievement, recognized individuals and groups, and encouraged participation and inclusion. As stakeholders saw their contributions to the success of the entire organization, a collective pride began to permeate the district.

Summary of Findings for Research Question Three

The state and federal mandates, initiatives, and referendums that continually inundate the local educational organization can result in conflict and stress. State initiated top-down reform efforts in an organization that is committed to bottom-up change strategies can also produce numerous challenges and disagreements. Top-down change typically occurs by designing and designating different roles of specialization; however, this approach inevitably leads to problems of coordination and control. Throughout the data, it was evident that the collaborative culture of the faculty and staff would not permit such top-down efforts to reduce their sense of drive and vision. Instead, it was believed that the organization would work together to lessen the impact of the reform while continuing

to strive towards achieving their organizational goals.

The collaborative culture of the district helped lessen the impact political scenarios could have on the organization. The team atmosphere and caring attitude of the staff changed the faculty from a previously described, "back-biting, negative place' to an environment where all members of the organization worked together to achieve common goals. Martinez's diligence in keeping extraneous things away from teachers so they could focus in on what the important issues were changed the way groups accomplish their goals.

The creation of a team approach between the sites and the district enabled the schools to feel comfortable in taking risks and trying new programs. Martinez and Reeves shared the same values and goals, which made it easier for the district to move forward. This bridge of shared beliefs helped sustain the early accomplishments of the district and the school sites.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

Overview of the Problem

Findings for each research question were determined following a careful analysis of

the wealth of rich data. As suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) immediately upon

the compiling of data, challenges appeared. Probably the biggest challenge comes from

the multiplicity of data sources and forms. All of this information piles up geometrically.

Thus the need to develop a coding system becomes essential to successful analysis of

collected data. Miles and Huberman state, "Coding is analysis. To review a set of field

notes, transcribed or synthesized, and to dissect them meaningfully, while keeping the

relationship between the parts intact, is the stuff of analysis" (p. 56). The wealth of rich

data lent itself to the emergence of the following six themes:

1. Concerned and Dedicated Staff – Most frequently cited throughout the data was

    the strong conviction that success at the Hidalgo Unified School District was a

    result of a concerned and dedicated staff.

2. Individualized Attention – Individual student success was a core belief and

    primary focus for the district. Programs and interventions were tailored to meet

    the individual learning needs of each student.

3. Data-driven Assessment and Change – There was a strong emphasis on the use of

    data to drive district and site level change and develop goals for maximizing

student potential.

4. Visionary Superintendent – The leadership role of the superintendent is chief to the establishment of an environment of trust and mutual respect. Martinez's ability to deliver a strong message, earn support, creatively plan and create a common vision was vital to moving the district in a positive direction.

5. Culture of Academic Excellence – Positive district and school site culture, oriented on student success, was critical to the development of a safe, disciplined, and focused learning environment.

6. Collaborative Leadership – Collaborative structures both at the district office and at the school sites has afforded the district to more fully draw upon the talents of all the staff.

Theme 1: Concerned and Dedicated Staff

When asked, "Why is the district so successful?" participants in the study overwhelmingly mentioned the concerned and dedicated staff. Martinez acknowledged the "very professional and focused staff" as the reason the students were making progress. It was not unusual to hear reports of teachers going above and beyond the call of duty or working outside their normal hours. A teacher on a site level leadership team commented, "I know most of our teachers put in countless extra hours with kids and doing staff development activities that are not being recorded…because our staff is more concerned with student success than compensation."

Possibly the greatest indicator of the district improved climate is the way an individual is welcomed on to any of its campuses. The overwhelming comment from new staff and visitors to the campuses was that their welcome to the campuses was

significantly nicer than they have ever experienced in any other district. A first year teacher confirmed, "Everyone went out of their way to make sure I had everything I needed to do my job and that I was comfortable."

Teachers also enjoy a personal relationship with one another much more so today than they did six years ago. A high school teacher commented, "We are a pretty close knit group today compared to a few years ago. We enjoy being around each other much more than we did back then." It was pretty common to have staff say that they are sure this improved level of personal relationship among staff members has helped to improve the learning environment for the students.

