

IMPOSED REFORM: STANDARDS-BASED ACCOUNTABILITY AND ITS
IMPACT ON THE PRINCIPALSHIP

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

The imposed policy reform of the *Common Core State Standards (CCSS)* represents another attempt at an “enlightened proposal for change” currently in play at the ground level in the American education system, setting new standards for college and career readiness. This qualitative, comparative case study explored how two principals from suburban elementary schools, possessing very different demographics and state assessment achievement histories, made sense, constructed meaning and, ultimately, enacted change in their implementation of *CCSS*. Datnow and Castellano’s “Framework for Reform” was employed to analyze how the principals accepted, symbolically displayed or rejected *CCSS* reform. The contextual considerations of “structure, culture, and agency” were used to understand how the interplay among these factors and the reform itself led to variation[s] in response. The practices found at both Sunny Brook and Laguna showed evidence of degrees of implementation of *CCSS*, but the depth and clarity of understanding of implementation varied. Ideologies of staff respondents seemed to match those of their principals, which shaped reform, emphasizing the non-linear reality of school change. Findings suggest that the imposition of a mandate does not necessarily lead to consistent interpretation of that mandate. Rather, clarity of systems, structures, and expectations for change are critical to truly enacting reform that results in changed in learning experiences for students. Policy makers and district leaders should consider the significance of “why” through use of a co-construction approach over a technical-rational one in packaging and messaging reform. This case study suggests that technical-rational reform approaches, although successful in enacting change at operational levels, will likely continue to result in different interpretations and experiences for students.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

“However noble, sophisticated or enlightened proposals for change and improvement might be, they come to nothing if teachers don’t adopt them in their own classrooms and if they don’t translate them into effective classroom practice” (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991, p. 59). The imposed policy reform of the *Common Core State Standards (CCSS)* is one such category of an “enlightened proposal for change” that is currently in play at the ground level in the American education system. The term *imposed*, throughout this study, is meant to reinforce that implementation of *CCSS* at district and school levels is *required* or *obligatory* in the states that have chosen to adopt them. These standards set new criteria for college and career readiness and, consequently, raise the bar of achievement for our nation’s schools. Although considered a “state’s reform” and not technically federally imposed, presently, 43 states, the District of Columbia, four US territories and the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) have adopted the *CCSS*, and federal dollars, in most places, have been attached to this adoption. Ultimately, states’ adoption of *CCSS* has reduced states’ control over their education systems and, in some cases, removed decision making discretion from local school boards whom historically have had great power and influence over schools (Berry & Herrington, 2011). In order to fully understand why this shift toward a federalist approach may be problematic, one must first understand the theory of action behind standards-based reform and how specific reforms of this nature have impacted the American education system over the last decade or so.

Intentions & Realities of Standards-Based Reform

Clune (1998), a well respected professor of law whom specializes in topics of policy research in education, summarized the central thesis of standards-based reform to be that of systematically increasing alignment of instructional policies and practice guidelines around new standards of learning to produce far-reaching and considerable increases in teaching and learning for all students. Thus, to further simplify, such reform, when implemented, should eventually lead to systematic changes in curricular and instructional practices for students in classrooms. Explored in detail in Chapter Two, standards-based reform should provide a roadmap for stakeholders; it should ensure equitable learning opportunities around common standards for all students; and, it should increase feelings of accountability and related responses among educators. Such an approach inherently assumes the same model will similarly impact all targeted groups regardless of contextual differences that exist between populations (Clune, 2001; Sipple & Killeen, 2004; Desimone, 2013; Uline & Johnson, 2005; ISSLC Policy Standards, 2008; Glatthorn & Jailall, 2008; Fuhman, 2001; Honig, 2006; Theoharis & Brooks, 2012; Desimone, 2013; McClure, 2005; Sebring & Bryk, 2000; Louis, Febey, & Schroeder, 2005). However, in reality, a review of current literature on the impact of standards-based reform indicated otherwise.

Instead, standards movements, rather, contributed to a narrowing of curricula, a tendency toward “teacher proofing” classrooms, and loss of public faith in the educational system. Furthermore, research indicated that these “unintended” consequences most impacted principals, teachers, and, most significantly, students from impoverished and minority settings. Thus, many schools serving affluent populations

were allowed to maintain local control and, in many cases, “ignore” imposed policies that did not suit them (Stillman, 2009; Phillips & Flashman, 2007; Ogawa, Sandholtz, Martina-Flores & Scribner, 2003; Holme, Diem & Welton (2014). The next section will provide specific examples to further address this claim.

Imposed Reform Upon the American Education System

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) is considered the “signature federal program” intended to improve educational quality for students from poor family and/or minority backgrounds. The passage of ESEA represented the “culmination of more than a century debate on the role of the federal government in public schooling” (Berry & Harrington, 2011, p. 273). It also represented a stage-setting example of federal policy being introduced to states and local agencies in exchange for monetary support to states.

Over the next several decades, the focus on equalizing educational opportunities shifted to a much less clear target of equalizing educational achievement. This resulted in dramatic amendments to the act introduced by the second Bush administration known now as *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* (McGuinn, 2006). Through the NCLB authorization of 2001, states were required to establish curriculum standards, benchmarks and assessments in order to receive federal funding. Furthermore, monitoring and planning for improvement was mandated for low-income and consistently low-performing schools. Thus, schools—and their principal leaders—situated in affluent locales, often devoid of enrollments that included defined subgroups (i.e. ethnic, racial or linguistic minorities) were, in many cases, able to meet “acceptable performance” cutoffs

and avoid any increased oversight imposed by state agencies (illinoisreportcard.com, 2014).

For those districts that were not able to meet acceptable performance criteria a program called Differentiated Accountability (DA) was later introduced as an attempt to mitigate the tension between the federal government and states. Berry and Herrington (2011) explained:

In 2008, the ED, under a program called Differentiated Accountability (DA), issued an invitation to states to apply for waivers that would excuse them from some of the provisions of NCLB. For schools not making adequate progress, the competitive federal program granted selected states more flexibility in the accountability matrix under NCLB. This program allow[ed] states to perform a sort of triage, allocating resources differentially across school by degree and type of low performance. (p. 275)

This program, like the ESEA in the past, allowed states to focus resources and time toward the lowest performing districts. For example, Illinois, chose to initiate DA in the lowest performing five percent of high schools, and any schools that opted to not participate got a series of consequences that were very tightly controlled (McGuinn, 2006). Such consequences could be significant. They could range from mandatory placement of state officials at low performing school sites to schools being completely restructured, re-staffed or, possibly, closed entirely. Schools, on the other hand, that maintained “adequate progress” remained free from such controls, threats and sanctions (isbe.net, 2014).

This reality begs the question, how will higher performing schools—those schools that until recently have been left to their own devices for school improvement—react to standards-based reform being imposed upon them by their states into their schools? The newest standards’ reform movement, the *CCSS* initiative, has changed the game for all students, schools and districts. This reform represents the first federally positioned standards movement, and growth measures and requirements are also components of this reform package. Discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two, the *CCSS* with accountability movement has established growth and achievement expectations for all students whose state officials have elected to adopt the standards—even those from affluent, suburban communities whose principals may have elected to maintain “status quo” up until the point of their required implementation (isbe.net, 2014). These principals, in particular, may have a unique challenge ahead as they lead teachers toward improved outcomes for their students.

The Role of the Principal

As the *CCSS* take on a foundational role in public schools, principals must take on the responsibility of ensuring their implementation at the building level. Thus, they must understand the intentions behind the standards, and they must unpack and construct meaning around the standards in ways that can be applied operationally for teachers and students. It is well known that principals play a huge role in improved outcomes for students. In fact, Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) found, “Leadership has significant effects on student learning, second only to the effect of the quality of curriculum and teachers’ instruction” (p. 2).

In this time of increased accountability, educational leaders—and specifically principals—must propel their students forward, despite the realities of “increasingly complex environment[s]” (Leithwood, p. 1). Therefore, principals need to clearly understand the methods and actions that promote successful growth for their buildings’ students. They need to better understand how the contexts of their environments and their lived experiences impact their leadership for change (Datnow & Castellano, 2001). To date, likely because the policy is so new, little scholarly research has been focused on how elementary principals in suburban school districts lead for change around imposed reforms such as *CCSS*.

Conceptual Framework

Datnow and Castellano’s (Datnow & Castellano, 2001) “Framework for Reform” will inform this study. Their framework, focused upon research on teachers as implementers of reform, concluded that “the interplay of structure, culture and agency” were significant factors in addressing and understanding the success or failure of a reform effort. To explain further, Oakes, Welner, Yonezawa, and Allen (2005), argued that schools and their broader districts “are situated in local enactments of larger cultural norms, rules, values, and power relations, and these cultural forces promote either stability or change” (p. 288). Therefore, responses to change are often impacted by these interceding factors. Specifically, Datnow and Castellano posited that educators may respond in three different ways to reform directives. They may advance the reform effort. Through Datnow and Castellano’s lens, this action typically occurs when there is a consistent match in the implementers’ and reformers’ ideologies. Educators may also choose to symbolically display a reform without fully advancing the cause. In this case,

the reform appears to have been implemented for stakeholders, but true ideological agreement and/or change has not occurred. And finally, within this framework, educators may also choose to resist the reform overtly or covertly. This result is often an outcome of a mismatch in ideologies. It is with this enlightening framework that I studied the role of the principal as a building leader for change in response to *CCSS* reform.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, comparative case study analysis was to understand how principals from suburban elementary schools made sense, constructed meaning and, ultimately, enacted change around imposed reforms such as the *CCSS*. As part of this analysis, Datnow and Castellano's "Framework for Reform" was employed to analyze how principals accepted, symbolically displayed or rejected *CCSS* reform. Consequently, through case study, the researcher considered principals' leadership actions or inactions in relation to *CCSS* reform. To gain an even richer understanding of the "the interplay of structure, culture and agency," this study compared two schools, both from suburban elementary environments, possessing very different demographics and state assessment achievement histories. This study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do principals make sense and construct meaning around imposed *CCSS* reform, and how does this developed understanding impact their leadership for implementation of *CCSS*?
 - a) What factors influence a principal's leadership around acceptance of the *CCSS* imposed reform?
 - b) What factors influence a principal's leadership around the decision to symbolically display *CCSS* imposed reform?

- c) What factors influence a principal’s leadership around the decision to reject *CCSS* imposed reform?

Significance

This study is significant because the role of the principal must evolve drastically with the imposition of the *CCSS* adoption. At no previous time in history, have principals been taxed with such a required, intensity of focus upon prescribed, national standards and isolated student achievement and accountability measures. Examining the relationship between this standards-based, imposed reform and how principals—particularly those principals who may have been able to “pass” upon past reforms mandates—understand and lead for change expands a currently very slim body of existing research and informs other principals along the way to leading for change in their respective buildings.

Summary and Organization of the Study

This study consists of six chapters. Chapter One is the introduction to the study. Chapter Two is a review of literature that explores themes related to the history of standards-based reform initiatives and the historical and present impact upon schools. An overview of the *Common Core State Standards* movement is also provided. Additionally, the role of the principal as a leader for change is examined, and the context of suburban schools, specific to the locale of this proposed study, is explored. Finally, a more detailed explanation of the theoretical framework guiding this study is shared. Chapter Three discusses research methodology and methods for recruiting and selecting participants, data collection, and analysis. Chapters Four and Five present the findings from each selected site to answer the research question posted in Chapter One. Chapter Six presents

a comparative summary of the findings, conclusions and a discussion of the implications of the findings of this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

A litany of justifications exists for reforming our nation's schools. Among the reasons, headlines suggesting that the U.S. is falling short internationally are almost a daily feature. For example, articles such as "The United States, Falling Behind," "Why the World is Smarter than the U.S.," and "Study Confirms that U.S. Falling Behind in Education," are all quickly available with a single online search. Additionally, students' experiences of inequity—highlighted through the continued existence of an achievement gap between students of different socioeconomic, racial, language and ethnic backgrounds on national assessment measures—in schooling are at an all time high (Collopy, Bowman, & Taylor, 2012; Hemphill, Vanneman, & National Center for Education Statistics, 2011; National Center for Education Statistics, 2013; Rojas-LeBouef & Slate, 2012; Simms, 2012; Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006; Stillman, 2009; Easley, 2011). Gamoran (2007) posited, "Pervasive inequality is the most pressing problem facing U.S. education" (p. 3) in his tomb on lessons learned from *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*, a standards-based reform solution for improving our nation's schools.

Probably the most well-intentioned and credible motivation for change in public education, however, is the hope that, despite a negative public image and ongoing challenges of inequity, reform efforts will raise the bar for all students through exposure to better instructional experiences (Clune, 2001; Goertz, 2001; Desimone, 2013; Uline & Johnson, 2005; McClure, 2005). One reform theory that aligns with this goal is that of a standards-based approach. Clune's (1998) central thesis of standards-based reform can be summarized to be that of systematically increasing alignment of instructional policies and

practice guidelines around new standards of learning to produce far-reaching and considerable increases in teaching and learning for all students. Thus, with this premise in mind, Clune (2001) described the following causal relationship: “*Standards-based reform* (SR), through its purposeful activities, leads to *standards-based policy* (SP), which leads to a *rigorous, implemented standards-based curriculum* (SC) for all students, leading to measured *high student achievement* (SA) in the curriculum as taught” (p. 15).

Ideally, in simpler terms, standards should help principals, teachers, and students gain clarity around the focus of teaching and learning and allow for the development of systems of measures to assess progress in relation to that learning (Desimone, 2013; Uline & Johnson, 2005; Goertz, 2001). But, what has been the impact of the standards-based movement? The purpose of this review of literature is to provide an overview of key themes of research on the standards movement. Among the emergent themes, I will explore both intended outcomes of such reform and the impact of enacted reform upon the field of education. I will also specifically discuss a current standards-based reform movement, the *Common Core State Standards (CCSS)*. Additionally, I will explore themes from research on the historical role of the principal to present times and, finally, the impact of standards reform and standards-based accountability reforms on principal leadership. Implications and recommendations for further consideration and research will also be shared.

Themes from Research on Standards Movement

From Clune’s theory presented above to a review of research on the impact of standards-based reform, several key themes emerged for consideration. For ease of explanation, these themes can be further categorized into topics of research on intended

purposes of standards-based reform and topics of research on “unintended” outcomes of standards-based reform. This section will discuss both varieties of themes, starting with the intentions of standards-based reform. Finally, the unintended outcomes of the standards movement will then be overviewed.

Intentions of Standards-Based Reform: A Road Map For Stakeholders

When considering the intent behind establishing standards, a frequently purported goal was to establish a clear road map for educators (Clune, 2001; Sipple & Killeen, 2004; Desimone, 2013; Uline & Johnson, 2005; ISSLC Policy Standards, 2008; Glatthorn & Jailall, 2008; Fuhman, 2001). Standards-based reform is rooted, theoretically, by the proposition that successful education systems “create a common understanding of what all students should know and be able to do” (Uline & Johnson, 2005, p. 4) through content standards. McClure (2005), in her research on the theory behind standards-based reform, suggested that such reform has, in fact, been successful in bringing clarity to elementary and middle schools. She also argued that high schools, for the most part, still lack this systemic approach, which is evident in their lagging behind primary grades in relation to impact. Through defining “the what” through standards-based policies, public education has created an opportunity to now address funding inequities, instructional delivery variance and many other critical factors that could not be addressed systemically prior to the establishment of standards (McClure).

This argument extended as well to parents and other community stakeholders. Through standards, a level of transparency was extended to all participants about what could be expected through the education system. For example, Bianchini and Kelly (2003) in a critical study of the challenges faced by California’s standards-based reform

applied to science indicated this intent in their conclusions that the standards documents could “be understood as an attempt to create a comprehensive and coherent vision for science education; for persuading educators, school administrators, and the public of the merits of this vision; and for encouraging concerted and coordinated action in state and local settings (p. 383).

The standards road map also extended to principals and other school administrators. The 2008 update of school administrator standards by the Interstate Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) represented such an example of the hope for transparent communication to all regarding the responsibilities and requirements of effective leadership. The standards themselves addressed six critical areas that impacted student learning: vision, culture, management, community relationships, ethics and “the larger political, economic, legal and cultural context” (Uline & Johnson, 2005, p. 45). The explanatory language that accompanied the standards indicated, “incorporating clear and consistent standards and expectations into a statewide education system can be a core predictor of strong school leadership” and can “help states set expectations...and [ultimately] raise student achievement” (ISLLC, 2008, p. 4). Thus, emergent in literature, the intent of standards-based reform was to allow for a common road map among stakeholders.

Intentions of Standards-Based Reform: Equitable Learning Opportunities For All

Although highly debated in terms of actual results, another intention emergent in a review of literature was that of standards-based reform acting as an equalizer of opportunity for students traditionally underserved by the education system (Furhman, 2001; Honig, 2006; Glatthorn & Jailall, 2008; Theoharis & Brooks, 2012; Desimone,

2013; Uline & Johnson, 2005; McClure, 2005). The theory behind this intention was that by developing a common set of clear standards for all students, every student ultimately benefited. Traditionally underserved students could not be ignored because the bar was defined for their achievement, and traditionally higher performing students were pulled up even further due to the rigor of the standards set. In fact, reform leaders viewed this approach as a “moral and economic” imperative (McClure, p. 7) and stressed the importance of transparency to all in any educational endeavor.

Desimone’s (2013) study of teacher and administrator response to standards-based reform affirmed a portion of this proposition by concluding that “there was a strong district and principal-level consensus that standards-based reform efforts in their jurisdictions had brought a new focus on struggling learning” (p. 14). One administrator specifically shared that the standards-based approach “forced [staff] to look at all students, not just the smart ones” (p. 15). Thus, research suggested that the establishment of standards for all students had the impact of bringing instructional and achievement disparities among all students to the forefront.

On the other hand, others have posited that standards-based reform, even if well intended, is a shortsighted approach to truly improving equity for all students (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006; Stillman, 2009; Easley, 2011). Stillman, in a multiple case study that investigated teachers’ perceptions of imposed standards-based reform on underserved students in California, found that teachers who worked with marginalized students were the most likely population to experience a lack of instructional autonomy and be constricted by standardization and assessment requirements in their classrooms. Thus, students who most need a tailored instructional approach that matched their present level

of performance in a given content area and/or with the English language found themselves in “scripted” classrooms, where teacher autonomy was not allowed, and teaching to a standardized test was prevalent. Interestingly enough, these teachers indicated that the standards themselves were not the problem. Rather, it was the “canned” and scripted programs their districts adopted and implemented to interpret the standards. Teachers given the autonomy to tailor standards to marginalized students’ needs found more opportunities for equitable implementation for students.

For example, Easley (2011) in a mixed methods study of high school students’ and teachers’ perceptions of the impact of standards on equity found,

Teachers lose enthusiasm in preparing students to engage in concepts between academics and real life, be it local or international, when they are not regarded as transformative intellectuals’ (Murakami-Ramalho, 2010: 206) but are treated more like mechanics whose job it is to ensure that schools pass inspections that use high stakes tests to determine success or failure. (p. 233)

Thus, although the literature consistently indicated that equity was an *intention* of standards-based reform, success associated with this intention was inconsistent.

Intentions of Standards-Based Reform: Increasing Accountability

Standards-based reform’s beginning, most commonly connected to the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983), did not initially start with a focus on specific accountability measures. These measures evolved over time through the reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)* through the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* of 2001 (Uline & Johnson, 2005). More recently, the federal government leveraged accountability measures further through the establishment of *Race*

to the Top (RttT), a four-plus billion-dollar contest created to incentivize states to promote innovation and reform (“Race to the Top,” 2013). However, with the installation of accountability measures that resulted in accolades and sanctions to states, districts and schools, several prevalent themes emerged for consideration as part of the standards-based movement approach.

The addition of standards-based accountability measures resulted in shifting district and school leaders’ beliefs about their responsibilities and expectations for students. Desimone (2013) in a study of five states’ district and school leaders’ beliefs and actions around accountability policy found that almost all participants felt accountable for student learning, and “most said this had not always been the case before standards-based reform” (p. 15). The data in this study went on to show that these shifts in thought were attributed to the pressures applied by accountability expectations. Furthermore, additional studies built upon this theme to suggest that re-conceptualizing perceived culpability as a way of improving instruction and growth could, in fact, support the growth of all children (Sebring & Bryk, 2000; Louis, Febey, & Schroeder, 2005). Such choice allowed districts to use these accountability systems both positively and formatively to measure growth opportunities for schools and individual students and to decouple teachers’ expectations of student background factors like race and income. Glatthorn and Jailall (2008) addressed this potential succinctly in their recommendation that “standards should be treated as the floor for curriculum, not the ceiling” (p. 9).

Not all studies concluded positive results from the installation of accountability measures. In fact, little published research showed positive change associated with the establishment of *NCLB*, possibly the most significant example of accountability reform to

date (Diamond, 2007; Linn, 2003; Desimone, 2013). Desimone, Smith and Frisvold (2007), in a study of the impact of improved teacher quality as a result of *NCLB* implementation, found little gains and potentially negative impacts of *NCLB* on improved teacher quality. This factor, of course, was a touted expectation of successful implementation of *NCLB* reform. They concluded that similar policies “may eventually move states in the right direction, but...that results may not be substantial enough or fast enough to satisfy the legislation or our own ideal about equality in teacher quality” (p. 112).

Beyond studies of teacher quality, Ashby (2000) used the phrase “test factories” to describe her research on schools where principals had responded to increased accountability measures by requiring teachers to hyper focus on teaching to the test. Phillips and Flashman (2007) also studied such in their research on assessment and accountability policies and found that teachers in poor, minority schools reported more professional development around assessment measures and less instructional autonomy after increases in mandated testing from their states. Although professional development is typically viewed as a positive component of improved teaching and learning, in this case, the narrowed focus of professional development to standardized assessment over improved instructional practices, in combination with a loss of teacher autonomy, was interpreted negatively. Another result of accountability reform in conjunction with standards was the tendency to adopt a “Christmas tree” (Sebring & Bryk, 2000) approach. In this situation, principals and teachers became over reliant upon purchased products to “fix” instructional needs and then spent limited dollars on programs without first conducting careful review or planning. Thus, although the standards with accountability

movement has successfully promoted increased awareness and feelings of responsibility upon educators, these responses, have not necessarily positively impacted student learning.

Impact of Standards Movement: Narrowing of Curricula

Years after the enactment of *NCLB*, minimal evidence existed that showed student learning had increased in meaningful ways other than on states' versions of their own tests (Nichols & Berliner, 2008). However, much documentation showed unintended and negative impacts of this accountability movement—that this legislation had actually harmed instruction and student learning (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). One unintentional outcome was that of a narrowing of curriculum (Dillon, 2006; Jerald, 2006; Manzo, 2005; Nichols & Berliner; Willis, 2007; Jones, Jones & Hargrove, 2003; Misco, Patterson & Doppen, 2011; Fairman & Firestone, 2001). This section will provide a synthesis of current research on this topic and explore other related outcomes of narrowed curriculum.

Numerous studies explored the impact of *NCLB* and the broader accountability movement on schools. One such study found that academically deficient Kansas high school freshman were required to take two English classes instead of electives, and another study showed that California middle school students were required to take two periods of all core, tested subjects while funding was simply dropped for the arts, foreign language and trades' classes (Zastrow & Janc, 2006). In fact, Jones et al. (2003) found that a “narrowing of curriculum was reported in virtually every state where there [was] high-stakes testing of only a few subjects” (p. 30). Kannapel, Coe, Aagaard, and Reeves (1999) in a study of Kansas standards with accountability reform confirmed, through multiple teacher surveys, that instructors put less emphasis on non-tested areas in favor of

the tested areas in classrooms. Beyond teachers shifting their instructional foci to emphasize tested areas in their classrooms, standards-based accountability reform also resulted in shifting motivations for students and even less exposure to curriculum that focused on problem solving and critical thinking for marginalized student populations.