Observations at the district office and at all of the school sites revealed a significant number of staff staying late in the afternoons, arriving early in the mornings, running programs for kids, and receiving training. One teacher said, "Working at the small rural school you have to expect to put in time that may not be required or expect at other schools. Our kids and parents expect us to become a part of their lives. We can't do that without making a commitment to them." Another veteran teacher commented, "I am proud to be a teacher in the district – that wasn't always the case."

Inclusion of community members and parent volunteers as part of the team has made the case study school district a special place to learn and work. The positive effect of having community members and parent volunteers has had a dual outcome. The schools have benefited from having extra help without having to pay for it. The community has benefited from being included as part of the school environment. These adults that have volunteered their time benefit from the activities that the school sponsors, like English language acquisition, food programs, and other training. Many of these volunteers have

become paid instructional aides and two of them have gone on to become certificated teachers at the school.

Theme 2: Individual Attention

The development, implementation, and maturation of programs geared towards the individual success of each student are the hallmark of the case study school district. The goal was to target and track every student in order to tailor the learning process to strengthen achievement. Martinez's self described vision was to constantly have teachers assessing how students were doing by using data and making sure that appropriate interventions were applied for every student in the district.

The cornerstone of this component was teacher participation. Teachers at the case study school district demonstrated that they would participate in this type of intense assessment program if the program was viable and proven to works. Martinez shared that he initially hand picked several influential staff members to be trained in Accelerated Reading® knowing that if they bought into the program they would be able to convince the rest of the staff of the program's value. This tactic worked and now this program is used in almost every elementary classroom and intervention program. Martinez's strategy of picking influential staff members to model a program or providing training and then have those staff members work to convince others has been a successful tactic for bringing in new programs over the past 10 years. Additionally, the fact that the district's test scores have continued to improve over this same time period also helped to convince staff that suggested intervention models have value.

Buy-in is not limited to the staff. Leadership, specifically administrative leadership, must be willing to support and reinforce suggested program implementation. As one

member of a school's leadership team pointed out, Martinez was the initial driving force for getting the Reading Intervention Program off the ground in the district. Furthermore, parents and the community had to be committed to the programs, which meant schools had to communicate goals, needs, and successes on a regular basis. Support from the district office enabled the schools to take risks by implementing new programs, creatively using funds, and promoting the success of their students. Throughout the past 10 years, the district has committed its staff and budget to delivering professional development opportunities to teachers to help schools maximize their potential to reach envisioned goals. The district has also focused its attention on helping schools provide individual student intervention by housing student data in their database and delivering data reports to school leadership to share with their staff.

Theme 3: Data-driven Assessment and Change

The foresight that Martinez exhibited by challenging his district to use data to drive decisions prior to the state and federal mandates on accountability went into effect was remarkable. This accountability movement that had spread throughout the field of education was based upon data and a district's ability to use data to drive positive change. Martinez saw this movement requiring districts to use data to make it decisions well before most professional educators realized it was going to become a reality. During an interview with Martinez he shared, "I became a nut about data. We were able to track every student to make sure we were meeting their needs. The staff really began to see the value in having accurate data-drive curriculum and instruction decisions rather than relying on educated guesses as we had always done in the past."

The Hidalgo Unified School District was remarkable because the administrative staff

did not just collect data, they used the data, and the staff began to demand the data before they made any decisions. The stimulus to get teachers to use the data to improve instruction initially came from Martinez and the district's principals. For example, Martinez remembered a conversation with several board members and teachers during a workshop in which one of the board members commented that he believed that the students in the district were doing fine academically. Martinez was able to clearly demonstrate through the use of data that the district's general education students were making satisfactory academic progress but that many of the district's special education and English language learners were not. By providing the board members and the rest of the group at this workshop these data, Martinez was able to convince them that fundamental changes needed to be made in how they were meeting the educational needs of all their students, not just the general education students.

From this point forward, the use of data within the district expanded dramatically. Now, one of the primary charges of the current associate superintendent of instructional services, Updike, is to maintain and make available to all staff the district student data. In an interview with Updike, she pointed out that, "Because I work mostly with the data, I get to see all the reports. I run them into the system. I can spot check core areas where I see potential problems." This type of oversight and support from the district helps to keep the school sites continually focused on using data to make informed decisions. The gathering of data, especially test scores, may be time consuming, however, observations at the school sites revealed teachers are using the results to guide their practice and identify students with specific needs.