Few would likely argue that resiliency and persistence are not critical human qualities we want to cultivate in our nation's students. Research showed that these qualities were nurtured when students understood the purpose of learning as "self-improvement or achievement of personal goals" (Nichols & Berliner, 2008, p. 15). However, a high-stakes testing environment sends messages to students about the primary goal being one of scoring high on assessments (Desimone, 2013). This limited focus resulted in many schools choosing to hold assemblies, socials and other school events to motivate their students to perform on state-mandated assessments. These events then further reinforced messages to students that were in opposition to the goal of cultivating persistent, critical thinkers.

Take these enacted practices, the growing tendency for teachers to spend more time using teacher-centered approaches such lecturing and requiring students to engage in the collection of "bits of low cognitive-level" (Vogler & Virtue, 2007, p. 54) information, and a perfect storm of disengagement and discontent may be cultivated. "When curriculum is relevant to students' lives, interests and experiences, and students feel that they are partners in their education, they are engaged and motivated" (Wunderlich, Bell & Ford, 2005). Brain research supported the need for classrooms to focus on such qualities over narrowed, shallow, assessable curricula (Willis, 2007).

These foci were equally critical, if not more critical, for students from impoverished families, and research indicated that these students were the most negatively impacted by the narrowing of curriculum as a result of the accountability movement. Ogawa, Sandholtz, Martina-Flores and Scribner (2003) found that teachers' autonomy, relative to curriculum and lesson planning, was most constricted in schools with a large population of low-income students. These students were more likely to experience teachers who chose lower level procedural instruction methods over more conceptual methods (Desimone, Smith & Frisvold, 2007). Additionally, teacher attrition was greater among new teachers in these environments. Crocco and Costigan (2007) studied this phenomenon in New York City schools and concluded that inexperienced teachers felt a lack of professional identity and a lesser ability to build relationships with students as a result of scripted, narrow curriculum requirements in their schools. This reality resulted in these educators leaving their positions at much higher rates than other teachers. Thus, not only has narrowed curriculum as a result of the standards-based accountability movement brought negative outcomes for students, it clearly also impacted teachers. The next section will discuss yet another unintended outcome, the tendency toward "teaching proofing" instruction and the impact of such on our nation's teaching staff.

Impact of Standards Movement: A Tendency Toward "Teacher Proofing"

NCLB represented a reauthorization of the *ESEA*, originally developed by President Lyndon Johnson. At that time Johnson's agenda was for citizens to positively view dollars spent by government for education—to see education as a public good, to assist in mitigating the "war on poverty" (Meyer, 2013). Other prominent folks such as

Dewey and Perrone also worked hard to promote the notion that children should be inherently viewed as “curious, intense, inquiring, and fundamentally good” (Lakoff, 2002 as cited in Meyer, 2013, p. 2). Schools and schooling were seen as vehicles to promote this “good,” and teachers were given autonomy to determine the most viable learning pathways to achieve this goal. However, in the present times of *NCLB* and the accountability movement, “the national image of public schools has been viciously attacked” (Meyer, 2010, p. 3). Part of this attack resulted in the trend of “teacher proofing” classrooms, which research indicated led to significant losses in teachers’ agency and public faith for teaching as a profession and to the dumping of additional “defined” responsibilities upon teachers’ already full plates.

Teacher agency. The image of teachers as developers of curriculum “forms a sharp contrast to the dominant image of teacher[s] as curriculum implementers” (Craig, 2012, p.91), promoted in today’s reform solutions for improving education. This presently promoted image assumed that others in higher positions of power—namely government and “researchers” (Granger, 2008; Bracey, 2009)—knew more about what should happen in schools than did the teachers. Craig (2012) conducted a 12-year study that examined the impact of an external reform agenda on an experienced teacher’s image of her profession. Over the course of the study, she found that the imposed reform package drastically impacted the teacher’s sense of self, intrinsic motivation, organic commitment toward continuous improvement and relationships with her colleagues. Instead, what had been a strong collegial and collaborative environment “became replaced by...a culture of suspicion, a culture of sneaking around, and a way of being where they never divulged ‘what [was] in [their] heart of hearts’” (p. 99).

Meyer (2013) called this loss of autonomy “legislated malpractice” (p. 3). Teachers, once supported fully in their efforts to determine the “continuum of experience[s]” in their classrooms and appreciated for the “demands and complexities of teaching” (Granger, 2008, p. 206), were no longer respected for their knowledge of craft. Instead, as a result of *NCLB* and the accountability movement, federal and state governments and the private interest groups who influence them are now making many important educational decisions. Schools have come to be viewed by many as simply marketplaces and the students who attend them as mere consumers. Consumers then can choose these pre-packaged, scripted “products” that teachers must simply follow. “The moral craft of teaching is effectively superseded and evidence-based practice appears as the golden key of educational reform” (Granger, p. 216). Furthermore, this “teaching to the test” requirement imposed upon instructors most negatively impacted inner city schools. There, experienced, qualified teachers, offended by loss of autonomy and respect, fled the profession entirely or moved to other more desirable positions, which resulted in students dually suffering from low-level, scripted curriculum and inexperienced teachers (Meyer, 2013).

Public faith. Granger (2008) posited, “Anyone with even a modicum of understanding of public education knows that genuine excellence on the part of either teachers or students must be carefully and thoughtfully nurtured. It cannot simply be imposed, mandated or legislated” (p. 210). This statement presented in stark contrast to *NCLB* and the accountability movement, where a deficit image of the teaching profession has been promoted (Berliner, 2006; Apple, 2008; Hargreaves, 2003; Kelchtermans, 2007; Valli & Buese, 2007). In the present reform package, student achievement is directly

connected to teacher performance, and while this tenant is not completely outlandish in that we know good teaching results in stronger student learning gains, it has been oversimplified. Huge, promulgating factors such as poverty and limited English exposure are forgotten or are discounted as pieces of the puzzle (Meyer, 2013).

The image of failing schools and failing teachers is promoted, ultimately reinforcing loss of public faith, “that someone in the publicly funded educational system is doing something wrong for which they should be punished” (Craig, 2012, p. 99). This movement can be seen in the growing popularity for privatization of schools and the charter schools movement. Public faith in traditional schooling models, although equally effective to charter schools in research studies (Debray-Pelot, Lubienski & Scott, 2007), has dwindled under the hope that a token economy system of schools will somehow solve all of the significant challenges facing the nation’s schools. The complexity and ambiguity that comes with being human, and then inherently, to learning in classrooms every day has been reduced to two results: success or failure, as measured by a standardized test. Granger (2008) explored this concept succinctly:

Such reductionist choreography is built on simplistic curriculum-delivery models of teaching. It plays on and reinforces the presumptions that (a) teachers are only teaching if students are learning in accordance with prescribed standards; (b) student learning is accurately reflected in scores on standardized tests that assess these standards; and (c) if students’ tests scores are not meeting these standards, then teachers are, in fact, not teaching, that is to say, they are not doing their jobs. (p. 215)

Loss of faith in the teaching profession has been the result, and even though the

public image of teachers' capabilities can best be described as damaged, their load of responsibilities has only increased.

This impact can be described as a “more and faster” expectation (Hursh, 2007). Although, there is reduced autonomy to determine classroom needs and reduced faith in teachers' abilities to effectively conduct their jobs, expectations have continued to increase. Bracey (2009) summarized this phenomenon by describing five categories of responsibilities imposed upon teachers under *NCLB* and the accountability movement. These responsibilities were increased curriculum pacing demands, curricular alignment to state testing requirements, substantially increased data-related tasks, increased demands for English to speakers of other languages' (ESOL) instructional capacity and the expectation of teachers to tutor to fill gaps. As one teacher put it, the expectation was to do “whatever it takes” (p. 782) even if that meant doing so before school, during lunch, during plan periods or after school.

In sum, research indicated a growing requirement that teachers presented imposed curricula, “[taught] to the test” sufficiently for standardized assessment impact, adjusted instructional delivery to effectively support a range of students who speak languages other than English, collected, analyzed and relied upon defined data sets to show growth and provided, daily, as much additional instruction through tutoring that could be mustered. Teachers' plates were not the only ones, however, impacted through *NCLB* and standards-based accountability reform. Principals' roles have also shifted dramatically. The next section will provide, first, an overview of the most recent standards based accountability reform, *Common Core State Standards (CCSS)*, to provide the reader will additional context. The final sections will then explore the role of principal from a

historical perspective and discuss current emergent themes as a result of standards-based accountability reform.

What are The Common Core State Standards?

According to its website, The *Common Core State Standards (CCSS)* initiative is a voluntary, state-led effort that established a single set of clear educational standards for kindergarten through grade twelve in English language arts and mathematics. The standards were designed to ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to enter credit bearing entry courses in two or four-year college programs or enter the workforce. Like the theory behind standard-based approaches, the *CCSS*, according to the authors, “are clear and concise to ensure that parents, teachers, and students have a clear understanding of the expectations in reading, writing, speaking and listening, language and mathematics in school” (“Common Core,” 2014).

Again, taken directly from the website, the nation’s governors and education commissioners, through their representative organizations, the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), led the development of the *Common Core State Standards* and continue to lead the initiative. Teachers, parents, school administrators and experts from across the country together with state leaders provided input into the development of the standards (“Common Core,” 2014).

The goal beyond these standards was to establish—across states—a set of clear expectations aligned to expectations for college and career readiness. Additionally, another function of these standards is said to be the promotion of equity by ensuring all students, no matter where they live, are well prepared with the skills and knowledge

necessary to collaborate and compete with their peers in the United States and abroad. This represents a change from previous state standards that were unique to every state. Thus, the *CCSS* should enable collaboration between states, which was previously impossible. For example, the development and implementation of textbooks, digital media, and assessments systems, are just a few ideas suggested as collaboration opportunities among states. Additionally, the website suggests that states can help each other with “changes needed to help support educators and schools in teaching to the new standards.”

What is different about the *CCSS* from previous standards-based reform efforts? The *CCSS* were said to be written by building upon “the best and highest state standards in existence in the U.S.”, through reviewing expectations from other high performing countries around the world, and by careful study of the existing research and literature on what students need to know and be able to do to be successful in college and careers. The website emphasized that no state in the country was asked to lower its expectations for students in adopting the *CCSS*. Additionally, the authors indicated that the standards are evidence-based, aligned with college and work expectations, include rigorous content and skills, and are informed by other top performing countries. Finally, again according to the website, they were developed in consultation with teachers and parents from across the country so they are also realistic and practical for the classroom. While some folks might argue ambiguity exists in this statement—after all, which teachers and which parents remain in question—others such as Diane Ravitch and Joy Pullman have suggested that the authors themselves were not even qualified to write the standards (Ravitch, 2014; Pullman, 2013). It should be noted that the politics and policies behind the *CCSS* are not

the focus of this research; rather, I am interested in how principals understand and enact change through this particular example of policy. Therefore, what is the role of a principal in implementing change at the building level?

The Role of the Principal

In order to understand how current principals make sense and enact change around policy reform in their buildings, it is helpful to first understand the role of *principal* itself from a historical perspective. However, Kafka (2009) in her explicit research on the history of the principalship found that, more often than not, published research focused on district level leaders rather than on principals. In fact, Kate Rousmaniere (2007), a known historian noted, the “principalship is missing from both the political history of school administration and the social history of schools. It’s as if the principal did not exist at all” (p. 4, as cited in Kafka). However, even with only a slim body of research available, existing literature on the topic has concluded that the role of principal, even in historical times, was both complicated and highly demanding.

The role of principal is said to have emerged from the original position of “principal-teacher.” This position was typically filled by a man who, in addition to his teaching responsibilities, also carried out clerical and administrative duties, such as student discipline, student attendance, building maintenance and communication with the superintendent (Kafka, 2009). Pierce’s monograph (1935) on the history of the principal concluded:

The principal took attendance but also gained authority over the other teachers in his school. He worked with the broader community but also personally maintained school grounds. In some cities, the principal gained formal

institutional power in the mid-1800s; in other cities it was decades before his role and authority were officially carved out. (Kafka, 2009, p. 321)

Nevertheless, leadership authority, whether it emerged quickly or over several decades became a common feature of the role of the principal, and by the late 1800's, principals were expected to perform very similar tasks of today's principals (Pierce, 1935, pp. 71-75). By the 1920's principals were seen as "pivotal figures in any school reform effort. For many observers at the time, the principal *was* the school" (Kafka, 2009, p. 324).

This notion has remained firmly true into modern times. So, while historical accounts of leadership attributes are not predominantly available, current research is plentiful in relation to leadership attributes required of principals. Much has also been written about leadership for change. This section will highlight, first attributes of successful principal leaders, and then review qualities of leaders tied to successful change initiatives.

Attributes of Principals as Leaders

Transformational leadership has been a frequent focus of study in the leadership field of research (Bass, 1998; Heck & Hallinger, 1999). Initiated by Leithwood and his colleagues in the late 1980's and early 1990's, many studies have shown positive relationships between transformational leadership and various school and teacher organizational conditions (Anderson, 2008). Northouse (2001) defined transformational leadership in simple terms as being "the ability to get people to want to change, improve, and be led. The process of leading teachers toward these ideals, according to Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) could be summarized into seven dimensions at schools. These were building school vision and establishing school goals, providing intellectual stimulation,

providing individualized support, modeling best practices and organizational values, setting high academic standards expectations, creating a productive school culture and fostering participation in decisions.

Other scholars also described leadership attributes and practices that were indicative of successful principals. Beatty (2007) indicated that leaders must remain open minded to differing or dissenting opinions and create forums where these opposing ideas could be expressed and heard (Degenhardt, 2006, p. 290). Additionally, she stressed the importance of principals tuning into “moment-to-moment emotional attunements” with humility and openness.

Yet another lens, *The Educational Leadership Policy Standards (ISLLC)* of 2008 organized functions that defined strong school leadership under six standards (“Education Leadership Standards,” 2008). These standards represented the broad, high-priority themes that education leaders must address in order to promote the success of every student. The six standards called for the following leadership behaviors:

1. Setting a widely shared vision for learning;
2. Developing a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth;
3. Ensuring effective management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment;
4. Collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources;
5. Acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner;

6. Understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, legal, and cultural contexts.

And while each of these visions of successful principal leadership showed commonalities among effective practices, some researchers have argued that these standards/ideals/functions alone were insufficient. In essence, transformational leadership is insufficient. Such theorists emphasized that attributes of leadership, rather, in addition to the previously described criteria, must include those that actively challenge any practices that promote social reproduction or inequities for students (Shields, 2009; Theoharis, 2007). These added requirements have been defined as those being consistent with transformative leadership practices.

Whether present day principals strive to be transformational or transformative, the role of the principal in the present era of reform has yet to be studied by many. In fact, very few studies exploring the impacts of the standards movement upon on-site principals are in existence. I was able to locate one such study completed in Nebraska in 2002. It examined how public high school principals perceived the impacts of standards on their schools (Weichel, 2002). In his study, Weichel noted that principals felt there would be little impact in the school except in administrator's stress, pressure, and time. The principals studied were not convinced that standards would have a big impact on student learning, but would instead demand more time and more stress and pressure for all educators. The principals, however, did feel that textbooks and other materials would become more aligned with state standards. If principals in this particular study did not believe that standards would impact teachers and students in ways other than through added stress, pressure and time, the imperative to further study such principals to better

understand their thoughts and practices around standards-based reform is highly important.

Yet another factor in exploring attributes of principals was to consider their role specifically in relation to reform implementation. In doing so, principals were among the most responsible for implementing reform. These “social actors”—often those who do not work at the classroom level—are most frequently the force behind the adoption of a reform” (Datnow & Castellano, 2001, p. 21). The role of a principal as an active and ongoing supporter of reform is critical to the success of a school-wide change effort (Muncy & McQuillan, 1996 in Datnow & Castellano, 2001). Datnow found a correlation between shared leadership (distributed) and successful reform for change and concluded with the following recommendations:

1. Principals need to be instructional leaders of reform, not just manage or support them from a distance, and design teams need to promote this vision of leadership.
2. Teacher buy-in to reform should be present at the outset or cultivated quickly.
3. Teacher resistance must be confronted, rather than ignored.
4. External reform designs need to build in ample opportunity for teacher empowerment.
5. Districts should formalize policy regarding teacher leadership positions and modify working conditions to account for the burdensome responsibilities of these jobs. (pp. 67-88)

If leadership is accepted as a process of interaction between leaders and subordinates where a leader attempts to influence the others’ behaviors to accomplish organizational goals (Yukl, 2005), then, leaders must cultivate strong support for reform

by creating, stimulating, promoting and sustaining it at their schools (Bass, 1985; 1997; Balyer, 2012). Each of the attributes for effective principal leadership described above warrants further contemplation now in relation to considering themes on the impact of standards reform and standards-based accountability reform on principal leadership.

Themes from Research on Impact of Standards Reform and Standards-Based Accountability Reforms on Principal Leadership

The topics of standards reform and standards-based accountability reform were predominantly viewed as two distinctly different animals in a review of recent research. Many researchers described the virtues of standards-driven policies—they brought coherence to education and improved access to equal opportunities; they offered guidance but not directives in assisting school districts with transforming their systems; and, they defined content in curricular areas that was previously ambiguous (Desimone, 2013; McClure, 2011; Uline & Johnson, 2005). On the other hand, extant literature more often than not critically viewed standards-based accountability reform efforts by concluding that the shift led to “disappointing and in some cases alarming responses that have failed to fulfill the potential of standards-based reform” (Desimone, p. 43). Additionally, research suggested accountability reform had also ultimately failed to address inequities in funding and delivery and had, instead, focused student success upon very limited standardized test measures (Desimone; McClure; Uline & Johnson, 2005).

Researchers agreed, however, that the role of the principal, regardless of enacted reform approach, was crucial to a school’s success (Leithwood et al., 2004; ISSLC, 2008; Fullan, 2007). In fact, the same researchers found that school leadership was second only to classroom instruction as the major factor that contributed to what students learned.

Therefore, it is critical to understand how principals' roles have changed through both the standards movement and standards-based accountability reforms. The next sections will describe emergent themes regarding these changes. Each section will highlight, first, the impact of standards-based reform on principal leadership and then describe how accountability expectations on top of standards have further amplified leadership expectations for principals.

Instructional Leadership Over Management

Standards-based reform resulted in instructional leadership becoming a prerequisite for a successful principalship. No longer could principals simply be “responsive to students, parents, and other stakeholders” needs and ensure that their schools were run smoothly (Fullan, 2007; Pepper, 2010). This shift from a focus on management to a focus on instruction required principals to engage in responsibilities that promoted implementation of curricular changes, built shared vision-making among stakeholders and promoted professional communities where teachers focused upon improved teaching practices for increased learning and achievement for all students (Burke, Marx & Lowenstein, 2012; Eilers & D’Amico, 2012; Uline & Johnson, 2005).

Effective principals, as a result, “spent a considerable percentage of the school day in classrooms observing instruction, reviewing student work, engaging teachers in discussions about best practices, modeling effective strategies and helping teachers solve pedagogical problems” (Johnson & Asera, 1999, p. 17). Furthermore, these leaders in successful school environments initiated and maintained dialogue around evidence of student learning in their schools. Education leaders “must not only manage school finances, keep busses running on time, and make hiring decisions, but they must also be

instructional leaders...they have to be able to mobilize staff and employ all the tools in an expanded toolbox” (ISLLC, 2008).

Integrating instructional and transformational practices. Successfully fulfilling the above-described responsibilities was insufficient, however, for making it as a principal in an era of standards-based accountability reform. The integration of instructional leadership and transformational leadership practices was suggested as an imperative for success. Sergiovanni (2007) noted that successful transformational leadership required collaboration and shared decision-making around a common goal or vision. He contended that the use of such leadership was more effective in creating positive changes for learning in schools. Leadership for change with accountability demands resulted in a need to bring all stakeholders—parents, community members, teachers, students, staff, etc.—together toward a common vision of collective improvement. Leithwood and Sun (2012) posited, “In an education policy environment with a laser-like focus on improving student achievement, transformational leadership theoretically offers only a partial solution to the leadership ‘problem’” (p. 389). Marks and Printy’s (2003) study of principal leadership indicated that this integrated leadership approach, applied to accountability-laden schools, was far more powerful than either leadership style employed alone. Thus, an approach that combined the knowledge, skills and leadership practices that promoted instructional growth with the political savvy and belief-changing technical knowledge, skills and practices that transformed schools and communities was a stronger recipe for principal success (Leithwood et al., 2004; Marks & Printy, 2003; Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009).

Data-Informed Decision Making

Another emergent theme from standards-based reform that changed principal leadership expectations was the notion that standardized data became an integral part of the definition of success for students and schools. Standards-based policies also resulted in leaders developing an awareness regarding the performance of all of their students. Uline & Johnson (2005) posited, “Leaders must be able to use data to identify the most effective and efficient routes to high achievement for every student (p. 47). Standards allowed a common bar by which principals could, in many cases for the first time, compare all students’ achievement and growth. Desimone (2013) found, in a study of principals’ changing practices relative to standards-based reforms, “Nearly all respondents said they felt accountable for student learning, and most said this had not always been the case before standards-based reform” (p. 15). Thus, standards-based reform changed the technical requirements of principals in that they had to become data savvy and aware of the achievement for every student. However, the added accountability features of more recent reforms have raised the bar for principals to an even higher level.

Narrowing view of “achievement.” The focus on accountability has forced educators to look at all students, not just the bright ones (Desimone, 2013). Although standards-based reform efforts, as previously described, brought an awareness to principals about all students’ performance within their schools, standards-based accountability reforms resulted in intense pressure upon principals for all students to “perform” to prescribed standards. As a result, these mandates left little space for discretion with curriculum or instructional decisions (Hamilton, Stecher & Yuan, 2008). Thus, principals, in many cases were reliant upon quick fixes that did not necessarily result in authentically improved learning gains for students. Popham (2001) described

principals' need to quickly fix learning by mandating "drill and kill" methods that emphasized teaching to the test rather than focusing on the standards themselves. Additionally, other researchers found a growing trend in principals purchasing and mandating implementation of packaged programs that came with one time "sit-and-get" professional development for teachers as another ineffective solution to guaranteeing quick increases in test results. Not only was this approach relatively unsuccessful, it also led to teachers depending upon ineffectual instructional practices as their go-to solution for helping students (Lezotte & McKee, 2006; Pepper, 2010).

This pressure to act quickly to avoid accountability sanctions, beyond resulting in a tendency for principals to look outside to external partners to provide services to improve student learning, also caused principals to make decisions quickly rather than carefully (Datnow & Castellano, 2001). Kohn (2004) asserted, "Instead of improving the education of children, the threat of corrective actions on school districts for poor results, coupled with increased public scrutiny, have created a high-stakes educational environment" (p. 42). This pressure to perform, in some cases, resulted in some principals turning their schools into "test factories" (Ashby, 2000) where improving standardized assessment results became the only goal. This narrowed focus on results has "squander[ed] resources, narrow[ed] curriculum, and 'deskill[ed] teachers" (McNeil, 2000 as cited in Rorrer & Skrla, 2005).

Context Matters

Beyond demands upon principals for improved achievement via standardized measures for all students, the standards movement and standards-based accountability reforms also resulted in a growing awareness that context matters in enacting reform.

Sipple & Killeen (2004) posited that all school district staff interacted with contextual factors of schools, such as size, geographical features, personnel, resources, etc., in ways that influenced responses to standards-based reforms. Richardson & Placier (2001) also addressed this concept in their findings that “beliefs, perceptions and self-reported change [were] a necessary precursor to meaningful change, but not a substitute for it” (as cited in Desimone, 2013, p. 28).

Therefore, because context matters, principals, in response to imposed standards-based reforms had to shift leadership in ways that promoted the development of learning communities and relationships with staff and stakeholders. Because previous research showed that teachers’ interpretations of reform greatly impacted the extent they changed their practices in response to reform (Gold, 2002), “principals [were] the critical link in stimulating the conversations that led to classroom practices that [were] associated with improved student learning” (Louis, Seashore & Wahlstrom, 2011, p. 54). In order to be successful in implementing standards-based reform, principals had to consider all contextual factors present in their schools, and determine the best strategies for building buy-in and pedagogy around implementation. Rorrer and Skrla (2005) described this skill as “the ability to adapt policies to local contextual needs” and suggested such represented to principals a “valuable survival skill...and a requisite for an integrated, cohesive response to policy requirements” (p. 55). However, once again emergent in literature, the addition of accountability requirements to standard-based reform upped the ante even further for principals.

Principals as policy mediators. As if the above challenges put upon principals were not already enough, the increased demands placed upon principals as a result of

standards-based accountability reforms resulted in principals needing to act as policy mediators (Glatthorn & Jailall, 2008, p. 49). No longer could principals preside within their school walls alone. Eilers and D’Amico (2012) found that principals had to be proficient navigators among “other district and community leaders within the framework of national and state educational agendas” (p. 48). Beyond building strategic relationships among peers, Johnson and Uline (2005) discussed the need for principals to craft their communications in ways that empowered, created focus and understanding and minimized confusion. Thus, messages had to be strategic in nature; principals had to hone the political craft of persuasive speech. Simply put: “Relationships in districts and schools that forge[d] successful and productive policy implementation require[d] the leadership to be involved and to coordinate efforts across organizational levels” (Rorrer & Skrla, 2005, p. 56).

Establishing the Context: Principals and Suburban Schools

In researching principal leadership around standards-based reform within suburban schools, I found very few studies. It seems that this particular area is yet to be tackled, and particularly, yet to be studied in the elementary school context. Therefore, the purpose of this section will be to provide an overview of the nature of this particular setting in relation to framing context for imposed reform.

The federal *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* of 2002, considered the most significant federal education policy initiative in a generation, set the expectation that all students would minimally reach proficiency expectations in reading and math by the 2013-2014 school year (Illinois State Board of Education, 2014). Additionally, the policy required that all limited English students would become proficient in English, that all

students would be taught by highly qualified teachers, that all students would be educated in safe, drug environments, and that all students would graduate from high school. With these goals in mind, the law also established requirements, resources and sanctions to be implemented at the state level. Among these requirements, states were required to test students annually in grades three through eight in the areas of reading and math and establish both a definition and timeline for determination of “Adequate Yearly Progress” (AYP) toward an ultimate goal of one hundred percent of students meeting standards by the 2013-2014 school year.

Illinois, the state in which the study will take place, then established their specific plan accordingly. Illinois created performance targets in the areas of attendance, assessment results, and graduation rates. This “rising curve of accountability” increases every year until 2014, when all schools are expected to have met the criteria of 100% of students meeting/exceeding standards, possess attendance rates of at least 92% and achieve graduation rates of at least 85%.

These requirements have been imposed upon all schools, regardless of their funding patterns, present levels of performance or other limitations. Schools who do not meet these criteria for two or more consecutive years receive sanctions that may include additional requirements and services, state takeover of the school site, the required provision of school choice to students and/or complete closure of schools. On the other hand, schools that do make their AYP benchmark goals receive the “Illinois Honor Roll Awards” of “Spotlight,” “Academic Improvement,” or “Academic Excellence” and no additional requirements from the state or federal government.

So, with this background knowledge in mind, one might question how these sanctions or rewards impact principals' understanding of their leadership around imposed reform. If a school is already successful per the Illinois State Achievement Test (ISAT) criteria established by the state, how actively will that school work towards implementing imposed reform, such as the *CCSS*? And, what other factors must be considered in understanding leadership action or inaction in response to reform? For example, the Illinois state per pupil minimal expenditure is \$6824. However, when viewing the Illinois Interactive Report card, one can quickly deduce that many schools spend well over that state "minimum" on their students. One can also notice quickly that there is an expansive gap between the performance of non-low income and low-income students. In fact, in 2012 that gap was a 39% difference in ISAT performance (www.iirc.niu.edu, 2012). Where do the majority of these higher spending, higher scoring schools reside? The suburbs.

In essence, because they are not typically statistically among the bottom five percent or receiving state sanctions from their results, in many but certainly not all cases, suburban schools have, up until this point, been "pardoned" from imposed reform. They have not had to submit school improvement plans, they have not, unless electing to take federal Title dollars, had to follow federal provision mandates in association with *NCLB*, and they have not felt the pressure associated with being publically labeled as "failing" schools. How does being situated in a suburban, higher per pupil spending and performing school affect principal leadership for imposed reform? It is important that we begin to understand how principals in these types of settings make sense, construct meaning and, ultimately, enact change around reform, as it seems clear that reform is in

order. After all, some performance statistics, such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), revealed that even schools that are “meeting” state and federal standards are not on par with demographically similar schools in other countries (Brown, 2013).

Gaps in the Literature

In a review of current literature, suburban schools have been left out in investigating principals’ roles in relation to imposed standards-based reform. As the literature review overviewed, studies were plentiful in relation to research on teachers and standards-based reform, but the specific role of the suburban principal was a missing element. This reality warrants further research. Additionally, available research frequently looks at urban contexts. Since context matters (Honig, 2006; Spillane, Reiser, & Gomez, 2006) and suburban schools, due to their often higher per pupil expenditures, attendance rates and homogenous demographics, have experienced less state, federal and public media sanctions than their urban counterparts. Therefore, it is critical that educators and policy makers understand the impact of imposed reform at all varieties of school sites.

Theoretical Framework: Datnow and Castellano’s “Framework for Reform”

“One of the most consistent findings in studies of educational reform since the 1960’s concerns variability due to local circumstances” (Datnow & Castellano, 2001, p. 39). This statement, in simpler terms, means that educational reforms have been changed to adapt to schools more often than schools have adapted to accommodate educational reforms. This finding represents a critical foundation in understanding the “Framework for Reform.” It implies a “relational sense of context” (p. 36) where one must take into

consideration many factors when looking at the implementation of a desired educational reform. These contexts, such as school organizational characteristics, existing state and federal policies, student population composition, cultural considerations, teachers' ideologies about teaching and learning and factors of race, ethnicity and intelligence all shape implementation. Datnow and Castellano refer to the interplay of all of these factors as the elements of "structure, culture and agency" (p. 15). Holme, Diem & Welton (2014) offered further explanation by use of the terms *power dynamics* and *power imbalances*. These terms are meant to describe the significance of local circumstances and existing ideologies, all which interact with a reform to result in a range of school responses. Such responses may be, but are not limited to, resistance, passive acceptance or complete openness toward the change, dependent upon each unique situation. For example, "the range of potential decisions considered feasible by...actors...and educators themselves" (p. 39) in a reform scenario can often impact what Oakes et al. (2005) referred to as the *mediation zone*, or the available window in which reforms can be made.

Datnow and Castellano further described two additional terms that can be employed in relation to viewing and understanding school change. The *technical-rational perspective*, best explained through classical management theory, "assumes that reforms can be sustained on technical considerations alone and downplays the social, cultural and political factors that lead to variation" (p. 40). On the other hand, *mutual adaptation*, best explained through a co-construction theory, suggests that change is ongoing. As Datnow and Castellano stated, "Belief systems that exist among educators and community members are robust examples of social norms that shape reform in local schools." This

“multi-directionality” must be taken into consideration. They posited simply, “school change is not linear” (p. 42).

Thus, both of these lenses are at odds with each other in viewing principals’ sense making and action taking around imposed reform. Imposed reform—such as *CCSS* policy reform—typically operates under the technical-rational lens, yet principals, as educators, apply their own “social norms” to a reform, which results in a co-constructed outcome. This discussion sets the context for the framework with which I intend to view research findings. It is thus:

Educators, in this case, principals, can respond to reform in three specific ways:

1. They may advance the reform effort. (Ideologies are consistent.)
2. They may symbolically display the reform effort.
3. They may resist the reform effort either overtly or covertly.

(Ideologies are conflicting.)

Datnow explained each of these choices through understanding the importance of consistent ideology. If, for example, the reform is working at a particular school and ideologies are similar, a person is much more likely to take ownership for having participated in the reform. On the other hand, if educators are not in favor of a reform, they are more likely to “pick apart the process and minimize their role in it” (p. 35). Weick (1995) called this action around understanding reform past implementation as “retrospective sense-making” (p. 35). He emphasized that sense-making retroactively involved developing explanatory ideas as to the possibilities behind an action or series of actions rather than defining one static body of knowledge. These ideas, he posited, are

informed through the organization—through hidden factors such as incentives, controls, and routines. Thus, each of these factors is included in the “sense-making” about a given situation, and context matters, for whether a reform is advanced or resisted.

Other considerations that serve as sub-components to this framework include the notion of “hierarchical power relations” (p. 36.) When these surround a reform, Datnow and Castellano suggested that educators are more likely to “respond opportunistically,” and the reform is more likely to be “become politicized” (p. 36). Understanding this dynamic helps a researcher make sense of principals' sense making, understanding and actions or inactions associated with reform. As Fullen and Hargreaves (1991) posited, “however noble, sophisticated or enlightened proposals for change and improvement might be, they come to nothing if teachers don’t adopt them in their own classrooms and if they don’t translate them into effective classroom practice” (p. 59).

Ultimately, like psychiatrists have the power to confine patients to hospitals and judges possess the power to confine citizens to prison, principals are granted the power to impose significant meaning upon others and to change educational experiences for children. It is critical to understand how principals make sense, construct meaning and, ultimately, enact change around reform. “Analyzing reform implementation as co-constructed processes affords us a better opportunity to understand the complexities confronting the implementation of a successful prototype than is provided by unidirectional (especially top-down) interpretations” (Datnow & Castellano, 2001, p. 16). Because reforms in schools do not succeed on simple technical considerations alone, as history has shown, we must try to understand what factors promote or hinder a principal's understanding and action around reform.

Implications & Recommendations

Three distinct implications emerge from this review of the history of the standards movement and the impact of standards-based and accountability reform on principal leadership. First, and likely most cogent to the present educational climate, one clear implication is simply that true standards-based reform cannot be accomplished in a silo—the intended and the enacted are simply two very different phenomena (Datnow & Castellano, 2001). Research points over and over to context and situation being crucial factors in how policy is received and implemented. Although it seems evident that the creation of standards, and then accountability measures to evaluate performance, has resulted in action on the part of principals, schools, and districts, it has not necessarily improved equity and quality of learning experiences for all students. Leaders and policy makers must ensure that context and “situated-ness” are in alignment with the reform mandates, and these factors cannot be accomplished through blanket one-size-fits-all mandates made by federal and state governments. Additional research applied to this area would assist policy makers and practitioners in adjusting their approaches to improve methods and impact of reform mandates.

Additionally, another implication for consideration is the extent to which principals’ already full plates can become even more full. As discussed previously, principals are now expected to align curriculum to standards, lead instructional practices, transform beliefs and practices of stakeholders, ensure all students are meeting or exceeding the academic bars set by the accountability movement, strategically consider context in all communication situations and be policy advocates and strategists with the broader public. These tasks and responsibilities are all important, and of course, we as

educators never want to “leave a child behind.” But, additional research should consider the limits of leadership in relationship to these initiatives. Which aspects must be priorities for policy makers and principals, and which aspects must be let go or organized differently to improve depth and quality of reform efforts?

Finally, another implication for consideration is the reality that perhaps the particular reform agenda of *CCSS*—the escalation of standards-based reform to standard-based accountability reform—has gone too far. Numerous studies indicated a number of positive intentions and outcomes associated with standards-based reform; very few indicated any positive outcomes of accountability reform. Middle ground seems to often be the best solution to most situations. Perhaps the pendulum in this area of reform needs to swing back to the middle where a focus on success as defined by, in many cases, a single testing event, is reevaluated and broader definitions for what constitutes learning success are cultivated.

This multiple case study of principal leadership in relation to imposed reform continues to explore these themes in relation to imposed *CCSS* reform with the goal of gaining additional insights and recommendations for how practicing principals might successfully navigate these challenges. Ultimately, we must do better for our nation’s children.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Review of Purpose

The increased emphasis on accountability and performance within the United State's education system cannot be missed. This reality has produced ever-increasing evidence of amplified state and federal involvement through mandates and the implementation of “top-down” reform. We also know that teachers and principals have an impact on student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Goldhaber & Brewer, 1997; Leithwood, 2001). Thus, better understanding the interplay between reform initiatives and the operational players charged with implementing the reform—in particular principals—can ultimately assist practitioners in gaining knowledge and strategies to assist their efforts.

Therefore, this multiple-case study examined and compared the leadership behaviors of two principals as they made sense, constructed meaning and, ultimately, enacted change around *CCSS* reform within their schools. This chapter provides an overview of research questions, research design and methodology, data collection, data analysis, validity considerations, quality controls, ethics, limitations and delimitations and reflexivity.

Research Questions

Within a qualitative research approach, such as case study, one or two central research questions are included as a way of broadening the inquiry for the purpose of “address[ing] a description of the case and the themes that emerge from studying it” (Creswell, 2009, p. 130). Additionally, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that sub

questions may allow for specific guidance in framing purpose and, then, building interview questions or criteria for coding observation or documents. Therefore, this study posed the following research questions:

1. How do principals make sense and construct meaning around imposed *CCSS* reform, and how does this developed understanding impact their leadership for implementation of *CCSS*?
 - a) What factors influence a principal’s leadership around acceptance of *CCSS* imposed reform?
 - b) What factors influence a principal’s leadership around the decision to symbolically display *CCSS* imposed reform?
 - c) What factors influence a principal’s leadership around the decision to reject *CCSS* imposed reform?

The included data matrix provides additional clarification:

Table 3.1
Data Matrix

Research Question & Sub-Questions	Data Collection Sources	How Will I Access the Data?
1) How do principals make sense and construct meaning around imposed <i>CCSS</i> reform, and how does this developed understanding impact their leadership for implementation of <i>CCSS</i>?	<u>Comparative Case Study</u> In-Depth Interviews In-Depth Small Group Interviews (Multiple Phases) Site Observations Document Review	In-depth interviews of principals and small group(s) of teachers; site observations; document reviews
a.) What factors influence a principal’s leadership around acceptance of <i>CCSS</i> imposed reform?	<u>Comparative Case Study</u> In-Depth Interviews In-Depth Small Group Interviews (Multiple Phases) Site Observations Document Review Available Demographic Statistics Review	In-depth interviews of principals and small group(s) of teachers; site observations; document reviews; <i>Illinois Interactive School Report Card</i>

Table 3.1 (cont.)

<p>b.) What factors influence a principal’s leadership around the decision to symbolically display CCSS imposed reform?</p>	<p><u>Comparative Case Study</u> In-Depth Interviews In-Depth Small Group Interviews (Multiple Phases) Site Observations Document Review Available Demographic Statistics Review</p>	<p>In-depth interviews of principals and small group(s) of teachers; site observations; document reviews; <i>Illinois Interactive School Report Card</i></p>
<p>c.) What factors influence a principal’s leadership around the decision to reject CCSS imposed reform?</p>	<p><u>Comparative Case Study</u> In-Depth Interviews In-Depth Small Group Interviews (Multiple Phases) Site Observations Document Review Available Demographic Statistics Review</p>	<p>In-depth interviews of principals and small group(s) of teachers; site observations; document reviews; <i>Illinois Interactive School Report Card</i></p>

The next sections will provide further detailed explanation of data collection sources and access approaches.

Research Design and Methodology

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research design requires that each component of the design be selected purposely, be justified for its use, and contribute to the establishment of “coherence and congruence” (Coughlan, Cronin & Ryan, 2007, p. 740). Methodology refers to the “general logic and theoretical perspectives for a research project” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 31). In this case, a qualitative approach matches the interests and intentions of the researcher.

Thus, this study employed a qualitative research design, the best method for gathering perceptions and imprints of people about the situations and contexts in which they work (Creswell, 2009). Stake (1995) suggested, “Qualitative studies are best at

examining the actual, ongoing ways that persons or organizations are doing their thing”

(p. 2). He further described qualitative research using the following characteristics:

1. It is interpretive. It keys on the meanings of human affairs as seen from different views.
2. It is experimental. It is empirical. It is field oriented.
3. It is situational. It is oriented to objects and activities, each in a unique set of contexts.
4. It is personalistic. It is empathetic, working to understand individual perceptions. It seeks uniqueness more than commonality; it honors diversity.
5. When qualitative study is done well, it is also likely to be...well triangulated with key evidence, assertions, and interpretations redundant. (pp. 4-5)

Patton (2002) also provided his views as additional explanation:

Qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting—what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what’s going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting—and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting...the analysis strives for depth of understanding.

(p. 1)

Researchers, of course, must select methods that accurately meet the goals of their identified research. In this specific case, a qualitative approach best met the needs of this

study as the researcher, through choice of methods, sought to “explor[e] and understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, p. 4, 2009).

Qualitative research is a broad term used to encompass a variety of approaches a researcher may take dependent upon unique circumstances. Ultimately, the goals of the research and, thus, the research questions posed, guide a researcher’s chosen methodology. Many authors have offered to categorize approaches (Wolcott, 2002; Miller & Crabtree, 1992; Creswell, 2007b), but Creswell’s summary of qualitative strategies, most resonated with this author. His framework included ethnography, grounded theory, case study, phenomenological research and narrative research as qualitative approaches (Creswell, 2009). This research study utilized the strategy of case study.

Case Study

Many researchers have developed definitions for the term *case study*. Stake (1995) defined case studies as a strategy of inquiry in which the researchers deeply explore a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. Cases are bound by a period of time and a series of events, and researchers gather comprehensive information using varied data collection procedures. Leech (2007) additionally noted “a case study can be used to examine a construct of interest...as it manifests itself on a particular individual or group of individuals (p. 558). Merriam (2001) additionally offered a wealth of information on case study and suggested that, because there are many definitions yet little consensus around this approach, the process often becomes intertwined with the case itself and the end product.

Yin (2014) focused on the process in his definition and indicated, “a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). He went on to indicate the first critical component of a case study research design to be that of appropriately matched research questions. Posed questions can provide insight into the best research method employed when considering methodology for a study. In this case, the research questions closely matched Yin’s direction. “Case study research is most likely to be appropriate for “how and “why” questions” (p. 29).

Yin (2014) suggested that one should think about a research design as a “blueprint” for study (p. 28). Case study, then, is the ideal variety of qualitative research because the researcher is interested in uncovering how the phenomenon or entity functions in a particular context (Merriam, 1998). In case study methods, the unit of analysis is defined as the phenomenon or entity the researcher is interested in investigating (Merriam, 1998). This study focused the unit of analysis, not only on individual principals, but also, theoretically, upon the principals’ responses to CCSS imposed reform.

Case study additionally benefits from prior development of theoretical schemas to guide the collection and analysis of data (Yin, 2014). For this study, the theoretical framework that was applied was Datnow’s “Framework for Reform.” In this case the framework served to guide the researcher in both establishing a focused lens around data collection and in coding of gathered data. The provided table shows how Datnow’s framework informed data collection and analysis.

Table 3.2
Datnow's Framework for Reform

Datnow's "Framework for Reform"	Codable Characteristics of Framework
Possible Responses	
#1 Advance Reform	Ideologies directly match; actions support intentions & principal assume ownership of reform
#2 Symbolically Display Reform	Visible/observable ideological disconnect/tension in aspects of reform via physical display vs. documentation vs. communication. Full ownership not assumed. Tension not directly communicated.
#3 Covertly or Overtly Reject Reform	Visible/observable ideological disconnect/tension in reform physical display vs. documentation vs. communication. Full ownership is not assumed. Tension may or may not be directly communicated.

Additionally, this case study included multiple sites instead of just one location, which was preferred due to the ability to make comparisons among findings. This approach is also desirable in that, if designed well, it can offer an opportunity for replication, which is important in affirming validity of study findings. (Yin, 2014; Krathwohl, 2009).

Population, Site Selection, and Participants

Purposeful sampling commonly associated with qualitative research, involves selecting sites and participants that will help the researcher address the focus of the research study (Creswell, 2009; Krathwohl, 2009). The participants and sites for study were selected using a purposeful, sampling method. The Illinois State Board of Education utilizes a coding process derived from a "classification system originally developed by NCES in the 1980's to describe a school's location ranging from "large city" to "rural." The codes are based on the physical location represented by an address that is matched against a geographic database maintained by the Census Bureau. This database is the

Topographically Integrated and Geographically Encoded Referencing system (TIGER). In 2005 and 2006, NCES supported work by the Census Bureau to redesign the original locale codes in light of changes in the U.S. population and the definition of key geographic concepts” (isbe.state.il.us). For the purposes of this study, because the location of research interest was that of urban fringe, large suburban school districts, the researcher used this information to conduct criterion sampling.

In an effort to approach the study in a meaningful fashion, the researcher began by recruiting a small sample size of 10 schools in the state of Illinois that were listed as large suburban, fringe communities. She then initiated contact by sending a letter that described the purpose of the study to these principals and copied the school district superintendent associated with each school. The ultimate goal was to use this method to identify five to seven potential principals who might be a good match for participation in this study. If this method was not successful, the research planned to expand her search to other appropriate schools from the coding list and so forth. This researcher ultimately found most success through direct conversations with qualifying principals’ superintendents and was able to confirm the participation of two qualifying study sites through this method, Dr. Smith at Sunny Brook Elementary School and Mr. Jones at Laguna Elementary School.

Furthermore, because an intended focus of research was a comparison between two principals’ experiences in affluent schools, the principal participants selected for this study were also chosen based upon meeting the criteria of being presently employed in a suburban elementary school where per pupil costs exceed the state average. The selected principals also possessed at least three to five years of principal experience at their

present sites, as the researcher was interested in gaining a deeper understanding of how principals understood and enacted change around *CCSS* reform at their buildings. This amount of time allowed the ability for principals to have become sufficiently enmeshed within their schools and districts and, therefore, able to have implemented change (Fullan, 2006). New and/or inexperienced principals may not have been as able to provide the depth of experience desired for the study.

Once targeted principals responded positively, the researcher met personally with the principals and explained the research project. Before the interview process began, the interviewer carefully explained that the purpose of the research was to understand how principals from suburban elementary schools made sense, constructed meaning and, ultimately, enacted change around imposed reform, such as that of *CCSS* reform. Potential participants were ensured both orally and in writing that failure to participate would have no repercussions. Once principals were selected the researcher conducted multiple interviews (each interviewed at least twice) and global site visitations (at least three at each building) with each participant in multiple phases. As part of this analysis, the researcher also interviewed small focus groups of teachers (two groups twice or more at Laguna and two groups once for an extended period of time at Sunny Brook) in the selected principals' buildings to learn about the tensions they had experienced in receiving/experiencing leadership around *CCSS* imposed reform. Focus group interviews occurred in multiple phases and followed principal interviews whenever possible. Focus groups participants were ultimately selected by the principals, but were comprised of a representative sampling of new and experienced classroom and specialist teachers within each building. Principals were informed of this additional requirement prior to agreeing

to participate, and teacher participants were also ensured orally and in writing that failure to participate would have no repercussions. Finally, approval was obtained from each school district prior to conducting any research.

Data Collection

To address the above research questions, data was collected through interviews, site visits and document review. Because, unlike other research methods, there was “no clear cut-off point” in data collection for this case study, I attempted to collect enough data through the aforementioned approaches to garner “confirmatory evidence” (Yin, 2012, p. 104). Good study case studies rely upon as many sources as possible (Yin).