It is also critical that with the change in district and site level leadership the drive to

use data as a tool upon which to base decisions continues. The new superintendent and site level administrators have fully supported the practice of data driven decision making.

Theme 4: Visionary Superintendent

The vision of the superintendent directly impacted the district's increased student achievement. Martinez acted as a change agent for the Hidalgo Unified School District. Data from this case study revealed that the leadership of Martinez was a catalyst for positive change within the district.

As the natural cycle of change occurs in the superintendency within the case study district a strong leader will have to create a clear, significant, and shared vision that fits the district and is supported by the board, faculty, staff, and community. Martinez came to live his vision in the twilight of his career, in spite of the fact that many people thought of his goals as unnecessary and unattainable. By defining his mission and delivering its charge without alienating his stakeholders, Martinez was able to succeed where others may have failed. Martinez was described as being the "perfect fit" for the district by many of those interviewed. He was the right blend of leader, director, visionary, and cheerleader that his stakeholders were able to support. It was not uncommon for Martinez to say, "I am fighting alligators today" meaning he was challenging antiquated thinking. Everyone quickly knew exactly what he was referring to when he made this comment. He wanted the district to move forward and he needed to know who his supporters were and who his detractors were. He believed his vision was correct for this district and that getting people to support it was critical for its success.

A leader's ability to garner resources to serve the team and accomplish the vision is critical to the success of the district. Martinez was often described as "crafty" at finding

and using resources. In fact Reeves said with envy, "He had a knack for getting people to support his ideas both monetarily and with resources." As a result of this ability, Martinez is credited with the passage of a local bond that enabled the district to build three new schools, dramatically improving the district's assessment scores, and improving the overall morale of the staff. It will be critical for the current and future superintendents to develop the instinct and know-how to acquire fiscal and human resources to support their educational visions.

Chance, (1992b) declared that school leaders that expect high student achievement through the instruction of highly effective teachers must be able to determine the exact culture and academic needs of their school or district. Creating a vision of what is required and how to achieve that vision is the measure of an effective leader. Furthermore, Lezotte (1992) stated that to convert traditional schools into effective schools administrators must become visionary transformational leaders. A large component of being a visionary leader is the ability to see change, events and needs before they occur. Reeves believes Martinez was the one who focused the district on working towards the standards, which is one of the foundations of the district's success. An effective superintendent will also recognize and prioritize needs in terms of materials and instructional practices. Martinez is widely recognized for being the driving force for positive change and always being aware of what was going on at the school sites. Reeves paid his predecessor one of the best complements he could ever receive. He said, "He [Martinez] was able to create a system that will endure long after he is gone." By building this leadership capacity, Martinez has created a legacy of continual improvement within this district.

Theme 5: Culture of Academic Excellence

Schein (1999) informally defined organizational culture as "the way we do things around here" (p. 15). Martinez challenged the existing culture in the district by advocating for an academic focus. He was able to have all stakeholder groups share their basic assumptions and recognize the common patterns within these documented assumptions. Through the process of solving their problems of external adaptation and internal integration the groups saw academic excellence achieved on a large scale for the first time in the Hidalgo Unified School District's history. This academic success validated the groups' basic assumptions. As new people join the stakeholder groups these assumptions and values were shared thus creating the culture of excellence that Martinez envisioned.

Martinez believed that by setting high standards both the staff and the students would rise to meet them. Furthermore, he challenged the staff to become a unified partnership rather than to continue as a fragmented staff. One of the first steps was banking minutes to allow staff time for collaborate and to focus on standards and individual student achievement. As a result, staff became extremely thorough in making sure that students achieved proficiency before moving forward with instruction.

The culture of academic excellence is not limited to the school sites and student body, but has propagated the entire district to all of the employees. Reeves explains that the culture of the district is one of high expectations for all staff members regardless of their assignment.

Theme 6: Collaborative Leadership

Building trust in the mists of a culture of distrust is one of the biggest challenges a

leader can attempt to overcome. Developing partnerships between site level staff and district office personnel that advocates a shared vision, welcomes shared decision-making and, as a result builds trust was another area of success for Martinez. The use of collaboration by Martinez has enhanced the district's ability to cultivate a culture of trust. As Martinez said, "We have great people working for us. We need to welcome their opinions and ideas as we attempt to meet our many challenges." This spirit of collaboration is one of the primary reasons that the case study school district has been able to make the significant academic improvements that it has. Including all stakeholders in the decision-making process has improved the district's outcomes.