Interviews. Yin (2014) posited that interviews are “one of the most important sources of study evidence” (p. 110). For this study, interviews were conducted one-on-one or in small focus groups of three to five people (Creswell, 2009; Krathwohl, 2009). The interviews were conducted face-to-face, by telephone, and/or through electronic mail (Krathwohl, 2009). Creswell’s (2009) interview key components were included within the study protocol:

- (a) Standard interview procedures will be followed from one interview to the next utilizing:
- (b) Previously prepared guiding questions,
- (c) Additional probes for the questions,
- (d) Appropriate spacing between questions,
- (e) Plans for audio-recording information gathered during interviews. (p. 183)

This study employed a series of semi-structured interviews. At least two, face-to-face, one-on-one interviews were conducted with the two selected principals. These

interviews occurred in two phases. Additionally, at least two focus group teacher interviews were conducted at each site of study. The principal interviews followed established protocols occurred in two phases. Phase one involved a first interview that lasted approximately 60-90 minutes, and phase two included a subsequent interview and/or telephone conversation that last approximately 60 minutes. Teacher interviews followed the initial principal interview phase and were also semi-structured and lasted for approximately the same duration of time.

I used principal and teacher interviews to gain insight about principals’ understandings and experiences of *CCSS* reform. Because the focus of my research was upon understanding change—principals’ leadership responses—in relation to *CCSS* reform, I employed two additional frames that nicely aligned to this effort. The first additional frame was emergent themes from a review of research on the intended outcomes and observed impacts of standards-based reforms. The second frame aligned with Datnow’s “Framework for Reform” and was comprised of her recommendations for successful reform by principals. I used evidence of these recommendations as codable indicators in my analysis. The below table shows themes and elements associated with each of these frames:

Table 3.3
Codable Themes As Indicators

Intended Outcomes SB-Reform Codable Themes	Impact of SB-Reform Codable Themes	Datnow’s Successful Reform for Change Principals Codable Themes
Clear Road Map	Narrowing of Curriculum	Principals as instructional leaders <i>As further defined by evidence of: *Integration of instructional & transformational</i>

Table 3.3 (cont.)

Intended Outcomes SB-Reform Codable Themes	Impact of SB-Reform Codable Themes	Datnow’s Successful Reform for Change Principals Codable Themes
Equitable learning opportunities for all Positive sense of accountability among principals/teachers	Evidence of “teacher proofing” Loss of teacher agency Diminished public faith	<i>practices</i> <i>*Data-informed decision making</i> <i>*Awareness of context</i> Evidence of “teacher buy-in” toward reform Principal confronts teacher resistance, does not ignore Teacher empowerment opportunities cultivated

All in-person interviews were audio recorded, and a hired professional transcribed the recordings. Interviewees had the option to stop the interview at any time. All information that may have been personally identifiable was removed during transcription, and the original recordings were deleted following receipt of the transcriptions. Copies of the transcribed interviews were offered, by request, to participants by email for the purpose of providing an opportunity to clarify or amend their responses as is necessary. Appendix [A] shows the list of posed interview questions.

Site Observations. Additionally, observations were conducted within the buildings of the principals, and descriptive notes were taken that aligned to the topics of focus during personal interviews (Creswell, 2009). Because they offered an opportunity to observe phenomena in their natural setting, site observations provided another source of meaningful data in this case study research (Yin, 2014). Site observations range from casual to formal, and may include the researcher as a participant or observer (Creswell;

Yin). Furthermore, Krathwohl (2009) suggested descriptive observational notes contribute to a rich, thick description of the site and should include the following:

- (a.) Reflections on the processes of selecting what was important to capture;
 - (b.) Behavior in the situation (comfort, obtrusiveness, apparent impact on others, treatment by others);
 - (c.) Ideas or hypotheses explaining what was occurring;
 - (d.) Problems in observing, recording or coding; and
 - (e.) Suggestions for the next steps and from whence they were derived, and so on.
- (p. 272)

For the purposes of this study, observations were specifically focused upon evidence affirming or rejecting the principals' reports of leadership for CCSS change. In essence, I utilized all aforementioned, available themes that provided insight toward this phenomenon as the organizer and analytic strategy for my observations (Yin, 2014).

Appendix [B] includes an observational protocol to assist in this process. Additionally, I hoped to gain an understanding of the relationships and interactions between the principal and his/her staff to inform my analysis of interview data. In doing so, I acknowledged that observations take on different forms of relationships between the researcher and the observed (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, I aimed to be clear in my position as an "observer as participant" (p. 124), and while I was known to the group(s) being observed, I did not actively participate during my observations. Ultimately, observations shape my "explanation building" ability for each case studied (Yin).

Prior to beginning building observations, all participants were notified of their rights as human subjects and were required to sign an informed consent form. If a

participant chose not to provide consent, his/her comments were not included in the field notes. Field notes were specifically focused on the theoretical propositions previously defined. Observation notes were transcribed and personally identifiable information was removed and replaced with pseudonyms.

Document Reviews. Finally, a review of documents and other written materials pertaining to *CCSS* at the building level of implementation was conducted to affirm or refute themes that emerged through interviews and observations. The same observation protocol mentioned above was used to code for themes related to the principals' understanding and leadership actions in response to *CCSS* reform. Creswell (2009) indicated that public and private documents are valuable data sources because they represent data that are a thoughtful creation of participants in their own words. In the two cases, a variety of documents were available for review. At Laguna, I was able to review a fully bound binder of data and information about the school that had been gathered in the same year of this study for the purpose of a Consortium for Educational Change (CEC) building study. I also was able to review detailed school information from the school's website. At Sunny Brook recent faculty meeting agendas and parent newsletters were informally shared by Dr. Smith. I was also able to photograph district strategic planning posters hanging at Sunny Brook. Additionally, I was able to review ample district and school website information. All documents, whenever possible, were electronically copied with all efforts made to ensure that identifying information was removed. The original documents were then destroyed, and the electronic versions were kept and maintained in a separate location on a password-protected computer and shared only between the researchers.

Data Analysis

One sound analysis strategy for case study research is to utilize theoretical propositions (Yin, 2014). Therefore, all phases of analysis were grounded in Datnow's theoretical framework for reform. To provide additional structure, data were coded utilizing emergent standards-based reform themes and Datnow's recommended themes for successful reform through principal leadership. These two frames supported the eventual analysis connecting to Datnow's framework. In order to do so well, Creswell (2009) discussed six general steps:

1. Organizing and preparing the data for analysis. For this study, this meant transcribing interviews, organizing field notes and gathering all shared, supporting documents.
2. Reading through all of the data to obtain a general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning.
3. Beginning detailed analysis with a coding process. This was the process of "chunking" material into generalized groups before bringing meaning to those chunks of data.
4. Using the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis. This coding process led to the generation of themes or categories that then appeared as major findings.
5. Moving forward with plans about how the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative.

6. Making an interpretation of the data. This will be based upon my personal interpretation but will also be a comparison of the relevant literature.

I employed each of these suggested steps during analysis of findings. Additionally, transcribed interviews of principals and focus groups were coded using a line-by-line method and were reviewed and notated several times to ensure they were indexed completely. Finally, they were analyzed for convergent themes (Patton, 2002). I consistently and constantly looked for evidence that supported a developing understanding of how principals understood and responded to *CCSS* reform.

Validity

Validity refers to the accuracy of the findings of a particular study from the standpoint of all involved parties (Creswell & Miller, 2000). It is imperative that researchers take validity—or trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)—very seriously. For this study, two different frameworks were utilized to ensure the highest level of validity possible. First, Lincoln and Guba identified four sub-tenets of trustworthiness:

1. Credibility: consistent with internal validity; does compatibility exist between the constructed realities that exist in the minds of the inquiry's respondents and those that are attributed to them?
2. Transferability: consistent with external validity; extent to which the findings can be applied to other context or with other respondents.

3. Dependability: consistent with reliability; the extent to which evidence is provided to the audience that if the study were replicated, findings would be repeated.
4. Confirmability: consistent with objectivity; the extent to which the findings are the product of the focus of the inquiry and not the biases of the researcher.

Each of the above sub-tenets was examined as it applied to the study. The table below overviews such:

Table 3.4
Elements of Trustworthiness

Elements of trustworthiness	Steps toward achieving each component	Specific activities taken by researcher
Credibility	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prolonged engagement 2. Triangulation 3. Member Checking 	<p>Time spent on site and conducting interviews was prolonged</p> <p>Multiple sources were compared: interviews-principals and focus groups, observations, and documents</p> <p>Member checking was completed; transcripts were offered for reviewed by participants</p>
Transferability Dependability	<p>Thick, rich description</p> <p>A demonstration of credibility establishes dependability</p>	<p>Provided in Chapter 4</p> <p>See activities above related to credibility</p>
Confirmability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Data 2. Data reduction 3. Data reconstruction 4. Process notes 5. Material relating to intentions and dispositions 6. Instrument development information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audio-recordings, field notes, transcribed interviews, documents • Write up of notes, summaries and condensed notes • Coding, categorizing, use of graphic organizers and tables • Emergence of themes

Table 3.4 (cont.)

- Personal notes, intentions, development of study, expectations

With regard to qualitative validity, eight primary strategies are employable: triangulation, member checking, thick, rich description, clarification of bias, presentation of negative and discrepant information, prolonged time in the field, peer debriefing and use of an external auditor (Creswell, 2009). Creswell recommended that qualitative researchers utilize multiple strategies to “enhance the researcher’s ability to assess the accuracy of findings as well as convince readers of accuracy (p. 191). This study utilized the following strategies presented in the table below:

Table 3.5
Validation of Findings

Creswell’s validation of findings	Definition	Specific activities taken by researcher
Triangulation of data	Use of different data sources to build “coherent justification” for themes	Multiple sources were be compared: interviews-principals and focus groups, observations, and documents
Member Checking	Determine accuracy of findings through taking back parts of report—such as themes—to participants and ascertaining whether they feel they are accurate	Interview transcripts were offered for review by participants
Thick, rich description	Use of thick, rich description of findings to “transport” readers to the setting and give a sense of shared experiences	Thick, rich description was used to describe visits as well as narratives of interviews
Prolonged time in the field	Engaging sufficiently to develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon and convey adequate details	Researcher made multiple visits to both sites

Quality of Methods

Qualitative reliability indicates that a researcher's approach will remain consistent across different researchers and different projects (Gibbs, 2007). To ensure a higher degree of reliability, "qualitative researchers need to document the procedures of their case studies and to document as many of the steps of the procedures as possible" (Creswell, 2009, p. 190). Additionally, Gibbs suggested several reliability procedures be employed to ensure a quality approach. These procedures are checking transcripts to ensure that they do not contain obvious errors made during the transcription process, making sure there is not a drift in definitions or meanings of codes during the coding process, and cross-checking codes developed by different researchers by comparing results that are independently derived. I employed several of these procedures in my study, and, on two occasions, checked for "intercoder agreement" by consulting an informed peer to review several, random sections of my coding to affirm consistency (Creswell, 2009).

Ethics

Any time human participants are included within a research study, great care must be taken to ensure the participants are protected and the findings represent an accurate picture of their contributions. In order to do this aspect well, researchers must very clearly describe the measures they will take to ensure privacy protection and accuracy (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2014). They must additionally receive approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) with whom they are associated (Krathwohl, 2009).

Approval to conduct this study was obtained from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Institutional Review Board. Informed consent was obtained from

participants in advance of interviews or observations, and the informed consent form clearly articulated the participants' rights as human subjects. Furthermore, interviews and observation protocols guided researcher/participant interactions. Interview and observation data were transcribed using pseudonyms, and no data was shared that contained identifiable information. One exception to this rule was with a hired professional who transcribed all interviews. I sought to ensure the respect and dignity of all participants and, therefore, went to great lengths to protect the identities of the interviewees.

Limitations and Delimitations

All research plans can be analyzed for their relative strengths and limitations. Limitations are the restrictions that are created by the methodology of a study (Bryant, 2004). In this particular study, focusing upon only two principals and their responses to change influences the limitations. Thus, the issue of generalizability is one that must be addressed (Merriam, 2001). In this case, it would not be appropriate to expand my findings to hold meaning beyond the participants and their environments for this study. However, I did hope to obtain further questions for additional research and potentially gain insight into the “hows” and “whys” beyond the locales of my study (Yin, 2014). Furthermore, because I relied heavily upon interviews, I had to assume that the subjects were honest and open with their responses. This assumption may not actually have been a true one. Additionally, I only interviewed representative groups of teachers—not all staff members in each principal's building. Thus, I was not truly able to garner all potential voices through this research design. Finally, my time spent at both school sites represented just a glimpse of a much larger implementation process. Therefore, my study

and the findings later discussed are, realistically, limited to this small glimpse of the process. It is also important to note that both school sites were in the early stages of implementation.

Delimitations are the constructs that prevent researchers from claiming that findings are accurate for all people in all times and places (Bryant, 2004). This study is delimited in that it only examined two experienced principals from suburban, public K-6 settings in the state of Illinois. This study is also delimited in that it was a qualitative case study. Thus, the two principals that I studied cannot be representative of the thousands of other principals who are leading for change around *CCSS* reform.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity examines how my perspective—my lived experiences—shape the research I am able to conduct. Additionally, others' experiences—namely the research participants—may color my line of inquiry during interviews and so forth, ultimately impacting study findings (Yin, 2014). For the purpose of this study, it is important to share that my role as a researcher in this setting was likely heavily influenced by my professional background. Since graduating from college, I have worked exclusively in the same demographic environment in which I studied. I have served as a language arts teacher, a junior high school assistant principal, an elementary school principal and an assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction all in the same school district. Therefore, I recognize that my views and understandings of both principal leadership and *CCSS* reform have been shaped by the roles I have maintained as an administrator in an affluent, suburban elementary school district.

I do believe it is important to acknowledge that the coursework I have completed as part of my doctoral studies has forever impacted my previous views on public education—specifically with regard to opening my eyes to vast inequities, social reproduction and the significance of “power” in the education sector. This exposure has changed the lens with which I approach my work as an administrator and as a researcher. Ultimately, I recognize that, as a white middle class woman leading in an affluent, homogenous, school environment, I am part of this “power culture,” but I have the opportunity to make a difference—to intentionally, carefully, and deliberately change others’ views and actions toward the currently oppressed. I take this responsibility seriously.

CHAPTER 4

CASE ONE

This section presents the first unique case of Sunny Brook Elementary School. A profile of the school will be shared, and then themes that emerged in data analysis will be explored. Emergent themes included multiple tensions associated with purported positive intentions of standards-based reform and perceptions that the negative impacts of *CCSS* reform had been felt among staff. With regard to themes connected to principal leadership, Dr. Smith, Sunny Brook’s Principal, was identified as an empowering, instructional leader among his staff. “Buy-in” toward *CCSS* reform from Dr. Smith and his staff, however, remained less clear, but Dr. Smith and his faculty viewed district policies as supports to reform.

Sunny Brook Elementary School, proudly described as “a school that hugs you,” is a K-4 building located in the Chicago suburbs that presently enrolls just under 300 students. The broader district serves approximately 1800 students and is comprised of five schools, three K-4 buildings, one 5-6 building and one 7-8 junior high building. Table 4.1 provides additional context for understanding Sunny Brook’s demographics in relation to the state average.

Table 4.1
Context of the Case

School Data	Case A Sunny Brook Elementary School	State Average
Grade Levels	K-4	
Per Pupil Operating Expenditures	\$19,362	\$12,045
Per Pupil Instructional Expenditures	\$10,990	\$7,094
Proportion of Local Property Tax Revenue	96.2%	66%

Table 4.1 (cont.)

School Data	Case A Sunny Brook Elementary School	State Average
Student Enrollment	282	
White Students	87.9%	49.9%
African-American Students	.4%	17.5%
Hispanic Students	2.8%	24.6%
Asian/Pacific Islander Students	3.5%	4.6%
Multi-Racial Students	5.3%	3.1%
Low Income Students	0%	52%
2010-11 Overall ISAT Performance	95%	82%
2011-12 Overall ISAT Performance	97%	82%
2012-13 Overall ISAT Performance	87%	59%
2013-14 Overall ISAT Performance	81%	59%

^a Operating expenditures per pupil includes the gross operating cost of a school district excluding summer school, adult education, bond principal retired, and capital expenditures.

^b Instructional expenditures per pupil include the direct costs of teaching pupils of the interaction between teachers and pupils.

^c Overall ISAT performance indicates the percentage of students meeting or exceeding State standards as measured by the Illinois Standards Achievement Test.

Sunny Brook is a very mature, yet updated building structure, situated within a beautiful residential community. An original design intention—for the building to blend aesthetically with its surroundings—has definitely been maintained through multiple remodels and additions occurring over the last 100 years. Upon arrival to the building, one quickly notices the ample and beautiful landscaping, an outdoor sculpture depicting children on display (previously commissioned by their Parent Teacher Organization to celebrate the “community spirit” and crafted by a former student) and the neighborhood feel of the environment. The building itself was erected in 1915 and has been a source of pride for the prominent district. It touts a gorgeous and classically maintained

professional auditorium, skylights in every classroom and an upstairs library-learning center complete with two-story, functional fireplace. This library space serves as a meeting place for the student community where student-led, town hall meetings are held in frequent intervals. Dr. Smith, Principal, described:

We have our town hall meetings every week, every other week, [that] really support student engagement around social/emotional/democratic conversation, because progressive education is also tied to student voice and you have to make sure there are opportunities for students to have a voice...that's a very big piece of curriculum to me that we, in our school, value. So we have created these town hall meetings and other iterations in years past to allow the children to really – almost town hall representatives – they run the meetings.

Additionally, the school has hosted its own student run television studio for more than 10 years. From the school's basement studio, third and fourth grade students produce a daily news show for their fellow student body.

Upon walking into the building, one is immediately greeted by an attendance assistant whose desk is right out in the open-concept main foyer that also contains a comfortable seating area. Kids' artwork and classwork decorate the school halls, students come and go freely from various classrooms spaces, and staff members meet and greet one another openly in passing. Within grade level classrooms, you will most likely see students working independently or in small groups on various projects in built-in lofts accessible via ladders or at tables or students using the recently provided standing desks to support active engagement through movement. A source of pride, visitors touring the school might also be taken to the basement to view the "life size" pilgrim and Native

American “maker-space” that students create annually as part of the progressive instructional philosophy and methodology strongly maintained at Sunny Brook.

For anyone unfamiliar with the term *maker space*, essentially it is a dedicated space for students or people (outside of a school context) to build and/or create objects. Although not a new concept for Sunny Brook School, maker spaces and maker-faires (events in which new maker-space creations are presented to a broader audience) are a relatively new phenomenon emerging on the educational scene. The Oregon Museum of Science and Industry’s website (2015) defined the concept as the following:

Maker Faire is part of a growing “Maker Movement” sweeping schools, libraries, garages, and museums around the world. Technology has made it easier than ever to share ideas, and to make those ideas a reality. At the same time, people are moving away from the disposable, consumer culture of the past few decades. Policy makers see it as a way to revive American innovation, and educators see it as a new way of teaching and learning. Admittedly, the movement is more of a revival than a revolution. Humans are makers by nature, and Maker Faire is a two-day reminder of that (ww.oms.edu).

This concept is not new to Sunny Brook because it fits within the progressive ideals the school—and broader district—hold close as part of communicated vision and mission for education. In order to better understand what the term *progressive* meant in relation to Sunny Brook and the broader district, as it was a frequently mentioned term, I asked Superintendent Tanya to offer a definition. She defined *progressive education* from the lenses of students, teachers and curriculum (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2
Progressive Education as Defined by Superintendent Tanya

Lenses	Descriptive Statements
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Own their learning and advocate for what they need • Reflect on learning • Make choices based on interests and relevancy • Collaborate and share responsibility in democratic ways • Live and experience the curriculum • Critically think about the world • Show what they know in authentic ways • Learn skills and apply ideas • Extend their learning with extra-curricular opportunities
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize the whole child in planning • Collaborate with one another to continuously improve learning • Develop a sense of community within the class, school, and greater community • Provide flexible learning environments • Integrate content areas/units/experiences to make the learning meaningful • Act with autonomy in response to learners' needs • Gather meaningful information/data to deeply know each child and the curriculum
Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasizes experiential learning and project-based methods • Demands interdisciplinary connections (content areas and social/emotional areas) • Fosters collaborative, authentic learning experiences • Embeds service learning • Builds relationship among ideas, others, and the outside world • Stretches students' thinking and provides challenging dilemmas worth engaging

Additionally, unique to Sunny Brook and the other elementary schools in the district and another component of the *progressive experience*, students do not receive letter grades. Rather, parents attend two goals/progress conferences each school year, and they receive periodic progress reports in narrative form from their students' teachers.

Dr. Smith, the ninth Sunny Brook principal in 100 years, possesses a Big Ten undergraduate and multiple Ivy League post-graduate degrees. Additionally, Dr. Smith possesses 21 years of administrative experience and 32 years of total service in the field of education. Dr. Smith is an experienced educator and leader, and, although presently

only in his fourth year as principal of Sunny Brook, he was formerly a teacher at the same school earlier in his career. Additionally, through out his educational tenure, he has served as a principal in others affluent suburbs and also started and ran his own progressive, private school in the city of Chicago. This private school is still open and successful today. Likely, Dr. Smith will move to a central office position in the district within the next two school years. His reflections upon his current career path:

I've been an educator all my life so I'm passionate about children and learning and what happens to the future and I think that I've been very lucky to have been involved in progressive education for all these years...and so to continue in the progressive vein [at Sunny Brook] and...reframing it and keeping it alive, keeps me here.

It is significant to note that Dr. Smith expressed emphatic support for his superintendent whom was still in her first year in the position at the time of my interviews. Furthermore, he shared a feeling of renewed hope for the future, something that he felt had been lost during the tenure of the previous superintendent. In reference to maintaining a progressive focus:

Tanya [the Superintendent] is doing a great job of reframing it and keeping it alive, keeps me here. I even told Tanya this; at one point she and I talked and I said I was losing some of my passion here because I was feeling we were becoming just another district and it was losing me, and Tanya I think heard that, not only from me but from quite a few teachers about losing the kind of uniqueness that the school has, so part of my passion is just being here because it

is such a unique entity and it attaches itself to the philosophy that I'm a very strong believer in [it].

He also very much affirmed his definition of progressive education to be in alignment with Superintendent Tanya's. Dr. Smith, with passion in his eyes and voice, further emphasized the concepts of project-based instruction, experiential learning, and empowerment of student voice in his descriptions. In keeping with progressive ideology, students also do not receive traditional report cards—or grades of any kind—at Sunny Brook. Progress is communicated through narrative form and developmental skills check lists.

The Sunny Brook staff consists of 37 certified members and approximately 15 teacher assistants. Additionally, among the certified staff, the building hosts two instructional coaches, three reading specialists, a social worker, a psychologist, a literary facilitator, a library/media specialist, a Spanish instructor, a vocal music teacher, a school nurse and an art instructor. Table 4.3 displays additional contextual information for each identified study participant.

Table 4.3
Profile of Other Participants

Participants	Gender	Position	Grade level teaching	Years experience
A1 - Beth	Female	Teacher	4th	15
A2 - Kristen	Female	Resource Teacher	Elementary	18
A3 - Donna	Female	Teacher	3rd	17
A4 - Jeremy	Male	Resource Teacher	Elementary	10
A5 - Amy	Female	Teacher	Kindergarten	14
A6 - Amanda	Female	Reading Specialist	Elementary	31
ACO7 - Tanya	Female	Superintendent	Elementary	16

Note. Participation identification labels utilize the letters A & B, which correspond to Case A or Case B. Years experience is the individual's total number of years in education and may not reflect the length of time in his/her current assignment.

The average teacher within the district earns around \$78,600 annually, possesses at least a Masters degree (true of 80.7% of staff) and has about 13 years of experience. The pupil-teacher ratio at Sunny Brook is 12.5 students to every teacher. Teaching staff described the qualities they value most in their colleagues to be “autonomy, smarts, creativity, fun and mutual respect.” Their student demographics are not extremely diverse. Sunny Brook’s enrollment is just under 300 students, and the vast majority of these students are White (87.9%) with other racial/ethnic diversity reported as Black (.4%), Hispanic (2.8%), Asian (3.5%) and Two or More Races (5.3%). Only .4% of students were reported as coming from Low Income families.