School districts, even small rural school districts, are costly. They require unbelievable amounts of time and energy to support their vast programs. It is unrealistic to assume staff will continue to support programs outside the school day without compensation. Thus far, the case study school district has been fortunate that many staff members have been satisfied to realize profound improvements in student achievement without seeking additional pay for all the extra time that has been required to implement all of the new programs. It is doubtful that this level of philanthropy on the part of the staff will continue. Despite the current bleak economic picture in the State and Country at some point the staff is going to demand compensation for their time and expertise. It will be critical that staff and the administration meet to work out some acceptable means of compensation so that the gains achieved will be sustained.

The relationship between the site and the district is also characterized by the shared staff development programs and training opportunities afforded teachers and staff. Reeves boasts that, "Our staff development and training programs for our staff is the

envy of the rest of the County." One reason may be that most of the intervention programs and all curriculum is district wide, which enables the training to support a greater number of individuals and build upon the desire of Martinez to have the district be unified rather than divided. This type of collaboration has created an environment in which success is celebrated and shared.

The original interest from the district in data and individual student achievement at each school site has provided a platform of support for school to explore into an area often thought by teachers as an administrative responsibility. By providing the staff with training in data analysis teachers quickly comes to embrace data-driven decisions. In fact they come to demand that all decisions be guided by data. The case study district is not only able to monitor student progress, but also engage site leaders in meaningful discussions about achievement and provide training to support the cultural shift to data-driven culture.

Conclusions

The implementation of academically focused programs that meet the individual learning needs of each student is one of the primary factors highlighted for this district's success. Programs that are standards-based, individualized, and offer immediate feedback to the district's community enabled the district to monitor positive change. Buy-in and input into program implementation and use was critical to the successful institutionalization of the interventions offered within the district's schools. Time to analyze the student achievement data and prescribe student placement in the intervention programs was a necessary aspect to individual student progress. Training opportunities

and collaboration time helped to change the organization to a data-driven and standards-based culture.

The district's leadership was localized in Martinez whose talent for forecasting future trends, motivating the staff, developing a common vision, sharing leadership, allocating resources and providing support led the district into a positive direction. Within three years of implementing Martinez's vision, the district's commitment to students and each other developed and the district's mission was celebrated by all stakeholders.

The importance of the positive school culture cannot be overstated when searching for the cause for the positive change in the district's achievement. Change in school districts does not typically come quickly. The need to garner support for any change initiative must be constantly reevaluated by the district's leadership. The cultural movement from a divided district to one that all stakeholders can support must be attributed to the district's former superintendent. The support of the district office is critical to the success of change efforts in school districts, specifically at the site level, so schools feel confident about taking risks. Martinez was highly praised for his ability to obtain this support.

Implications

The results of findings and conclusions in this case study have led to the following recommendations:

The Hidalgo Unified School District shared their resources to concentrate on identified successful programs to help students improve academically. Time and attention were given to researching all programs before they were implemented to make

sure they met the district and sites' needs. Teacher teams were used to research and give input on the programs to enhance their use and success. The case study school district concentrated its time and money on researching programs that were standards-based, met individual student learning needs and were supported by data.

Vital to the success of these programs is the use of the data generated on each student. As is commonplace in many district's the practice of creating records and then placing them in binders that sit unused on office shelves was not allowed in the case study district. The case study district and its school sites became data-driven and supported one another in learning how to use the data effectively to drive instruction and school the culture of the district.

Ten years prior, the same leadership that implemented the change process was described as "ineffective", the culture of the district was negative and apathetic and student achievement was below average. Martinez decided change was essential to break out of this cycle of mediocrity. In order to make effective change, district leaders must consider the cultural environment within which they work before starting fundamental changes. Leadership must be collaborative and based on an environment of mutual respect and trust.

Ten years earlier, the district culture was void of any defining aspects. Apathy within the teaching and administrative ranks was the common denominator within the district. Teachers and staff commonly left the district within a year or two of joining. The lack of a common curriculum across the district created a culture of isolation that was engulfed with fear of taking chances or celebrating success. The district office was obligated to change its culture to help the schools within the district transform their orientation from

complacent to high-achieving.