According to the Illinois State Achievement Test (ISAT) results, 81% of Sunny Brook students met or exceeded standards during the 2013-2014 school year. Table 4.4 displays the academic performance of Sunny Brook students as measured by their performance on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT).

Table 4.4
ISAT Scores for Case A: Sunny Brook Elementary School

Year	All students	White	African American	Hispanic	Low Income
Percentage of students meeting or exceeding in reading					
2011	94	94	No data	No data	No data
2012	98	98	No data	No data	No data
2013	89	88	No data	No data	No data
2014	82	79	No data	No data	No data
Percentage of students meeting or exceeding in math					
2011	97	98	No data	No data	No data
2012	99	99	No data	No data	No data
2013	85	84	No data	No data	No data
2014	81	78	No data	No data	No data

Note. The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) adjusted the performance levels on ISAT for Reading and Mathematics to better align with the more rigorous standards of the *Common Core* in 2013 (30% of test items were aligned to *CCSS* in 2013.). In 2014, 100% of test items were *CCSS* aligned (www.isbe.net).

Note. Sunny Brook began implementation of CCSS ELA Writing, 2012-13, CCSS ELA Reading, 2014-15 and Math, 2013-14.

Figures 4.1 and 4.2 show a visual illustration of the percentages over time of Sunny Brook students who met or exceeded state standards based on ethnicity and socioeconomic status. You will note that no data is provided for White, Hispanic or Low Income groups; for reporting purposes, the state of Illinois requires that a school must possess 10 or more students of an identified subgroup in order for public reporting to occur. This requirement is in place to protect the privacy of students. In this case, therefore, Sunny Brook does not presently enroll 10 or more students who identify themselves as Hispanic, Black and/or Low Income.

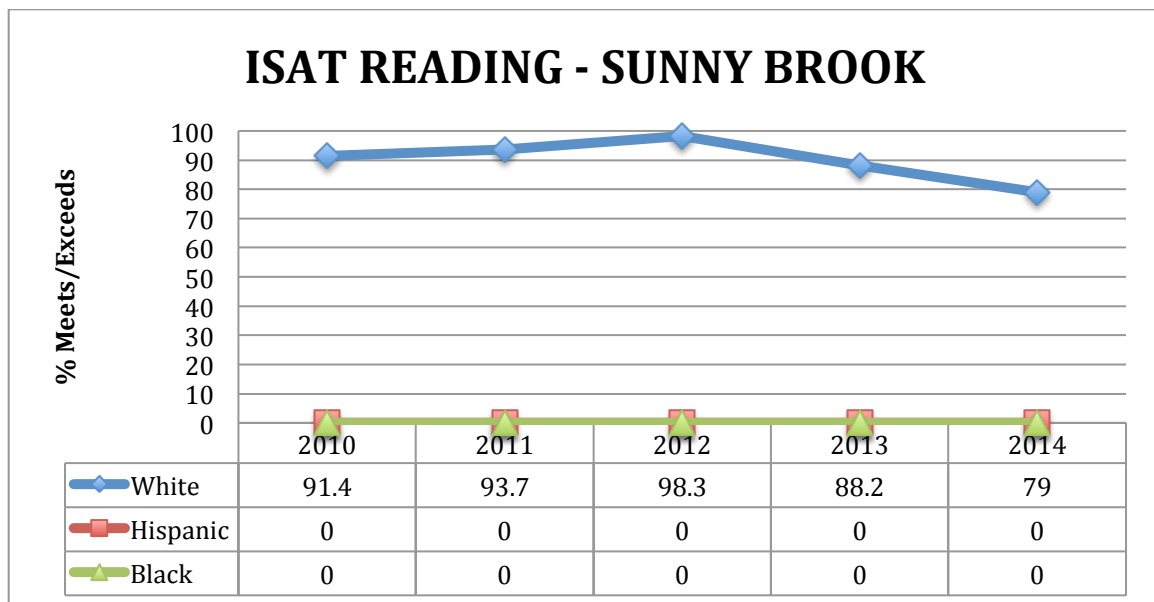


Figure 4.1 Percentage of Sunny Brook students meeting or exceeding standards in reading by student race/ethnicity.

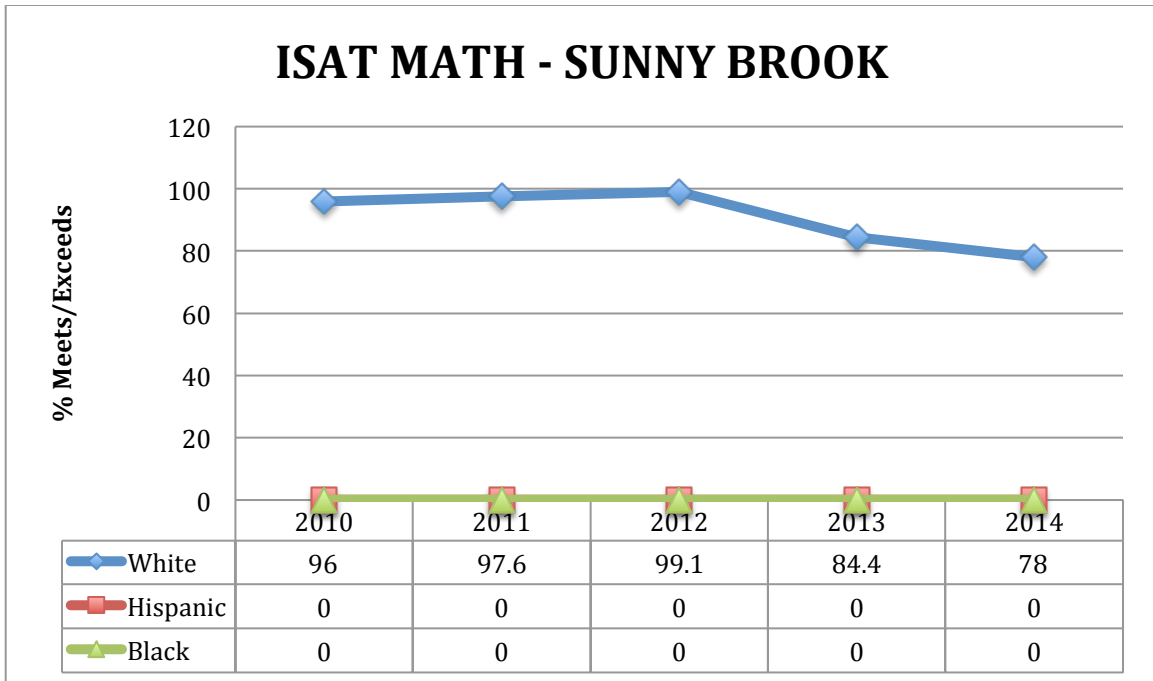


Figure 4.2 Percentage of Sunny Brook students meeting or exceeding standards in math by student race/ethnicity.

Several structures are presently in place to support staff collaboration and professional development at Sunny Brook. With regard to curriculum implementation specifically, Sunny Brook is home to three dedicated facilitators (math, literacy and science) who work with teachers and meet with Dr. Smith to support initiatives. Dr. Smith indicated that he meets with each facilitator once a month to discuss strengths and needs for his building. Additionally, Dr. Smith and facilitators, usually on a rotating basis, have recently implemented mandatory, weekly 1-hour collaboration meetings with each grade level team. The goal for these meetings is to shift the conversation from weekly planning topics (i.e. Where is the next field trip?) to focus on student work and achievement. For example, the third grade team, as a result of analyzing student work samples in math with Dr. Smith and the math facilitator, determined a need to more closely monitor students' acquisition of proficiency in multiplication facts and implemented new formative measures in their rooms. These changes will hopefully allow

for differentiated instruction or interventions to occur sooner for students who may be struggling. Dr. Smith also indicated that starting this new collaboration structure—where he is physically present and often facilitating the meetings--has taken a bit of the pressure off of facilitators to “act” as administrators with their peer colleagues, hopefully, allowing for richer collaboration moving forward.

Dr. Smith also holds faculty meetings approximately once a week during district structured early release time on Mondays. Prior to each meeting he meets with his building leadership team to garner teacher voice in agenda needs. For these meetings, Dr. Smith shared that he almost always relies upon this staff input for determining topics. Recent meetings have included a presentation by the school psychologist on conscious discipline and an overview of the district speech-language referral process. Once a month, however, these early release days are reserved for district use, and Dr. Smith gathers the agenda topics to be covered through reading the communiqué put forward by his superintendent prior to the meetings. Other district professional development structures are additionally in place during institute days and school days via teacher release, and most staff—all members except new teachers—are on at least one district curriculum steering committee.

Additionally, Dr. Smith is allocated \$15,000 each year to support out-of-district professional development and travel costs for his staff. He meets with every faculty member each September to discuss his/her professional development goals and then uses this planning session as a springboard for directing opportunities to teachers as they come across his desk.

The following sections describe the practices found at Sunny Brook through onsite interviews, observations and document collection. Because the focus of my research was to understand principals' leadership responses to *CCSS* reform, I utilized three frames of reference aligned to this effort. The first frame focused on indicators of the *intended outcomes of standards-based reform*, and the following subthemes that emerged from this frame were evidence of a clear road map, equitable learning opportunities for all students, and a positive sense of accountability among the principal and staff. For the second frame, *observed impacts of standards-based reforms*, the subthemes were evidence of a narrowing of curriculum, "teacher proofing", loss of teacher agency and diminished public faith. Finally, the third frame comprised the four key indicators of successful principal reform, as defined by Datnow's *Framework for Reform for Principals* (2001). These indicators were evidence of principals as instructional leaders, teacher "buy-in" in relation to reform, principals confronting rather than ignoring, observable teacher resistance in response to desired change, and the cultivation of teacher empowerment. This section will present emergent themes organized by each supporting framework and also provide a brief analysis of absent subthemes when necessary.

Observed intentions of standards-based reform. As previously shared in chapter two, there are multiple, intentional purposes behind utilizing a standards-based reform approach. One such purpose is to create opportunities for common vision and expectations among staff regarding curriculum and assessment of that curriculum. At Sunny Brook teachers expressed a consistent theme of moving in this direction in the area of math, one of the two major areas of required focus in *CCSS* reform. Their principal,

although not viewed as directly connected to operational changes associated with math reform, was viewed as an active attendee at curriculum meetings and a supporter of such changes in the building to a point. His explanation:

Common core philosophically is trying to do about eight or five things really well and go deep with those and I'd say that's aligned with progressive practices; that's what we've been saying we want to do.

Although some tensions emerged regarding the sentiment that Sunny Brook has always utilized such an approach and, thus, did not necessarily need to make strong curricular or instructional changes to implement the new standards, teachers expressed several thoughts about the operational changes they had experienced in math. For example, one teacher explained, speaking about her experiences of recent math reform in the district, "*Investigations*¹ is not a curriculum; we have our curriculum, but you need to use *Investigations*...we [now] have a district curriculum and that's what we're obligated to meet." This comment was connected to district efforts to move teachers to a common math curriculum and anchoring resource. Another teacher provided a specific example in third grade:

[One year later, post-implementation year,] 3rd grade is still functioning like the above...[the] scope and sequence is a district document...[it] tells the

¹ *Investigations* is a K-5 math curriculum, developed at the Technical Education Research Centers funded in part by the National Science. *Investigations* was adopted by the District in 2013.

instructional path rather than the text book path...[but it's] hard to get teachers to follow in this manner.

This teacher's comment reinforces the idea that Sunny Brook has moved formally to a "standards-based" curriculum approach in math, and therefore, this respondent, understands that the district *CC*-aligned standards are the instructional foundation, not the purchased textbook. It is, rather, just a resource *for* instruction of the standards. However, his comment also suggests that not all staff members have made this shift, and some are still *teaching* the textbook.

Interviews and documents review also indicated varying degrees of common understanding, and common implementation, in curricular areas outside of math. One teacher described,

I feel really knowledgeable in the area of math in common core because I was lucky enough to sit on the curriculum writing for the math committee, but not so much with language arts because I haven't been forced to read up on it like I was with the math.

Another teacher commented there was limited guidance on reading curriculum and instruction,

We haven't covered reading ever, really. There was a lot of focus on Lucy Calkins writing for sure, although I mean you were pretty much on your own, like you had to read those units and figure it out.

Superintendent Tanya confirmed that writing, a component of *English Language Art (ELA) CCSS*, had been previously implemented, and that reading and other sub topics of ELA were scheduled for implementation in 2015-2016.

The 2014-15 District Improvement Plan (DIP), which was also posted on the district website aligns with and affirms many of the teachers’ perceptions of CCSS implementation thus far. Specifically, it highlighted the very targeted professional development and curriculum work being done in the areas of math and writing, and showed that the content area of reading still seemed to be at the resource acquisition level, not yet directly impacting teachers and students in classrooms. In follow up with Superintendent Tanya regarding reading, the district is presently vetting resources but is currently most interested in Lucy Calkins’ and colleagues *Units of Study for Teaching Reading*. Table 4.5 captures the relevant pieces of that plan in relation to Sunny Brook’s CCSS implementation for 2014-2015. The table also identifies anticipated action steps associated with CCSS identified areas. You will note that reading is still a “central office areas of exploration” in terms of progress as compared to math and writing, where facilitators are meeting with teachers at the operational level and classroom expectations for teachers and students have been articulated.

Table 4.5
Sunny Brook School Improvement Plan (2014-15)

Area of Focus & Rationale	Action Steps Indicated
<p>Reading</p> <p>The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (CCSS-ELA) intend for students to engage in “a broad range of high-quality, increasingly challenging literacy and informational texts.” This expectation requires students to engage in extensive reading both inside and outside of school. Students are expected to acquire knowledge of how different text types are structured, cite textual evidence to support their ideas, and enhance their background knowledge across a range of content areas. Students are also expected to</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Literacy facilitators will conduct classroom needs assessments to support the enhancement of non-fiction titles grades K-8. b) Literacy facilitators will conduct inventories to assess the range of text complexity in K-6 classrooms and differentiated text sets for grades 7 and 8 to support the range of student reading needs. c) Curriculum Office will order reading materials based on the analysis of the needs assessment.

Table 4.5 cont.

develop habits as independent readers and critical consumers of informational text. The variety, range of complexity, and volume of books required to support the CCSS/ELA for reading instruction will require a multi-year materials adoption effort. Classrooms must have a balance of fiction and non-fiction resources to support independent reading, mentor texts for the writing curriculum, and the range of instructional purposes as outlined in the CCSS-ELA.

Math

Students grades 1-6 will demonstrate an increased understanding and use of the Standards for Mathematical Practice that are supported by the implementation of the District's math curriculum and materials. Using the Engaging in Mathematical Practices Matrix, teachers will document the evidence they see of students demonstrating understanding and use of the math practices in their classrooms. This will be benchmarked three times throughout the year, to determine growing proficiency in the students' use of the mathematical practices as defined by the Common Core State Standards for Math (CCSS-M).

- a) Math facilitators will meet with grade level teams once a month to review Common Core Standards for math as it relates to the current units they are teaching and support a consistent integration of the Standards for Mathematical Practice: 1a. Making sense of problems; 1b. Persevere in solving problems; 2. Reason abstractly and quantitatively; 3a. Construct viable arguments; 3b. Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others (consistency, communication).
 - b) Teachers will work with facilitators to determine appropriate evidence and benchmark student understanding of the mathematical practices in their classrooms through the use of the Engaging in Mathematical Practices Matrix in the context of the District math curriculum (consistency, communication).
 - c) Students will apply use of the math practices during daily math problem-solving (consistency and communication).
 - d) Teachers will work with facilitators to obtain a mid-year benchmark for student application of the Mathematical Practices based on gathered evidence (consistency, communication).
 - e) Students will continue application of practices during daily math investigations and across the curriculum units. Teachers will use data from mid-year benchmark to guide instruction (consistency, communication).
 - f) Teachers will work with facilitators to engage in an end-of-the-year analysis of student understanding and use of the mathematical practices to review the benchmarks for student growth (consistency, communication).
-

Language Arts

To build a foundation for college and career readiness, students need to learn to use writing as a way of offering and supporting opinions, demonstrating understanding of the subjects they are studying, and conveying claims about

- a) The literacy facilitators will meet with grade level language arts teachers monthly (K-4) and weekly (5-8) to guide targeted implementation and consistency of practice of writing instruction across the grade levels (consistency and communication).
- b) Teachers review and apply the instructional criteria expected for the text type being assessed: lead,

Table 4.5 cont.

real events with reasons and supporting evidence. Students learn that a key purpose of writing is to communicate clearly to an external audience, and they learn to adapt their writing to accomplish a certain task and purpose. College and Career Readiness (CCR) standards help to define skills and understandings that all students must demonstrate. With that in mind, students will [also] focus on the Common Core Anchor Standards for writing. The Teachers College opinion and argument writing checklists are aligned to the new Common Core State Standards and our District curriculum. They offer us a common vehicle to collect student information to help guide differentiated instruction, provide targeted feedback to students through conferring, and to monitor individual student growth, and progress by text type.

- transitions, ending, organization, elaboration, craft, spelling, and punctuation (consistency and communication).
- c) Students will participate in an on-demand writing assessment (to serve as a pre-assessment) from the chosen opinion/argument writing unit to be assessed (consistency).
 - d) Teachers will use benchmark data on lead, transitions, ending, organization, elaboration, craft, spelling, and punctuation to help guide differentiated instruction and provide differentiated feedback to students through mini-lessons and individual and small group conferences (consistency, transition, communication).
 - e) Students will participate in an end-of-unit on demand writing assessment (to serve as a post assessment) (consistency, transition, communication).
 - f) Teachers will assess each student's progress using the Teachers College assessment tool, which focuses on lead, transitions, endings, organization, elaboration, craft, spelling, and punctuation (consistency, transition, communication).
-

While a DIP clearly exists and shows evidence of district *CCSS* implementation, the themes described above show the inconsistencies in relation to both depth of understanding of *CCSS* implementation at Sunny Brook and the clarity of the district picture in relation to Sunny Brook's teachers' understandings. Teachers identified elements of concern with math and writing—both of which, according to the DIP and Superintendent Tanya having already been implemented—in addition to reading, which has yet to be implemented. Ultimately, this reality points to a somewhat unclear roadmap for the teachers of Sunny Brook despite the standards-based methods used.

Sub-themes *not* emergent relative to purported intentions of standards-based reform. Another area of intended focus behind standards-based reform is improved equity for traditionally underserved children. Although Sunny Brook's population includes less than one percent of students coming from traditionally marginalized

backgrounds, it does contain several students who require special education services. For these students, Sunny Brook teachers expressed tension around “negotiating the [state] system” that they felt inherently “wasn’t best for kids.” One teacher commented:

There is a lot of [resistance] Special Ed wise because we have to write our goals based on grade level, common core standards and our kids are learning at two grade levels below and how could we possibly write a standard at a third grade level for a child who cannot read? So...it’s like trying to constantly negotiate the system...But then at the end, it is weird if we would teach them at their level, we would have, you know, one targeted goal, we try to get them to grow there, but then they have to take a standardized test in that grade level with everybody else. So, I mean, it’s just like you have to be kidding, you know and that is all tried to *Common Core* as well. You know what *Common Core* things that you have learned this year, you are going to take this test about and kids with special needs it is just not right, so it is frustrating for them and demoralizing.

Another unobserved intention behind standards based reform was the cultivation of a positive sense of accountability among all stakeholders, where deficit thinking is reduced and standards are viewed as “the floor, not the ceiling” (Glatthorn & Jailall, 2008, p. 9). Rather, participants described *CCSS* reform as a direct mismatch to this intention:

I feel like Common Core doesn’t...it is more...it’s a recipe. It doesn’t quite fit in here. I also think, I think of it as um the ideal that development is shifting and different for different children, and so Common Core says by the end of kindergarten they will do this and by the end of first grade they will do that, and the end of second grade they will do this, and so on, and I think what feels

antithetical to our practice is that we have been much more fluid in our understanding when children master certain skills, so we have been much more – student center[ed], child center[ed].

Thus, folks felt that *CCSS* in some respects had made learning “rigid” and less “fluid,” and this shift had increased accountability, but not in a positive way; rather, it had cultivated tension among teachers to be conflicted in their core beliefs about developmental readiness continua for kids versus *CC* grade level outcomes expectations. At Sunny Brook students are developed to be the drivers of their own education, which is a highly valued component of progressive practice—*CCSS* accountability reform was viewed as a conflict to maintaining this practice.

Observed impact of standards-based reform. Several distinct themes may be explored in relation to the impact of standards-based reform on a school site. The first two such subthemes were the narrowing of curriculum for students and evidence of “teacher proofing.” Although no formal programs have been lost at Sunny Brook in order to provide more time for *CC* instruction, tensions were definitely evident. For example, middle and upper elementary teachers felt challenged by never “succumbing to teaching to the test” but pressure to make sure students performed well on state testing. One primary teacher respondent explained:

There isn’t just one easy cleaning material to clean your floors. You have to look at each little person and you almost have to be a physician—you [rule] every single option out that...and then you pick and pull for each little person in each moment. You can’t just prescribe...this is the program that is going to fix it for everyone. And that is what they are doing. You can’t do that. You are dealing

with the most important commodity we have, our children. There is no one-step model for little people. You have to totally look at each person in the moment and you have to know a wealth of options to fall from, as they change in seconds and then to be able to pick and pull for that person. You can't just say "here is your basal story be on page 3, 5", you can't, it doesn't work and then say you have a board coming in who wants to be physically responsible or educated in that concept, it is not just here's the math problems for everyone, get them in. It's not industrial anymore; it's not like where it was a factory model. You can't do it...doesn't work. We know it doesn't work.

Furthermore, another teacher in response to a question about perspectives on teacher autonomy described a definite shift from total autonomy "way back when" to now changing "for the sake PARCC." Partnership for Assessment of Readiness in College and Careers (PARCC) was the new state test implemented during the 2014-15 school year in Illinois. The policy intent of this assessment is to help ensure that all students, regardless of background or geography, have equal access to a top-notch school preparation experience that will ensure their ability to be successful after high school.

Dr. Smith, the principal, also expressed tension with PARCC in his building—trying to honor his commitments to implement the stated goals of the district improvement plan—without his teachers losing the autonomy to maintain the progressive practices in which he is so firmly philosophically routed. This tension was further evidenced by extensive commentary—from all groups interviewed—regarding what was described as the third grade "ISAT situation."

Last year, Sunny Brook had experienced a significant decline in their third grade ISAT scores, which became a public matter of scrutiny at multiple Board of Education meetings. Although, according to Dr. Smith and teachers, Sunny Brook progressive ideals and present curricula did not expect mastery of some of the math topics tested on ISAT by spring of the testing year, public outcry and Board scrutiny after scores were shared had resulted in teacher pressure to make adjustments to teach to the test to improve results. In fact, when asked what their current greatest challenge was, one third-grade teacher responded with the following:

I would say we as a Third Grade...are feeling gun-shy because we really got whacked over this whole ISAT thing, and I think part of our anxiety is that the message we were sent was that the public would be informed that this was a transitional year and it was going to be part-ISAT, part-PARCC and that we probably weren't going to do that well and everything would be fine, and then we really were – they came down really hard and it was embarrassing. I feel like we're definitely gun-shy. Okay you're saying all of this and it feels really good; is that really what's going to happen, or am I going to be sitting at a board meeting and get slapped again? There were some school board members that were very disappointed in these scores, very vocally disappointed in the scores.

This situation may have been exacerbated by the relative “freedom” Sunny Brook teachers had experienced in the past from public accountability related to ISAT results. In speaking with Dr. Smith, it seems that this particular ISAT area had been a “lower” scoring area (although note quite *as* low is in 2014) for several years, but previous Boards and parents had been mostly understanding of the Sunny Brook's position that the math

topics presented on ISAT in third grade were not developmentally appropriate as a focus for Sunny Brook’s progressive curriculum. Thus, teachers had—in their minds, with permission—intentionally not “taught to the test.” Therefore, the reaction from the Board and broader community had been quite an unexpected surprise for staff.

A third subtheme, closely aligned to the first two discussed, was that of loss of teacher agency. At Sunny Brook, Dr. Smith was viewed as a strong supporter of teacher agency in his building. His teachers viewed this reality as evidence of strong principal/teacher trust. As one teacher shared, but all interviewed affirmed:

I think that our building allows us way more freedom than the other buildings. In that building I was just talking about, they’re on the same lesson, all of them, every day.

This participant’s comment was trying to describe the impression among Sunny Brook staff that other teachers in other buildings in their district were allowed less freedom in their lesson planning and instructional choices. Rather, they were expected to teach the same content at the same time as their grade level partners, regardless of varying student needs.

Despite experiences of greater autonomy relative to other schools in the district, most parties interviewed still expressed concerns regarding loss of autonomy and feelings that “CC is just another thing on [our] shoulders that [we] have to be accountable for. Why can’t [we] *just teach?*” One of the most experienced participants shared her perspective that, historically, Sunny Brook had never been a school that had adopted a core program. Rather, it had been a place where teachers were the ones to conduct the research, determine resources and then pull instructional units together accordingly. She

noted her opinion that “the conflict now is with the shift...[toward] state pressure, state laws, and the country’s laws imposing...conformity.” Although perhaps reduced from earlier times, teachers still expressed feeling some sense of agency at Sunny Brook and felt supported by their principal to work around imposed reform agendas when they didn’t feel they were best for kids. Imposed reform—through their building principal’s clear progressive leadership—had not completely removed their ability to make decisions.

Another observed impact of imposed reform was that of diminished public faith in educators’ abilities to positively impact students’ learning experiences. Comments pertaining to this subtheme emerged in all facets of data collection. From the superintendent to classroom teachers, tensions abounded in relation to feeling accumulating pressures to “defend” their methods and instructional decisions, particularly relative to other neighboring communities that also feed into the same high school. One staff member described:

[The] notion that we have to defend our education. You know we’re on the North Shore, there are all these other schools going into [high school feeder school] and here is Sunny Brook, the radical district that does progressive education, no letter grades and things like that, and we are constantly on the defense...

As Dr. Smith shared areas of priority in terms of his position responsibilities, he described at length the strategic necessity of providing ample explanation and proactive communication with his parent community and with his teaching staff. For example, Dr. Smith dedicates significant weekly time toward preparing both a lengthy Monday morning update for his teachers and a Friday update for the parent community. Furthermore, Dr. Smith provides lengthy monthly newsletters to parent that describe the

“why” beyond instructional decisions, that unpack how *CCSS* are being interpreted and implemented within his building, and that give parents the necessary background to understand reform opportunities at play at Sunny Brook. Dr. Smith also attends monthly Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) meetings at the homes of Sunny Brook parents and hosts twice-annual public forums where he reports publically on the progress of a combination of district developed and self-developed goals. Each of these forums is done for the explicit purpose of maintaining and building positive relationships with community stakeholders and shielding his staff from needing to defend their instructional positions. Dr. Smith wants his teachers to be able to focus on *just teaching*.

Participants described feelings of reduced public faith associated with both the public outcry from the previously mentioned drop in third grade ISAT scores and with parents’/community stakeholders’ varying levels of understanding the tenets of *progressive* practices. As described by one teacher, “I feel like we have a lot of trust from parents until the test scores come back and then there is a lot of anxiety.”

Because Sunny Brook is philosophically grounded in progressive practices, Dr. Smith and his teachers believe that student development should not be isolated to each and every student mastering pre-defined skills within a small grade level time frame (as necessitated in *CCSS*). Tension between this philosophy and reform mandates emanated through each school visit and interview. Dr. Smith’s consistent leadership in defining progressive practices as the priority seemed to have translated well to his staff. Every staff member with whom I spoke talked about this conflict and how Sunny Brook has made efforts to preserve its philosophical roots despite the imposition of standards. Parents, and the broader community of stakeholder—inclusive of some Board

members—however, were described as having varying levels of understanding of what *progressive* practices mean and how this approach—which allows kids to emerge as readers and learners at their own paces through instructional support—might translate on a state assessment. In these disgruntled parents’ and community members’ minds, instructional practices should result in high levels of performance on standardized tests as an identified priority. Obviously, this state assessment has been valued very little by Sunny Brook staff as an authentic measure of their kids’ true growth and achievement. Rather, teacher-collected classroom data, narrative and portfolio collections are more valued. Dr. Smith affirmed this sentiment:

[The]Third Grade team [and] Fourth Grade team[s] are always in a tizzy about standard test scores, ISAT scores and that so they’re – they feel so conscientious and accountable for them...and yet they don’t ever want to succumb to teaching to the test, but [they] want to make sure...students have an opportunity to succeed. You know the ISAT has division on it or whatever, and I, you know I try to assuage those fears a bit—they do lots of assessment and I think progressive education has wonderful forms of assessment. There is authentic assessment; there are writings that are happening; there is observational data; there are tests, not that we don’t test; there are all kinds of data that we give children and get from children and collect in terms of assessment, so. If you were to say that we don’t have standardized testing here I think the teachers would say well we have a rich array of assessments and ways to be able to share with parents on assessments. The standardized testing one puts a kind of an edge on assessment because that one always asks well what about assessment, meaning that

quantitative number versus all these others. [Regarding ISAT] I said don't be victimized by these scores; you are strong enough to step above these and we need to be mindful of them politically, but you know, let's be aware of all the other tools and measures you have to know what your children are doing and celebrate that you are doing it very well, and let's not spend all of our time on this.

This commentary, beyond affirming mixed feelings on the value of standardized assessments in schools, also shows the juggling Dr. Smith must do on a very frequent basis. He must calm teachers' fears; he must affirm students' beliefs about their abilities after they fail ISAT; he must remind teachers of their need to pay attention to state tests, even if they do not believe in them; he must remain conscious of the politicking that must happen between the school and parents when tests do not show the results desired; and he must make sure there are substantive other forms of data available to affirm student learning in the absence of standardized results. And finally, Dr. Smith would affirm, that most of these needs are impacts from the heightened accountability requirements associated with standards-based reform.

Principal leadership via Datnow's *Framework for Reform*. A final lens with which data was filtered was through that of Datnow's *Framework for Reform for Principals* (2001). In her research, she defined four indicators of successful reform. These indicators were evidence of principals as instructional leaders, evidence of teacher "buy-in" in relation to reform, evidence of principals confronting, rather than ignoring, observable teacher resistance in response to desired change, and evidence of the cultivation of teacher empowerment. This section will review emergent themes associated with each of these areas.

Principal as instructional leader. “I see my job as being the ambassador or the PR person for the great things that are happening.” The principal at Sunny Brook understands his primary purpose as a conduit to conveying the important learning stories of Sunny Brook. This purpose was unanimously understood by Sunny Brook staff. Perhaps not a traditional interpretation of what Datnow intended when she chose the words “instructional leader,” but folks at Sunny Brook felt supported by their principal in instructional endeavors. They indicated that Dr. Smith was not a frequent presence in their classrooms, described his leadership approach as “hands-off,” and shared that he often “gets involved when parents encourage him to get involved.” However, staff expressed competence in their instructional skills and didn’t give the impression that Dr. Smith’s instructional leadership approach as a negative one. Rather, staff appreciated his hands-off approach and positively described Dr. Smith’s approach:

I know from having Dr. Smith as my Principal [that] I truly believe when the poop hits the fan and Dr. Smith, as all administrators have multiple people coming at them, he really does do what I believe is best for the kids; it may not even be the choice I want him to make, but I know that when he makes that choice it wasn’t because of funding and it wasn’t because of what the superintendent thought and it wasn’t because of a parent. He – he does what is best for kids and he shares the decision and why and I totally respect and trust it even if it’s not the one I would pick because – or the one I wanted – because I know where it’s coming from.

The culture was described as one where teacher empowerment was an expectation. Competence, autonomy and student-centered decision-making were a requirement to

work at Sunny Brook. Thus, instructional leadership seemed to be defined by staff as Dr. Smith's ability to create a positive culture, between and among parents and stakeholders, that allowed teachers to simply continue teaching, using whatever progressive methods they deemed best for their students. In this case, Dr. Smith's weekly and monthly communications with parents were evidence of success in terms of instructional leadership for his teachers.

Evidence of "teacher buy-in". "It was just like okay guys, I can't do this for you; you can pad it a little bit, but you have to be on the same line as all the others. According to Datnow's framework, key indicators that teachers have bought into a reform are evidence of a direct match in ideologies between the reform and teachers, evidence of actions that support the reform intentions, and observance of teachers assuming ownership for the reform. At Sunny Brook, data seemed to indicate that there was a direct match between Dr. Smith's spoken ideologies and staff's spoken ideologies. In further explanation, a staff member described the following:

If any of us went to Dr. Smith and said, you know this great opportunity has come my way. I need the day off and 150 dollars to take this class; he would probably make it happen for us because he believes in us.

Did, however, this teacher buy-in for their principal's beliefs extend to *CCSS* implementation? This answer is less clear because Dr. Smith, himself, did not view *CCSS* reform as a black or white requirement. As the opening quote exemplifies, Dr. Smith expressed strong concerns about aspects of the reform and seemed to openly share his sentiments among staff. His biggest concern was connected to feelings of a direct mismatch between, not the imposition of common standards, but rather, his fundamental

beliefs in progressive instructional practices that leave the developmental window open for mastery of these standards. To translate further, Dr. Smith felt that *CCSS* and the accountability measures associated with their implementation might result in “boxing” students into categories that are not developmentally appropriate. Thus, Dr. Smith’s alluded to the need to affirm his teachers’ abilities to exercise personal freedoms of interpretation in relation to district implementation of the *CCSS* aligned curriculum. For example:

[Pertaining to *CCSS* math implementation]...we’re going to do it – but at the same time... you’re so well versed in *Investigations*. If you want to slide a few more things in and around do that, but if someone comes in from central office and says what are you doing, we’re following the protocol, which we are, but we’re also wrapping around some other things because of the experience these teachers have and their knowledge base, so with their permission too.

A staff respondent indicated a similar understanding of implementation interpretation:

I think we’re about fifty/fifty now I feel like, where fifty percent of our stuff we kind of have to do it, and fifty percent of our stuff we still can kind of dabble and pick and choose, and the overarching resources are sort of given and then the way you implement them is sort of up to your discretion a little bit...

If effective principal leadership is staff buying into their principal’s direction, staff participants have definitely done so. Staff participants’ comments emphatically mirrored those of their principal and exposed the tension present between truly embracing *CCSS* reform and masking elements of it for the purposes of central office accountability.

Principal confronts, does not ignore, teacher resistance. “I’m not afraid to be the leader and have the buck stop here...they know that I will take responsibility for my actions if something didn’t work out.” Staff respondents affirmed Dr. Smith’s perception that building staff views him as an advocate for kids first. In terms of capturing the essence of this indicator as a distinct theme proved a challenge. The difficulty presented in trying to parse our Dr. Smith’s resistance to aspects of CCSS reform from his staff’s resistance. This reality may indicate that, indeed, Dr. Smith is a great confronter to teacher resistance in that all of the staff interviewed seemed to share common elements in describing their hesitation with CCSS reform. In essence, Dr. Smith’s staff seemed to authentically share Dr. Smith’s progressive philosophy and was not extremely verbose in sharing perspectives on this topic. One staff member did indicate, “[Dr. Smith] is very honest and he is very direct, but you know, he does it in a kind and constructive way...Teachers are encouraged to innovate.”

Another told a story of a former colleague who did not “fit in” and, as a result, chose to part ways with Sunny Brook at the end of that school year. In recanting this story, the mismatch was highlighted as a faculty style/personality mismatch to this person, not an administrative determination of departure. Therefore, as the situation was described, the staff as a collective, who felt this teacher was not an effective teacher, either made it too uncomfortable for this person to want return or gave this person enough informal feedback that she knew she was not a “fit” at Sunny Brook. This vignette may suggest that the Sunny Brook staff viewed “principal confrontation” as their responsibility too, not just Dr. Smith’s. Thus, this view may have contributed to the difficulty in gaining definitive insight.

Evidence of teacher empowerment. “One thing that I started this year is the teacher leadership team and that was one of my views and visions. I want to have faculty voice come forwarded more, so I initiated a team, people who volunteered to be on it, to help think about faculty meetings and how teacher voice is used in faculty meetings, and to increase teacher voice.” The final indicator to be discussed is that of evidence of teacher empowerment. As a consistent theme, teachers at Sunny Brook feel hugely empowered and responsible for their work with students. Several teacher leadership positions are presently in place at Sunny Brook to provide additional support to teachers (literary, science and math facilitators). Although is unclear whether empowerment has just always been a part of the Sunny Brook way or Dr. Smith’s keen leadership has brought this about, Sunny Brook is a place where teachers definitely feel empowered and take on deep responsibility. They own their challenges, they take pleasure in drafting, enacting and refining curriculum; they know the expectations for communication between school and home are high. In sum, in response to a question about having voice within the school and broader district:

I feel like we are very fortunate to be invited to participate in so many committees, whether you choose to participate or not. I am a part-time-er, but I am really full-time because I love it, and I am learning all the time. I am educated all the time though current practice because I choose to be on committees where I am welcomed and we are all learning together.

Conclusion

Sunny Brook School is a warm, welcoming environment to students and staff. Many of the challenges experienced among other public elementary schools were absent

at Sunny Brook. Rather, predominant tensions seemed to evolve mostly around the philosophical underpinnings of progressive practices and the call for policy makers to not forget about the abilities of teachers to know *and* provide students what they need academically without the imposition of mandates. Dr. Smith, in his teachers' opinions, was able to successfully support staff with their needs and was viewed as a protector/buffer, to a certain point, from both the parent community and central office when necessary. Sunny Brook is not a stagnant building unwilling to change practices; rather, refinement of teaching practices are a constant expectation. However, Sunny Brook with Dr. Smith's leadership is not a building where change is going to happen just because someone or some group said that it should. Dr. Smith and his teachers must value the reform and feel that it will best serve students' interests. Perhaps these observations—of autonomy, agency, expertise, critique—speak to the power culture in which Sunny Brook is situated. Coming from this perspective, it would be considered appropriate for Sunny Brook to question reform against present practices rather than just blindly accept that the reform must have improved value for students. These ideas will be explored more deeply in Chapter 6, but first Chapter 5 will present a detailed exploration of the second case, Laguna Elementary School.

CHAPTER 5

CASE TWO

This chapter provides a detailed description of the second unique case, Laguna Elementary School, as well as emergent themes from analysis of the data.

Laguna Elementary, a school whose mission is to “empower students to learn their interests, talents and dreams” is located in the western Chicago suburbs. Laguna enrolls just under 400 students and serves students from pre-kindergarten through sixth grades. The school is situated within a broader district of roughly 1465 students and is one of four elementary buildings and one 7-8 junior high building. Laguna, along with one other elementary building and the junior high school in which they feed, are outliers in the district in terms of diversity and socioeconomic position compared to the other schools in the same district. Table 5.1 provides additional context for understanding Laguna’s demographics in relation to the other elementary schools in Laguna’s district and the broader state average.

Table 5.1
Context of the Case

School data	Case B Laguna Elem. School	Other Elem. School in District	Other Elem. School in District	Other Elem. School in District	State Average
Grade Levels	PK-6	PK-6	PK-6	PK-6	--
Per Pupil Operating Expenditures	\$13,817	\$13,817	\$13,817	\$13,817	\$12,045
Per Pupil Instructional Expenditures	\$8,207	\$8,203	\$8,203	\$8,203	\$7,094
Proportion of Local Property Tax Revenue	86.5%	86.5%	86.5%	86.5%	66%

Table 5.1 cont.

School data	Case B Laguna Elem. School	Other Elem. School in District	Other Elem. School in District	Other Elem. School in District	State Average
Student Enrollment	388	353	231	193	--
White Students	34%	79%	69.7%	19.2%	49.9%
African-American Students	5.7%	1.1%	1.7%	0%	17.5%
Hispanic Students	56.7%	12.2	25.1%	78.8%	24.6%
Asian/Pacific Islander Students	1.5%	2.1%	0%	0%	4.6%
Multi-Racial Students	1.8%	4.8%	2.6%	2.1%	3.1%
Low Income Students	72%	10%	39%	89.6%	52%
2010-11 Overall ISAT Performance	80%	95%	92%	83%	82%
2011-12 Overall ISAT Performance	81%	97%	92%	79%	82%
2012-13 Overall ISAT Performance	57%	88%	81%	43%	59%
2013-14 Overall ISAT Performance	57%	85%	81%	58%	59%

^a Operating expenditures per pupil includes the gross operating cost of a school district excluding summer school, adult education, bond principal retired, and capital expenditures.

^b Instructional expenditures per pupil include the direct costs of teaching pupils of the interaction between teachers and pupils.

^c Overall ISAT performance indicates the percentage of students meeting or exceeding State standards as measured by the Illinois Standards Achievement Test.

Laguna Elementary is an attractive school located in a small neighborhood community just off a major thorough fare of businesses and car dealerships. Several of these businesses publically partner with the school to support initiatives ranging from student-teacher mentoring programs to family reading incentive programs. Although a much more detailed history is available to describe the tradition of Laguna School, which was first established as an institution with a different name in 1844, the current school

site was erected in 1950 after a fire burned the previous building down. According to information provided by the school, Laguna serves children from single-family homes, condominiums, apartments and mobile park homes whose economic statistics range from financially comfortable to below the poverty level. No statistics were available at the time of this research to determine specific percentages of students residing in these various types of dwellings. Additionally, Laguna's student body is very diverse with more than 15 languages spoken by Laguna families and, presently, over 35 different native countries represented. Furthermore, student transiency presents as a frequent challenge, which is unique from both the other district elementary schools and the broader surrounding area.

Upon entering the building, visitors are greeted by double security doors that funnel guests into the Main Office where two administrative assistants—one Spanish speaking and one English speaking—greet folks and scan credentials. Guests may also quickly note the highly visible and frequently posted school-wide expectations: Be Safe, Be Respectful, Be Here and Ready. These expectations are part of the school's Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program that has been in place for over 10 years. This program focuses upon establishing proactive behavioral systems with students that then allow and promote safe and effective learning environments. Consequently, statements describing specific desired student behaviors in all school environments are posted throughout the building—including bathrooms, hallways, and classrooms.

A feature of Laguna School is the daily, full student body morning meeting in the school's gymnasium. Every single day, the entire school—including every staff member—meets in the gym in an organized, respectful fashion to be greeted by Mr.

Jones, the school Principal, share in the *Pledge of Allegiance*, chant the school's motto, and hear any other announcements important to the day. It's an impressive sight of authentic mutual respect between students and staff; no voices are raised to gain order, and students from kindergarten through sixth grades quietly and efficiently participate in the ten to twenty-minute session and then exit the gym without any verbal direction from their teachers. The tradition is an established routine to all Laguna community members. Parents are also welcome to attend daily sessions; however, teachers reported this is not a common occurrence. I also did not observe any parents present during my two visits to morning meeting sessions.

Mr. Jones, who has been Principal at Laguna for the last nine years, earned his undergraduate and graduate degrees from an Illinois state university and is currently working on a doctorate degree at National Louis University. At the time of my study, Mr. Jones possessed 12 years of administrative experience and 19 total years within the education profession. Mr. Jones spent his early teaching and administrative years working in Central Illinois and was asked by his current Superintendent, with whom he had worked in the past, to interview for the Laguna Principal position, although he only had assistant principal experience prior to the opportunity. Accepting the position meant relocating himself and his family to the Chicago suburbs, which he did with few reservations. It is clear within minutes of meeting Mr. Jones that he is a passionate and outspoken educational leader who is proud of his teachers and students. School goals are clearly defined and communicated. In reviewing the comprehensively stated goals, one notices that many facets of the educational environment are addressed— students' academic growth and attainment, school environment and culture, parent and broader

community inclusion and satisfaction, teacher excellence, retention and collaboration.

Table 5.2 summarizes the four long-range goals at Laguna School.

Table 5.2
Laguna School Long-Range Goals

Goal Statement	Key Indicators
1. All students will demonstrate continuous growth and achieve college and career readiness standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are Kindergarten ready. • Students meet and/or exceed state ISAT standards in reading and mathematics. • Students read on grade level by the end of third grade. • Students achieve annual progress targets in reading and mathematics. • Students make a successful transition to high school. • Students are challenged and motivated by a rigorous, well-executed curriculum. • Academic data compare favorably with similar and highest performing schools. • School academic data improve over time.
2. All students will attend school in a safe, supportive and healthy learning environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students have a sense of belonging and feel safe, respected and free from bullying. • Students have adults in the school that they feel care about them and that they feel they can go to for academic, social, and emotional support. • Students, families and staff value health and well-being. • School learning climate data improve over time (student, staff and parent). • Laguna School learning climate data compare favorably with similar and highest performing schools. • Laguna School’s learning climate data improve over time.
3. Laguna School will enhance learning partnerships by connecting schools, families and communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents and community members feel that they are welcomed in the school and that their support and assistance are sought. • The school and district provide parent learning opportunities and partnerships that contribute to student success. • Laguna School’s family and community satisfaction data compare favorably to similar and highest performing schools. • Laguna School’s family and community satisfaction data improve over time.
4. Laguna School will recruit, retain and develop a high quality, collaborative staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff retention is high. • Staff holds multiple areas of subject area content certification. • Staff meeting National Board Certification Status. • Staff demonstrates effectiveness. • Staff demonstrates continued learning (university or in-district approved workshops, coursework, professional development). • Laguna School’s staff data compare favorably with similar and highest performing schools. • Laguna School’s staff satisfaction data improve over time.

Mr. Jones is a strong believer in the stated mission of his district, to “strive to be a high performing school district that celebrates the importance of each individual student” and in the abilities of his staff to get the job done. He and his teachers presently face tough challenges in achieving this goal, but this does not curtail Mr. Jones from creating

community systems in his building to conquer the challenge. One cannot walk into Laguna School without feeling warmth, community, safety, and purpose. His teachers and support staff are a self-reported close and collaborative group of colleagues. I had the opportunity to spend two full days immersed in the day-to-day operations of the school, and spoke informally with custodians, lunch staff, teaching assistants, secretaries, teachers and specialists. In all of these conversations, I heard stories of unwavering mutual respect among the staff. Every staff member indicated he/she felt valued, celebrated and important to the school setting. At Laguna, even the school custodians have relationships with students and are expected to verbally reinforce things like behavioral expectations. They are viewed as, and feel, instrumental to the school's success.

Mr. Jones spoke in detail about the vision of the broader district and the support he and his teachers have received from Central Office in moving forward with *CCSS* implementation. When asked about his leadership style, he described it thus:

... a lot of the district level work is...filtered down to the building level and principals act many times as instructional leaders within their building, but also take on some responsibility within the district...My style of leadership has always been...shared leadership within my building and helping to build capacity [of] teachers...around any initiative to promote... any ideas...that make us a stronger learning community. My role...varies depending on the initiative. ...A lot of things start at the district level...and are filtered down to the buildings, plans [and strategies] are developed...and then...they can be shared with staff through a variety of means, through whole district professional learning days, oftentimes

through staff development at the building level through monthly meetings, sometimes through smaller groups, teams within my building, such as my SMART² Team, which works around the SMART Goals process, and PBIS/Responsive Classroom team.

...Oftentimes, I'm a part of those smaller committees, and I typically serve more as a committee member in making decisions around how we bring those strategies...back to the whole staff.