Because the district worked towards creating an environment of trust and a culture of sharing the school sites benefited from dramatically improved student achievement. The training and professional development that the district supported the school sites with further enhanced the accomplishments of the individual students. The culture of apathy that once existed is completely gone, replaced by a culture that sets high standards for itself and for all of its students.

Suggestions for Further Research

The results of the current study have led the researcher to suggest the following topics be considered for future research:

1. The current study examined how district leadership and culture in a rural school district affect student achievement. Future research should be conducted to examine the relationship of district leadership and culture on urban districts whose students show improved academic gains.

2. During this time of financial constraints imposed by State and Federal cutbacks it would be valuable to examine both rural and urban school districts that have shown improved academic gains with limited financial support.

3. The case study school district experienced a turnover in its superintendent at the height of its academic accomplishments. Many districts' achievements dissipate immediately after the original visionary leader leaves. An examination of a district that has attained a high level of academic achievement and then experiences such a critical change in leadership but is able to continue its prior

levels of achievement could prove to be invaluable.

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APPENDIX I

UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, LAS VEGAS

INFORMED CONSENT

Department of Educational Leadership

TITLE OF STUDY: The Impact of Leadership and Culture on Student Achievement: A Case Study of a Successful Rural School District
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr. Patti Chance
CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: (702) 895-1696
INVESTIGATOR: Donald Clark
CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: (530) 495-2562

Purpose of the Study
You are invited to participate in a research study. The purposes of this study are to (a) identify how leadership in successful rural school districts has helped raise student achievement levels beyond those of comparable school districts as measured by state and federal mandated test scores, (b) investigate the district leadership that aligns with identified effective practices, (c) and investigate leadership, culture and the resultant student success.

Participants
You are being asked to participate in the study because of your association with a rural school district that has demonstrated higher levels of academic achievement as measured by state and federal mandated test scores over the last three years. The criteria for being included in this study are that you are a current or retired staff member of the Calipatria Unified School District, a parent of a student currently enrolled in the Calipatria Unified School District, a community leader, or a school board member. The criteria for being excluded from this study are present or former students of Calipatria Unified School District.

Procedures
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following: participate in one or more brief interviews of not more than one hour each and/or be observed in your classroom or other work environment and answer five open ended survey questions.

Benefits of Participation

There may be no direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. However, we hope to learn about factors that have contributed to your school district's leadership and culture that have impacted student achievement levels above those of comparable rural school districts.

Risks of Participation

There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal risks. You may be uncomfortable having a researcher observe you in your work environment or you may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions asked. You are encouraged to discuss this with the researcher and he/she will REPHRASE THE QUESTIONS INORDER TO ALEVIATE THE ANXIETY YOU MAY BE FEELING. You may choose not to answer questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

Cost /Compensation

There will be no financial cost to you to participate in this study. You will not be compensated for your time.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Donald Clark at 530-495-2562 OR DR. PATTI CHANCE AT 702-895-1696.
For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact **the UNLV Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at 702-895-2794.**

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with the university. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

Confidentiality

All information gathered in this study will be kept completely confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for at least 3 years after completion of the study. After the storage time the information gathered will be destroyed.

Participant Consent:

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

Signature of Participant   Date

_____
Participant Name (Please Print)

Participant Note: Please do not sign this document if the Approval Stamp is missing or is expired.

Audio-Taping Consent:

I agree to the use of audio-taping for the purpose of the research study.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____
Participant Name (Please Print)

APPENDIX II

PROJECT PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM

Date

Participant Name
Address

Dear Participant:

My name is Don Clark. I am a doctoral student in UNLV's Educational Leadership Department. I am a researcher on a project designed to (a) identify how leadership in successful rural school districts has helped raise student achievement levels beyond those of comparable school districts as measured by state and federal mandated test scores, (b) investigate the district leadership that aligns with identified effective practices, (c) and investigate leadership, culture and the resultant student success. You are being asked to participate in the study because of your association with a rural school district that has demonstrated higher levels of academic achievement as measured by state and federal mandated test scores over the last three years.