Mr. Jones believes emphatically that teacher attitude and subsequent messaging for change starts at the top. When asked for an example, he described themes from his staff communications over the last three years in relation to initial exposure to *CCSS* and present implementation challenges. In doing so, he shared his recollections of feelings of early enthusiasm for the opportunities *CCSS* might afford education, but also the recognition that the unknown elements were scary for him and staff. His leadership, therefore, needed to assuage these fears and bring staff on board. Thus, his messages were about embracing opportunity:

Back then I think our theme was —...[it] would have been this is a great opportunity for us to learn something that is going to change education. This is going to be big and this is our opportunity to learn as much as we can, and let's not shy away from this. Let's you know, ask questions and know that I'm learning this alongside of you...there were a lot of things out in the media...about... how terrible it was and we didn't want to send that message.

² *SMART*, which is an acronym used to assist in the design of measurable goals, stands for *Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Relevant and Time-Oriented*.

Having said that, Mr. Jones also shared initial feelings that *CCSS*, while they may change *curricular* experiences for kids, were not going to change how he or his teachers operated. It was not until he and his teachers fully embraced the work of transitioning to the tenets and standards of the *CC*, that he and teachers recognized that the standards, for Laguna School, were a transformational change:

We've always thought that we were not going to allow *Common Core* to change who we are and what we did; we had always been about teaching and learning and about meeting students' needs and that this was just going to be a different way of going about that, so that was the early message. As time has gone by the message has changed. The message now is we're more specific about what we need to do, about how we should redefine learning; learning around the standards, learning around it's not about the curriculum guides that they used to have and what those curriculum guides are saying students should know; it's more about the standards. It's doing everything we can to help teachers understand the importance of knowing their standards and in doing that, also being respectful and cautious about knowing that's an overwhelming task. It's not simple enough to say know your standards, understand the standards at your grade level; it's trying to empathize with the fact that it's a lot, but also making sure that they understand that this is what we should be focusing on—it's the standards; it's teaching to the standards; it's [then] finding resources to be able to do that, but it always goes back to the standards.

The Laguna staff consists of approximately 32 certified members and approximately 10 teacher assistants. Additionally, among the certified staff, the building

hosts two part time instructional coaches, two reading specialists, three English language specialists, two social workers, a part time psychologist, a literary facilitator, a library/media specialist, part time music, band, orchestra and art teachers, and a school nurse. Table 5.3 displays additional contextual information for each identified study participant.

Table 5.3
Profile of Participants

Participants	Gender	Position	Grade level teaching	Years experience
B1 - Collette	Female	Reading Specialist	K-6	14
B2 - Jenny	Female	Classroom Teacher	Third	9
B3 - Sandy	Female	Classroom Teacher	Second	4
B4 - Arlene	Female	Classroom Teacher	Third	6
B5 - Alice	Female	Classroom Teacher	Kindergarten	33
B6 - Sheila	Female	Reading Specialist	K-6	13
B7 - Maureen	Female	Classroom Teacher	Fifth	5
B8 - Galinda	Female	Classroom Teacher	Fourth	13
BCO6 - Kara	Female	Director of Curriculum	Elementary	18

Note. Participation identification labels utilize the letters A & B, which correspond to Case A or Case B. Years experience is the individual’s total number of years in education and may not reflect the length of time in his/her current assignment.

The average teacher within the district earns around \$61,970 annually, and 69.5% of teachers possess a Masters degree. Although average years of teacher experience data were not made available, the noted teacher retention rate was 83.9%. The pupil-teacher ratio at Laguna was 13.1 students to every teacher. Teaching staff described the qualities they value most in their colleagues to be perseverance and mutual respect. One staffer described the Laguna community as simply “a great place to be” where staff, when faced with adversity, “confront it...work through it...and [then] move on.”

Student demographics are diverse. Laguna’s enrollment is just under 400 students, and among this number, 34% of students are White, 56.7% are Hispanic, 1.5 % are Asian, 1.8% are Two-or-More Races and .3% are Pacific Islander. Seventy-two percent (72%) of students were reported as coming from Low Income families. Additionally, student mobility is significant with 27% of students transferring in or out of Laguna over the course of a school year. This reality has made continuity of experience difficult for staff and students, and staff expressed frustration both with trying to get to know new students quickly so that they may provide targeted instruction for them and with finally getting students in good learning patterns only to have them move on to another school or return to their country of origin. Staff indicated that parent involvement at Laguna is sporadic at times, and staff desire more direct involvement from their students’ parents. Communication can also be a challenge at times due to spoken and written language variances.

According to the Illinois State Achievement Test (ISAT) results, 57% of Laguna students met or exceeded standards during the 2013-2014 school year. Table 5.4 displays the academic performance of Laguna students as measured by their performance on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT).

Table 5.4
ISAT Scores for Case B: Laguna Elementary School

Year	All students	White	African American	Hispanic	Low Income
Percentage of students meeting or exceeding in reading					
2011	79	93	69	67	70
2012	77	83	77	73	71

Table 5.4 cont.

Year	All students	White	African American	Hispanic	Low Income
2013	57	75	42	46	44
2014	54	61	72	45	44

Percentage of students meeting or exceeding in math					
2011	81	94	69	71	72
2012	84	92	77	79	79
2013	58	70	50	50	51
2014	61	69	50	54	53

Note. Student populations of at least 45 or more students must exist in order for data to be gathered for sub-group statistics. *No data* indicates that fewer than 45 students are presently enrolled for a given sub-group.
Note. The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) adjusted the performance levels on ISAT for Reading and Mathematics to better align with the more rigorous standards of the *Common Core* in 2013 (30% of test items were aligned to *CCSS* in 2013.). In 2014, 100% of test items were *CCSS* aligned (www.isbe.net).
Note. Laguna began implementation of *CCSS* (ELA and Math) during the 2013-2014 school year.

Figures 5.1 and 5.2 show an illustration of the percentages over time of Laguna students who met or exceeded state standards based on ethnicity and socioeconomic status.

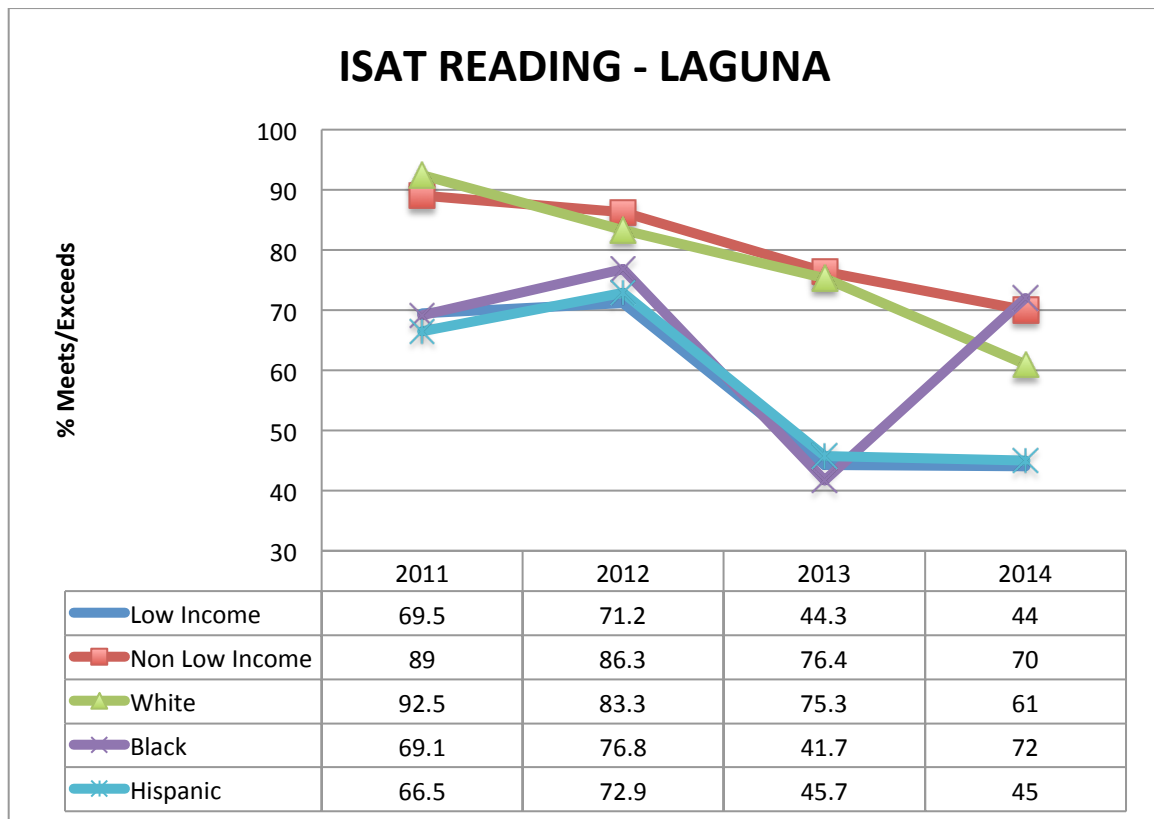


Figure 5.1 Percentage of Laguna students meeting or exceeding standards in reading by student race/ethnicity and income.

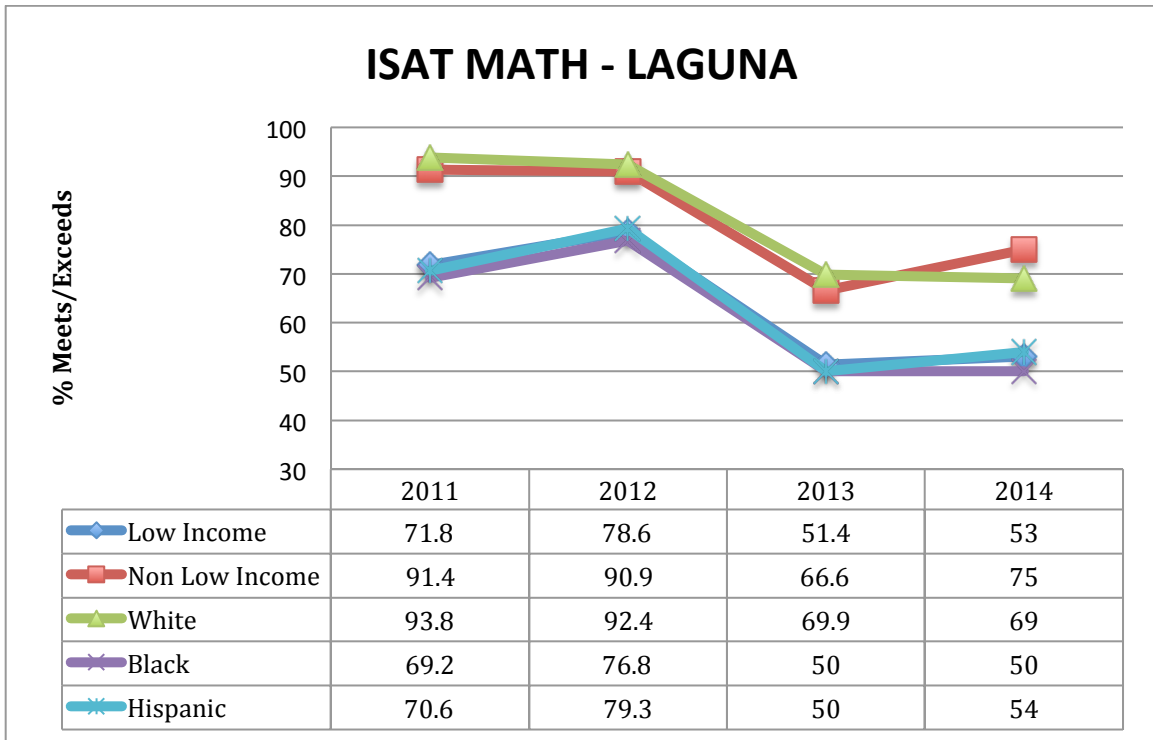


Figure 5.2 Percentage of Laguna students meeting or exceeding standards in math by student race/ethnicity.

Laguna Elementary School possesses a highly collaborative staff culture, and district and building structures have been implemented to support such collaboration. For example, the district offers professional development opportunities called “academies” for district grade level teams in both math and ELA. At these after school or summer sessions, K-8 staff is paid a professional, hourly rate to receive professional development and, ultimately, write local *CCSS* aligned curriculum and common assessments.

Additionally, the district possesses a “*Common Core* Black Belt Team” that is comprised of administrators and teacher leaders who own the responsibility of becoming “experts” on all things *Common Core* and then provide strategic leadership to the district. At the building level, Laguna teacher teams have been emerged in SMART Team training for the last two years, which has offered direct support to staff on learning how to write

essential questions and pre- and post-assessments that reflect the rigor of *CCSS*.

Furthermore, within the last year, in an effort to further support classroom teachers and instructional specialists, Mr. Jones has reworked the building master schedule to include large instructional blocks and common planning times for grade level teacher teams.

The following sections describe the practices found at Laguna through onsite interviews, observations and document collection. Similar to my analysis of Sunny Brook the focus of my research was to understand principals' leadership responses to *CCSS* reform. Therefore, I utilized three frames of reference aligned to this effort. The first frame focused on *indicators of the intended outcomes of standards-based reform*. Subthemes within this frame were evidence of a clear road map, equitable learning opportunities for all students, and a positive sense of accountability among the principal and staff. The second frame was focused upon *observed impacts of standards-based reforms*. Subthemes under this frame were evidence of a narrowing of curriculum, "teacher proofing", loss of teacher agency, and diminished public faith. Finally, the third frame was comprised of four key indicators of successful principal reform, as defined by Datnow's *Framework for Reform for Principals* (2001). Indicators explored for this third frame were evidence of principals as instructional leaders, teacher "buy-in" in relation to reform, evidence of principals confronting rather than ignoring, observable teacher resistance in response to desired change, and evidence of the cultivation of teacher empowerment. This section will present emergent themes organized by each supporting framework and also provide a brief analysis of noticeably absent subthemes when necessary.

Observed intentions of standards-based reform. Common vision, understanding and expectations associated with *CCSS* implementation were very apparent in both interviews and analyses of shared documents. As Mr. Jones shared when asked what school improvement goals were in place for the 2014-15 school year, “I mean that is *it* this year; it is around *Common Core* implementation, unit planning and assessment, formative assessment.” He and his teachers both described the organized district implementation efforts and the current aligned professional development process, called SMART Team Academy training, helping them with implementation in ELA and math.

In terms of district *CCSS* implementation efforts over the last few years, grade level teacher teams have attended numerous summer professional development sessions and after school meetings to, initially, unpack the standards and then, more recently, develop instructional units plans for ELA and math. As described on the school’s website:

As a staff this year, we have three major priority focuses: unit planning, balanced literacy, and ongoing *CCSS* implementation. These three things are not separate endeavors but practices that should be used as supportive pieces...these [instructional] units were organized around essential questions and themes, and contained pre- and post- assessments that reflect the rigor of the standards. This process has included [both] planning instruction and gathering resources. Additional training has been delivered through the Consortium for Education Change (CEC), a not for profit group who specializes in promoting continuous improvement frameworks based upon the tenets of the Baldrige Model in member districts. For

anyone unfamiliar, the Baldrige Criteria focus upon key areas of running a successful education organization and the integration of these systems within the organization to drive quality and achieve goals. “The Criteria provide a systems approach for performance management that aligns an organization's strategy and resources to increase value to all stakeholders and improve financial performance” (www.baldridgeforeducation.org, 2015).

A small group of chosen staff and Mr. Jones underwent training, which specifically focused on instructional unit planning utilizing *CCSS* the previous year, and a broader group of staff were participating in the intensive training this year. A staff “Black Belt” team had also been established at Laguna to further support unit implementation, and Mr. Jones indicated that at least one team member from every grade level had been trained or was in the process of undergoing training. As Mr. Jones described, “We have just really tried to pinpoint...our priorities in our district, and right now one of [the top priorities]– if not *the* priority –is around unit planning with *Common Core* implementation, and the SMART Team process is exactly what it is.”

Additionally, each Laguna grade level team shared documents overviewing their stated goals for the 2014-2015 year. To provide additional context, Table 5.5 summarizes documented goals and identified measure(s) in the areas of ELA and/or math. In reviewing Laguna’s grade level goals, you will notice variance in identified areas of focus. In speaking with teachers, they explained these differences to be related to the degree of SMART training the teams possessed. Teams with more advanced training have goals that are focused upon student goal setting and reflection using learning standards and effective pre- and post- data uses for instruction and planning. Other teams are still

required to have goals, but their present understanding of the interrelationship of standards, student reflection/goal setting, assessment and instructional planning is not yet as strong.

Table 5.5
Laguna School Grade Level Improvement Plans for ELA (2014-15)

Greatest Area of Need (GAN)	Action Steps	Measures
Kindergarten Achieve STEP pre-reading levels (rhyming, letter names/sounds, concepts about print). <i>70% of students will achieve "grade-level" status by spring 2015.</i>	1. Shared reading instruction focusing on Concepts about Print, pattern change and rhyming 2. Letter identification and rhyming intervention groups 3. Earlier guided reading instruction with targeted secure group 4. Multiple re-reads of instructional level text.	STEP Assessment
First 49% of students are presently below 1 st grade literacy expectations. <i>60% of students will achieve "grade-level" status by spring 2015.</i>	1. Use Power Hour/Learning Lab structure and use series books and author studies to build story elements, comprehension strategies and fluency that are vertically aligned. 2. Students will self evaluate fluency of different types of text. 3. Students will set goals using provided anchor charts	STEP Assessment
Second 6% of students are >85 th ile on Reading MAP assessment &. 59% are < the 35 th %tile. <i>15% of students will achieve 85thile status and 100% of targeted students will move 1 RIT range in the Vocabulary strand by spring 2015</i>	1. Book club extension 2. Vocabulary Intervention	STEP Assessment MAP
Third 42% of students are at or above grade level in reading. Students <50 th ile have deficit in vocabulary and informational text. <i>63% of students will achieve 50thile on MAP and 73% will achieve growth goal by spring 2015.</i>	1. Analyze ACCESS "I can do" Descriptors 2. Additional reading intervention before school. 3. Differentiate daily (RtI) instruction. 4. Sight word intervention 5. Flexible heterogeneous grouping for modeling reading strategies 6. Tier II ELL daily reading support.	STEP Assessment MAP Pre-Post Common Assessments
Fourth No student goal provided. Teacher goal indicated: Effectively organize and evaluate pretest data in a way that promotes differentiated instructional opportunities.	1. Student goal setting using common pre-test data. 2. Reflecting and evaluating the effectiveness of pre/post test questions 3. Guided math groups extending or reinforcing based on pretest results.	Pre-Post Common Assessments

Table 5.5 (cont.)

Greatest Area of Need (GAN)	Action Steps	Measures
Fifth Students to increase their understanding of basic number sense. <i>77% of students will improve their MAP number and operations strand score.</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide targeted interventions. 2. Keep student engaged with Interactive Notebook. 3. Provide academic vocabulary instruction. 4. Require SMART goal setting with students. 	Pre-Post Common Assessments MAP MCAP Exit Slips
Sixth 55 th of students are below standards in informational text. <i>75% of students will be at or above informational text standard by May 2015.</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pre/post assessments focused upon this standard. 2. Results of assessments used to drive instruction and grouping during guided reading. 3. Reading informational text for independent reading, read alouds, shared reading and guided reading will be emphasized. 4. Integrate informational text standards with social studies and science. 	MAP Pre-Post Common Assessments Classwork

Note: Common K-6 Goal: All students will demonstrate continuous growth and achieve college and career readiness standards.

Another desired intention of standards-based reform is that of improving equity of learning opportunities of all students. In this case, with more than 70% of students identifying themselves as coming from low-income households, many traditionally underserved kids attend Laguna Elementary. There is no doubt that this standards movement has increased opportunities for students at Laguna from teachers' perspectives. This theme of increased efficacy as a result of common understanding of direction among teachers was consistently audible and visible throughout interviews and observations. Two passionate staff members described their experiences of this change:

We've definitely raised that bar in educating children, and I'm hopeful that other districts around the nation are doing it to the same level. I've only worked through *No Child Left Behind* as a teacher and... I've felt that as [it] progressed, it weakened and weakened, and the standards lowered and lowered. So we pretty much did that to ourselves as a nation...and I'm a little concerned now that

[we've] taken the bar way up here. Are [we] –are they going to take time to show the positive results of this reform... [Or] are [they] going to start watering it down again?

And the next staff member:

Now the more and more I hear this conversation the more I think back and realize that the *Common Core* has really been the great equalizer for our district because when I was sitting in grade level meetings fourteen years ago, all we ever talked about was how different we were, all the time. Like nobody did anything the same ...we weren't standards based at all and we didn't have a curriculum, so it was like every man for himself. And as we have taken on *Common Core*...everybody is finally on the same page...it gives me the shivers.

Other significant sub-themes, also highlighted briefly in the above quotation, particularly from the more experienced teacher panelists and Mr. Jones, were the sentiments of moving away from deficit thinking by embracing varying learning needs and feelings of empowerment to adjust instruction accordingly—because the standards were now clear. As one staffer succinctly shared, “I think that we all understand what we're going for, and I think we've moved past the fact that my learners are different than your learners.” Although teachers described their experiences of positive accountability occurring well before *CCSS* implementation, they also consistently shouldered huge amounts of responsibility for their work and felt their principal did as well. One teacher shared:

We do whatever we need to do for those kids, individually, in large groups, but our goal is to help them be successful, and I know that sounds like a teacher's dream, but it is. We do whatever we need to do to help that child to be successful. From this group of teachers' perspectives, *CCSS* implementation has made them an even stronger team, who without hesitation, seeks out responsibility if it might mean better results for their students:

We are willing to do it, glad to have the opportunity to do it– I will not shy away from the fact that it is completely overwhelming and I don't think about it at night because I have too much work to do, but it is – I mean I'm kind of okay with that because I like that responsibility

And another comment from a participant affirming this theme:

We trust our administration; we're respected by our administration; we're treated as professionals by administration, and nothing has ever been thrown at us and said, "Do it." We've always had a say in everything, and I think that that is the key. When you get people to take ownership in what you're doing, it will always work. If you don't get people to take ownership, it's never going to work.

The findings shared above, for Laguna, reinforce the authentic ability for standards-based reform to result in perceptions of positive changes. For example, in summary, staff and Mr. Jones described consistent beliefs about a clearer road map for stakeholders, feelings of increased equity for students, and a common willingness to take on more accountability as a result of their experiences with *CCSS* implementation.

Observed impact of standards-based reform. Several distinct subthemes may be explored in relation to the impact of standards-based reform on a school site. Using

previously shared research, one might assume that evidence of a narrowed curriculum, reduced teacher autonomy and teacher agency, and/or a school perception of decreased public faith in teacher abilities to perform would be easily observable given Laguna’s evident *CCSS* implementation. In this particular case, however, no evidence emerged to support these subthemes. Rather, interviews with Mr. Jones and his teaching staff affirmed the opposite sentiments at Laguna. In doing so, however, respondents indicated their perception that their particular school’s practices (and the broader district’s) were different than other schools and districts. For example, one teacher described, in speaking about *CCSS* implementation:

I’ve heard other people talk about it...and like [they’ve] taken *Common Core* and just like put it into this little box and it’s much more dictated I think. It’s much more of the top down as opposed to the bottom up.

Mr. Jones also indicated that he has been able to maintain significant levels of autonomy in his building-specific leadership choices. Of course, the district has set the course for *CCSS* implementation, and his decisions still must align with that direction. In relation to maintained agency, Mr. Jones indicated, “If they’re building-related decisions then I have...autonomy.” This comment suggests that Mr. Jones, even working under a clearly communicated district direction, still felt that he could make decisions—and was supported by district administration to do so—at Laguna that were uniquely right for his staff and students. Staff affirmed by indicating that Laguna is, “Much more autonomous than...other schools.”