Procedures
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following: participate in one or more brief face-to-face interviews of not more than one hour each and/or be observed in your classroom or other work environment and answer five open ended survey questions.

Benefits of Participation
There may be no direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. However, we hope to learn about factors that have contributed to your school district's leadership and culture that have impacted student achievement levels above those of comparable rural school districts.

Risks of Participation
There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal risks. You may be uncomfortable having a researcher observe you in your work environment or you may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions asked. You are encouraged to discuss this with the researcher and he/she will explain the questions to your in more detail. You may choose not to answer questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

Cost /Compensation

There will be no financial cost to you to participate in this study. You will not be compensated for your time. The University of Nevada, Las Vegas may not provide dispensation or free medical care for an unanticipated injury sustained as a result of participating in this research study.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Donald Clark at 530-495-2562.

For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact **the UNLV Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at 702-895-2794.**

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with the university. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

Confidentiality

All information gathered in this study will be kept completely confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for at least 3 years after completion of the study. After the storage time the information gathered will be destroyed.

Participant Consent:

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____
Participant Name (Please Print)

Participant Note: Please do not sign this document if the Approval Stamp is missing or is expired.

Audio-Taping Consent:

I agree to the use of audio-taping for the purpose of the research study.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____
Participant Name (Please Print)

APPENDIX III

LEADERHIP SURVEY DIRECITONS

Please complete the attached survey using the form provided. If necessary, feel free to add additional responses on a separate sheet of paper. All names, titles, or positions reference will be kept *confidential.*

Please return the Informed Consent form and Survey to your principal.

If you have any questions, please contact Don Clark at (530) 495-2562. Thank you very much for participating in the study.

Leadership Survey

1. What programs at this school do you feel contribute to high student achievement?
-

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Are there any barriers hindering your school's progress? Is so, has your school overcome them?
-

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. What opportunities are there for staff members to participate in decision-making that affect student achievement?

-

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. What are some of the characteristics that make your school unique?

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_____

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_____

_____

5. What do your leaders do that makes your school successful?

-

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX IV

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR TEACHER INTERVIEWS

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

1. Why is this school successful?

2. What do you do that is special?

3. What are your specific challenges in your job, how do you overcome the challenges, and what type of support do you receive?

4. Who do you view as the district leader and why?

5. What does communication look like between faculty and staff? Between the district office and schools?

6. How do you deal with conflict? How is conflict between students dealt with? Between faculty?

7. How do you address the needs of all students?

8. How are people in the district recognized for their accomplishments?

9. How is new staff oriented to the district/school?

10. To what degree are staff/parents involved in the budget?

11. How do you see the money being spent in the district?

12. What programs are in place? How are they implemented? What is the reaction of the staff?

13. To what degree is the school district a village?

14. How do you see accountability in the school district?

15. Why are students achieving?

16. Describe a typical student in the schools.

17. How are decisions made?

18. Describe the culture of your school district.

19. What role do teachers play in the lives of their students away from school?

20. Is language a barrier to student achievement between the staff and students? Explain.

21. Please provide me with any other information you feel might be helpful in explaining the success of your school district.

APPENDIX V

GUIIDING QUESTIONS FOR ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEWS

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

1. Why is this school successful?

2. What do you do that is special?

3. What are your specific challenges in your job, how do you overcome the challenges, and what type of support do you receive?

4. Who do you view as the district leader and why?

5. What does communication look like between faculty and staff? Between the district office and schools?

6. How do you deal with conflict? How is conflict between faculty members dealt with?

7. How do you address the needs of all students and staff?

8. How are people in the district recognized for their accomplishments?

9. How is new staff oriented to the district/school?

10. To what degree are staff/parents involved in the budget?

11. How do you see the money being spent in the district?

12. What programs are in place? How are they implemented? What is the reaction of the staff?

13. To what degree is the school district a village?

14. How do you see accountability in the school district?

15. Why are students achieving?

16. Describe a typical student in the schools.

17. How are decisions made?

18. Describe the culture of your school district.

19. What role do teachers play in the lives of their students away from school?·

20. Is language a barrier to student achievement between the staff and students? Explain.

21. Please provide me with any other information you feel might be helpful in explaining the success of your school district.

APPENDIX VI

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS INTERVIEWS

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

1. Why is this school district successful?

2. What do the staff at this school district do that is special?

3. Who do you view as the district leader and why?

4. What does communication look like between faculty and parents?

5. How are parental concerns dealt with in this school district?

6. How are needs of all students dealt with in this school district?

7. How are staff and students in the district recognized for their accomplishments?

8. How are new parents oriented to the district/school?

9. To what degree are parents involved in the budget?

10. How do you see the money being spent in the district?

11. What programs are in place? How are they implemented? What is the reaction of the community?

12. To what degree is the school district a village?

13. How do you see accountability in the school district?

14. Why are students achieving?

15. Describe a typical student in the schools.

16. How are decisions made?

17. Describe the culture of your student's school district.

18. What role do teachers play in the lives of their students away from school?

19. Is language a barrier to student achievement between the staff and students? Explain.

20. Please provide me with any other information you feel might be helpful in explaining the success of your school district.

APPENDIX VII

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR COMMUNITY LEADERS INTERVIEWS

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

1. Why is this school district successful?

2. In what ways does the community view this school district as special?

3. Who do you view as the district leader and why?

4. What does communication look like between schools and community?

5. How are parental and community concerns dealt with in this school district?

6. How are needs of all students dealt with in this school district?

7. How are staff and students in the district recognized for their accomplishments?

8. How are new community members oriented to the district/school?

9. To what degree are board members and/or community members involved in the budget?

10. How do you see the money being spent in the district?

11. Do you know of specific programs that are in place in the district or schools? How are they implemented? What is the reaction of the community?

12. To what degree is the school district a village?

13. How do you see accountability in the school district?

14. Why are students achieving?

15. Describe a typical student in the schools.

16. How are decisions made?

17. Describe the culture of your student's school district.

18. What role do teachers play in the lives of their students away from school?

19. Is language a barrier to student achievement between the staff and students? Explain.

20. Please provide me with any other information you feel might be helpful in explaining the success of your school district.

APPENDIX VIII

OBSERVATION ACTIVITIES

District Observation over a period of 10 days

Activity	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10
Faculty Meeting		0:45		1:00			0:45			
Parent Activity/Meeting			2:00			1:00				
Dept/Grade Level Meeting			1:00					1:00		
School Sponsored Activity										
Social Acivity	1:00								1:00	
Academic Activity	2:00	2:00	2:00	2:00	2:00	2:00	2:00	2:00	2:00	2:00
Shadow a Classified Staff Member				2:00						
Observe a Special Needs Student		1:00	1:00				1:00			
Emvironmental Observations										
parking lot	1:00	1:00	1:00	1:00	1:00	1:00	1:00	1:00	1:00	1:00
front office	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30
restrooms	0:15	0:15	0:15	0:15	0:15	0:15	0:15	0:15	0:15	0:15
cleanliness	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30
safety	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30
cafeteria								1:00		
welcoming	0:15	0:15	0:15	0:15	0:15	0:15	0:15	0:15	0:15	0:15
community/student centered	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30
Teacher Workroom	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30
Library	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30	0:30
Technology	2:00			1:00		2:00			1:00	
Non-Instructional Time	2:00	2:00	2:00	2:00	2:00	2:00	2:00	2:00	2:00	2:00
Instructional Time	2-4:00	2-4:00	2-4:00	2-4:00	2-4:00	2-4:00	2-4:00	2-4:00	2-4:00	2-4:00

APPENDIX IX

COMMON DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Documents

*   WASC Report/ PQR Report / CCR Report
*   School Plan
*   School Accountability Report Card (SARC)
*   School Handbook/ School Rules / Student Orientation Packet
*   School Activities Calendar
*   Any available budgets
*   Audit Reports

Additional documents that might be useful:

- State school assessment reports
- High School graduation assessment reports
- Master Schedule
- Mission Statement / School & District Vision
- Discipline Records / Discipline Matrix / Discipline Procedures
- PTSA Handbook
- Department Chair minutes (High School)
- Safe Schools Report
- Teacher credentialing data
- School Bulletins
- Principals/School Newsletter
- School Flyers/Marketing tools
- Parent Night Flyers
- ASB By-laws / Constitutions
- Use of facility calendar
- Graduation / Promotion / Retention Reports
- School Site Council minutes

VITA

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