In relation to experiencing schools as marketplaces, where student achievement data is of sole importance in valuing teachers’ and principals’ performance, teachers

indicated that their parent population and the broader stakeholder community have not applied this pressure. Rather, respondents indicated that parents are supportive of teachers and, more likely, “don’t even know what questions to ask” in relation to reform efforts. Many of Laguna’s parents are working two jobs to support their families and have limited English proficiency. Laguna staff indicated that they would love for parents to be more actively involved in their children’s schooling, but they respectfully recognize the at-home challenges their parent population experience, with most of their students living in low-income households. At the time of my interviews, Laguna had recently held a *CCSS* parent night for the purpose of answering questions, getting parents into the building and allowing another forum to inform parents of reform efforts. The evening had been very positively received but not highly attended. Mr. Jones and participants indicated more plans were in the works for getting parents into the building and more actively involved. Mr. Jones shared a broader awareness of present challenges associated with this topic emphatically:

I get frustrated...when people from the outside are so critical of public education...public education...opens the door for criticism. But I also believe that...there are so many really great things happening in so many schools that...are overlooked because of some of the craziness that’s happening in other places, and the craziness of those negative things...overshadow the great things that are happening in many schools.

All in all, Laguna staff did not seem to have fallen victim to commonly identified standards-based reform pitfalls.

Principal leadership via Datnow's *Framework for Reform*. A final lens with which data was filtered was through that of Datnow's *Framework for Reform for Principals* (2001). To review, in her research, she defined four indicators of successful reform. These indicators were evidence of principals as instructional leaders, evidence of teacher "buy-in" in relation to reform, evidence of principals confronting, rather than ignoring, observable teacher resistance in response to desired change, and evidence of the cultivation of teacher empowerment. This section will review emergent themes associated with each of these areas.

Principal as instructional leader. "I've always had the mindset of believing in shared leadership within my building and helping to build capacity within teachers in my building around any initiative to promote...any ideas that we believe are going to make us a stronger learning community." Mr. Jones firmly believes in the practice of shared leadership, but this does not mean that he delegates works to his staff and does not stay involved. Rather, he explained that shared leadership involves "walking the walk and talking the talk" with teachers first and throughout any reform effort. For example, Mr. Jones attends all teacher professional development sessions related to *CCSS* implementation, even if this means that he must be at twice the number of evening meetings than those "required" (i.e. Both math and ELA grade level committees meet monthly after school for two-hour works sessions and periodically in full day sessions through out the course of the school year.). Mr. Jones explained:

I felt like I needed to be there as an example around my leadership, and I also felt like I needed to be there because I needed to become more aware of those decisions we were making as well, but even more so around those areas that I

didn't feel as comfortable in outside of math. That when questions did come to me down the road I had more – I was more invested in that process.

Mr. Jones' teachers also identified Mr. Jones as the administrative leader of the math committee and as someone who consistently used math student data to lead decision-making. They were less certain of his true command of ELA initiatives, but they affirmed his presence and authentic interest in the topic:

He leads the math committee stuff, so I know...he's definitely really involved in ...helping us get assessments and looking at questions we make...and helping us analyze assessments. He and I have worked together to make like zone analyzes for pre/post assessments and all the data stuff, so he is involved in that and he has a very good understanding about math because that's his strength. He understands ELA too.

Another key instructional leadership strength that emerged—in addition to his awareness and involvement in curriculum and his ability to lead data-informed conversations—was that of Mr. Jones being an astute questioner who “can see the big picture and see where different people's strengths are.” One respondent explained further:

He'll pose the question, always bring something to the table, I'm thinking about this, what do you think about this problem and what do you think we should do to resolve this matter for example, and then we come to a decision.

Furthermore, staff consistently indicated that Mr. Jones was strongly aware of contextual factors circulating within the school and was someone who was able to make changes to support the work of his teachers in relation to *CCSS* implementation. For example, Mr. Jones responded to staff concerns that they lacked adequate common planning time to

truly collaborate and best utilize newly developed unit plans by changing the building schedule:

He changes things for us...Last year...he changed our schedules to accommodate our needs to be with our partners...So he hears our voices and he makes those changes that are necessary. He brings people in because it's not all his decision, and I don't think he makes decisions by himself (different respondent). It's a collective decision that he makes when it affects our building, and I don't mean that to say, oh he doesn't make decisions...he always has done that in our building, together.

Mr. Jones reflected upon decisions like the one described above as implementation of “leadership leverage.” He explained:

I think one of the most critical pieces is understanding the work capacity and understanding that you have to be able to leverage your strengths and the positive things...[for example]...this used to be something that we were working on doing, and now it's just something that we do; it's become a part of who we are and when those things become a part of your culture...you can use those things to leverage other areas to change.

In Mr. Jones' understanding, his ability to know the limits of what his teachers can handle and the individual strengths of key members of staff help him to strategically position his building in ways where he can promote change and establish the proper culture. In sum, his building viewed the schedule change described above as a positive change—although it dramatically changed some of his teachers' schedules—because he had led folks to a point where they *asked* for such a solution and also provided them input

in the process along the way. Although not a direct tie to instructional leadership, these types of strategic and tactical decisions promote the foundation necessary for teacher planning for instruction to be successfully supported.

Evidence of “teacher buy-in”. On the topic of CCSS implementation from the perspective of his teachers... “We are willing to do it, glad to have the opportunity to do it...[we] will not shy away from the fact that it is completely overwhelming...I mean I’m kind of okay with that because I like that responsibility.” I am not sure I could have encountered a staff whose ideologies and actions directly matched intentions and implementation plans better than those at Laguna School. When asked whether staff felt they were involved in CCSS planning and implementation, they all, talking at once, said, “Yes! It starts with us. All of the planning, instruction, classroom design, instruction design is all teacher created.” They largely attributed the positive sentiment toward CCSS reform to be the product of strong principal leadership that had allowed for their intimate involvement in all aspects of reform. As one respondent affirmed:

[We’re] all very knowledgeable now, and I think that’s because we’ve been immersed in it...I don’t know if I would be if I hadn’t been involved, or if I was just given the curriculum and said, ‘here teach this’; I don’t think I would know the *Common Core State Standards* as well as I do...”

Furthermore, as previously shared, Laguna’s stated building improvement goal, “All students will demonstrate continuous growth and achieve college and career readiness standards” specifically addresses the expectations for Laguna School improvement and, coincidentally, addresses a specific desired outcome of CCSS reform. Thus, documents,

principal messaging and staff perceptions all affirmed the same positive feeling regarding reform.

Principal confronts, does not ignore, teacher resistance. “This is going to be big, and this is our opportunity to learn as much as we can, and let’s not shy away from this.

Let’s, you know, ask questions and know that I’m learning this alongside of you.” Mr.

Jones described in detail the methods he employs to manage teacher resistance to change.

First, he is a believer that attitudes “start at the top.” With regard to *CCSS*

implementation, he described how all district administration utilized such an approach:

...I have always said that it [attitude] starts at the top, so the attitude, getting better with the attitude of...that’s just how we are in this district, and I think that always has permeated from our administration and our principals saying you know what, hey we’re just going to dig in and do this *Common Core*.

Beyond modeling a positive and open attitude towards reform, Mr. Jones also indicated the importance of empathizing with teachers and creating opportunities. He described his approach: “[I] force teachers to sit and breathe and take some time [to] vent and get it out there.” He believes this approach allows opportunities for staff to recognize and celebrate their progress—even when they’re in the middle of an initiative, and it is not yet obvious—and then also do what Mr. Jones described as “admire the problem.”

I also have to give them time to be able to get it out there so that everybody can complain and talk, you know, it’s admiring the problem and then we do that, and then we, after a while we say okay we’ve admired long enough; now we need to solve it.

Staff interviews and building observations affirmed Mr. Jones descriptions. Laguna staff comments were hugely supportive of their principal, his leadership, and the approaches he utilizes to lead. Staff indicated that Mr. Jones sets clear and challenging expectations for staff, but he is also open to talking through problems, actively participating in the change process at the ground level and, ultimately, leading for change. As one staffer described, “principals don’t have textbooks and stuff to rely on, and [when] they hear about things, they have to get involved” in order to talk to parents, stakeholders, Board members and other constituents.

Evidence of teacher empowerment. “If I’m the only one promoting change we fail really, really fast.” This statement encapsulates much of this final indicator for change. Mr. Jones is a firm believer that his teachers should have a very strong, if not equal role, in all changes related to curriculum and instruction. As an example, he described some building decisions his teacher leadership structure, the SMART Goals Team, had made at Laguna over the course of the school year. In describing his participation in relation to affording opportunities for empowering the staff, he said the following:

They made all of those decisions on their own and they were great decisions. I was in the room; I didn’t say a word, and they made those decisions. That’s an example of how when it works well that’s how it works. It’s powerful for me because...when things may come into question. I don’t push it back on them like oh that was your idea, that was your suggestion; but they already know that and I think they appreciate the fact that I trust them...

As explained in previous sections, Laguna teachers also described themselves as feeling very much empowered, and at times, even a bit overwhelmed by their decision-making capacity:

I feel like sometimes he gives us too much credit, but he gives us a lot of credit in saying I trust your opinion and where do you feel we should start to push this, because we have had the ability to be in classrooms in the last two years with coaching, and so I think he kind of relies on us to help bring that up and kind of see more of the global picture.

Another contributor to teachers' perceptions of empowerment, as described by his teachers, was Mr. Jones keen ability to, first, see the broader picture and then connect teachers to other colleagues who were experiencing or had experienced similar implementation struggles. In this manner, teachers were able to solve their own problems and continue to grow in their practices without "needing" Mr. Jones to fix problems for them in a top down manner.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that over 50% of certified Laguna staff, at the time of my visits, was enrolled in an English Language Learning (ELL) Masters' program cohort being offered through a neighboring university in the evenings at Laguna. Even though many of the teachers enrolled already had Masters degrees in various educationally focused areas, staff indicated they felt the need to learn more—to be able to do more—for their high percentage of students who did not speak English as a first language. Mr. Jones and Kara, the Curriculum Director, had organized this professional development opportunity for Laguna teachers as a way of providing a workable method

for staff to better meet the needs of their students, thus further empowering them as teachers.

Further, in subsequent conversations with Kara, she affirmed that implementation of CCSS had really helped teachers differentiate more effectively and get more students closer to mastery of learning targets. However, she also shared the following:

...we are still having issues with low expectations of students from poverty and different cultural backgrounds. Teachers have moved forward with what they believe - students can and must mastery these standards no matter their background. However, changing instructional practices to demand that rigor is taking a little longer. In other words, they are “talking the talk” (and believing it!), but not always able to “walk the walk.”

Kara’s comment was unique from my conversations with Laguna teachers and Mr. Jones, where I heard consistent themes of efficacy and empowerment for students as a result of CCSS work and limited commentary on continuing challenges associated with teachers’ low expectations or addressing different cultural backgrounds. This absence of direct commentary from interviews and visits may serve to reinforce Kathryn’s point that teachers are “talking the talk” but may not be ready or yet able to truly “walk the walk” of incorporating strategies that acknowledge and reduce the present impacts of cultural variances and poverty.

Kathryn indicated that these conversations were starting, however. She shared that teachers at Laguna and one other school within the district would be completing two book studies focused upon the topics of poverty, the impacts of culture upon teaching and learning, and recommended strategies for “unique student populations.” The book

titles, both authored by Eric Jensen, were *Teaching with Poverty in Mind* and *Engaging Students with Poverty in Mind*. Furthermore, she shared that, from a district perspective, two bilingual classes were in the process of being added, additional English language learning resources were being purchased and a “Spanish for Spanish speakers” course was to be added at the middle school. Finally, she shared that the district presently offers training programs “to help parents improve their language and technology skills and their support for their children’s success in school” and were also conducting focus groups with Hispanic parents and students “to help them understand the achievement gap and to seek information about how we can better serve their needs.” While these last comments were not limited to Laguna School alone, they do serve to highlight the practices found within the broader district of which Laguna is closely connected.

Conclusion

Laguna School was an invigorating and high-energy environment where the values of teamwork and ownership of students were deeply supported by participants. Unlike Sunny Brook, where students from poverty made up less than one percent of the study body and all students had command of English, Laguna experienced the additional challenges of poverty, language acquisition and transiency. Regardless of these additional challenges, Mr. Jones and study participants were fully supportive of *CCSS* implementation efforts and valued the changes that implementation had afforded at their school. The positive intentions associated with standards-based reform, clarity of roadmap, increased positive accountability and equity, were present among participants at Laguna, while the researched impact subthemes did not emerge. Participants did not feel that their curriculum had narrowed or been “teacher proofed,” nor did they feel less

agency or reduced public faith associated with *CCSS* implementation. Perhaps many of these observations were the result of Mr. Jones' leadership. Viewed by study participants as an instructional leader who empowered staff and authentically "bought" into *CCSS* reform, Mr. Jones staff's beliefs seemed to be a mirror of his. These ideas will be explored more deeply in Chapter 6, which will present a comparative analysis of both cases and offer final commentary, implications and recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER 6

COMPARATIVE SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter I will review and comparatively summarize the findings of how Principals Smith and Jones understood and led for change by revisiting the broader research question and sub-questions of this study. I will also provide a comparative critique of their practices in relation to my research informed understandings about leading for change in situations where reform is imposed. I will then discuss findings in relation to the contextual considerations of “structure, culture, and agency” (Datnow & Castellano, 2001, p. 15) as a key to understanding how the interplay among these factors and the reform itself lead to “variation[s]” in response (p. 40) (Sipple & Killeen, 2004; Gold, 2002). For example, “power dynamics, and power imbalances in larger society, can influence...district decisions, particularly when it comes to policies that are perceived to be equity-minded (Holme et al., 2014, p. 39). It is important to consider how each school’s political position may have impacted decision-making in relation to *CCSS* reform. Lastly, I will provide recommendations and implications based upon the findings in this study as they relate to leadership for change in suburban public education settings for practitioners, researchers and policymakers.

This study explored how imposed reform is understood, unpacked and operationalized by principals and, by either extension or through mutual exchange, their teachers at the school level. To clarify the focus of my research, the following questions, informed by Datnow and Castellano’s studies of relational context, were utilized to guide this study:

1. How do principals make sense and construct meaning around imposed *CCSS* reform, and how does this developed understanding impact their leadership for implementation of *CCSS*?
 - a. What factors influence a principal's leadership around acceptance of the *CCSS* imposed reform?
 - b. What factors influence a principal's leadership around the decision to symbolically display *CCSS* imposed reform?
 - c. What factors influence a principal's leadership around the decision to reject *CCSS* imposed reform?

In order to answer these questions, I used a qualitative methods and comparative case study as the strategy of inquiry (Stake, 1995; Creswell, 2009). Additionally, because case study benefits from prior development of theoretical schemas to guide the collection and analysis of data (Yin, 2014), I relied upon multiple schemas for such support. As a concise overview, I provide the following tables to represent the theoretical understanding of each schema in relation to the research questions and their applications at Sunny Brook and Laguna. In response to the primary research question, findings imply that principal messaging is of key importance in leading for change. Staff participants from Sunny Brook and Laguna consistently matched their principals' views on *CCSS* reform. Additionally, both principals were viewed as instructional leaders by building staff, which likely played a role in the mutual trust and positive rapport principals shared with their faculties. Table 6.1 shows more detailed, comparative findings in relation to the primary research question.

Table 6.1
Leadership around CCSS Reform at Sunny Brook and Laguna Schools

Research question	Supporting schema	Theoretical outcomes description	Applications at Sunny Brook	Applications at Laguna
How do principals make sense and construct meaning around imposed CCSS reform, and how does this developed understanding impact their leadership for implementation of CCSS?	Standards-based reform Intentions	Clear road map; equitable learning opportunities for all; positive sense of accountability among principals/ teachers	Positive sense of accountability to students & building, not necessarily toward CCSS reform for principal and teachers; road map clarity uneven	Consistent messages of clarity of CCSS roadmap from all participants; equity primary focus with targeted professional development focused upon understanding poverty and operational practices to support improved equity; positive sense of accountability
	Standards-based reform impact	Narrowing of curriculum; “teacher proofing”; loss of teacher agency; diminished public faith	(Counter applications) Some evidence of perceived loss of agency, diminished public faith and “teaching to the test”	(Counter applications) No evidence of narrowed curriculum; teachers have autonomy and resources to develop curriculum aligned CCSS; perceptions of improved teaching practices
	Datnow’s <i>Framework for Reform</i>	Principals as instructional leaders	Teacher empowerment opportunities cultivated;	Instructional and transformational practices; data-informed decision making; evidence of “teacher buy-in” toward reform; teacher empowerment opportunities cultivated

In relation to comparative findings of sub-questions, the degree of reform support by staff participants was aligned to the ideological beliefs of each principal. Mr. Jones fully supported CCSS reform and implementation efforts and so did staff respondents. Dr. Smith expressed tensions with aspects of the reform and so did his staff respondents.

Table 6.2 addresses these three sub-questions.

Table 6.2
Leadership around CCSS Reform at Sunny Brook and Laguna Schools

Research Sub-question	Tenets/goals	Theoretical description	Applications at Sunny Brook	Applications at Laguna
What factors influence a principal's leadership around acceptance of the CCSS imposed reform?	Advance Reform	Ideologies directly match; actions support intentions & principal assumes ownership of reform	Themes of ideological match, but disconnect between need for change from present practices	Consistent themes of ideological match; aligned actions support communicated intentions; district, principal and staff fully support reform.
What factors influence a principal's leadership around the decision to symbolically display CCSS imposed reform?	Symbolic Display	Visible/observable ideological disconnect/tension via physical display vs. documentation vs. communication. Full ownership not assumed. Tensions not directly communicated.	Participants and principal identified tension and elements of disconnect between CCSS reform and present practices; some elements of reform have been displayed.	
What factors influence a principal's leadership around the decision to reject CCSS imposed reform?	Covert or Overt Rejection	Visible/observable ideological disconnect/tension in reform physical display vs. documentation vs. communication. Full ownership is not assumed. Tension may or may not be directly communicated.	Some elements of implementation were rejected as having little value for students	

Revisiting the Research Question & Understanding Context

In the following section, I will comparatively synthesize findings in relation to the main research question in the effort to move from conceptual applications to practical examples of experience. In doing so, I will also highlight the interplay of contextual

circumstances to emphasize how these factors—“structure, culture and agency” (Datnow & Castellano, 2001, p. 15)—shape principals’ choices and actions about reform.

Standards-based reform intentions. The practices found at both Sunny Brook and Laguna showed evidence of degrees of implementation of *CCSS*, but the depth and clarity of understanding of implementation varied quite a bit between schools. Sunny Brook’s district improvement plan showed a clear trajectory of implementation and process associated with such (Clune, 2001; Sipple & Killeen, 2004; Desimone, 2013; Fuhman, 2001), but study participants reported inconsistencies with their operational experiences at Sunny Brook. Dr. Smith’s admission of tension between firmly ingrained progressive philosophy and the new requirements of *CCSS* may have contributed to these inconsistencies (Gold, 2002; Louis, Seashore & Walhstrom, 2011). Furthermore, it is also possible that existing practices at Sunny Brook were also already standards-based in nature, and thus, *CCSS*, from a technical-rational perspective (Datnow & Castellano, 2001), did not result in the need for broad-sweeping changes there as they did at Laguna. Additionally, in consideration of previous accountability “passes,” Sunny Brook had consistently made Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) on the ISAT test through spring of 2013. Therefore, Sunny Brook staff had no experience with surveillance mandates, sanctions or repercussions from the state that might affect their mindset toward imposed change.

On the other hand, Laguna School’s, Mr. Jones, fully and openly indicated his school had completely changed their curriculum and instructional practices as a result of *CCSS* reform. Whether these changes and the positive sentiments associated with them were due to authentic beliefs that change would benefit kids or were more co-constructed

in response to “threat of corrective actions” imposed by accountability mandates (Kohn, 2004, p. 42) remains less clear. Laguna was in its fourth consecutive year of failing to make AYP during my visits and had moved from “Academic Warning Year 2” status to “Academic Watch Status Year 1.” Under NCLB rules at the time, the school would soon qualify for state takeover and/or closure. From interviews, Mr. Jones emphatically supported *CCSS* reform and expressed extensive optimism for the positive changes he hoped his students would experience. Laguna teachers echoed this strong approval as well. Additionally, Laguna participants consistently indicated feelings of improved equity of opportunities for underprivileged students as an impact of this standards-based reform (Furhman, 2001; Honig, 2006; Theoharis & Brooks, 2012; McClure, 2005). That said, because it should be emphasized that context matters (Sipple & Killeen, 2004; Datnow & Castellano, 2001), it warrants mentioning that Laguna staff reported upon implementation plans in a “colorblind” manner that did not seem to necessarily take into consideration the 15 languages spoken and 37 nationalities represented at the school (Welton, Diem & Holme, 2015). For example, the curriculum director, Kara, seemed very aware of these challenges. She was able to describe a few ideas of district response to these challenges, and she also confirmed that teachers were “still having issues with low expectations of students from poverty and different cultural backgrounds.” They were “‘talking the talk’ (and believing it!), but not always able to ‘walk the walk.’” In follow up, Mr. Jones affirmed Kara’s comments and acknowledged his faith in Kara’s leadership to continue to address these challenges from a district perspective for both principals and teachers. He did not, however, share a building plan for response.

Standards-based reform impact. Reform impacts were most heavily observed at Sunny Brook (Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Jones et al., 2003; Desimone, 2013). There, teachers and Dr. Smith expressed significant tension associated with loss of autonomy to “just teach” and required movements toward utilizing a common district implemented resource or collection of resources in their classrooms (Vogler & Virtue, 2007; Wunderlich, Bell & Ford, 2005; Willis, 2007). Dr. Smith described one of his key principal roles as being that of a “protector” for his teachers from district mandates and parental pressures to increase performance results on ISAT testing. This choice of words, in consideration of Datnow and Castellano’s discussion of ideological congruence, implied the need for Dr. Smith to “pick apart the process” and “respond opportunistically” in ways that sheltered his teachers from reform mandates (2001, pp. 35-36). Perhaps the powerful contextual circumstances of being historically “sanction-free” and employed within an affluent, predominantly white community, allowed Dr. Smith more latitude to freely share his concerns. Laguna teachers, on the other hand, consistently indicated sentiments that *CCSS* reform had improved their teaching competence and their understanding of instructional planning (McClure, 2005), and Mr. Jones shared no such ideological tensions in describing his leadership efforts around reform.

Principal leadership via Datnow’s *Framework for Reform*. Both Dr. Smith and Mr. Jones were viewed as instructional leaders by study participants and embodied many of the tenets associated with the ability to successfully enact change. Furthermore, both principals were viewed in high esteem among respondents (Louis, Seashore & Wahlstrom, 2011). What is interesting to note is that the ideologies of staff respondents seemed to match those of their principal (Rorrer & Skrla, 2005). For example, Dr. Smith

was very open about expressing concerns and philosophical tensions with *CCSS* reform and state accountability expectations. His teachers, then, expressed similar tensions in their understandings of the reform. In terms of “buy-in,” however, Dr. Smith’s teachers “bought-in” to him. They believed that Dr. Smith had their best interests at heart, and they also recognized that Dr. Smith was under district pressure to honor the “district plan” for *CCSS* implementation. A few staff members indicated awareness that, sometimes, latitude would be granted by Dr. Smith to “pad” reform versus following it lock step and key. These instances expose yet another example of Dr. Smith’s contextual power in relation to the reform. That said, the most valued leadership exhibited by Dr. Smith, according to his staff, might have been the autonomy he allowed and/or cultivated among his staff. This shared sentiment among participants, what Weick (1995) called “retrospective sense-making” (p. 35) showed the ideological tensions present at Sunny Brook. The “belief systems” present at Sunny Brook absolutely have shaped reform, emphasizing the non-linear reality of school change (Datnow & Castellano, 2001).

As touched upon earlier, Mr. Jones, on the other hand, did not share—nor did his staff affirm—any tensions or mixed feelings toward *CCSS* reform. Perhaps his willingness to fully jump into the reform implementation so whole-heartedly stemmed from the previous sanctions he and Laguna School had experienced as a result of failing to meet AYP. Or perhaps, unlike Dr. Smith, Mr. Jones did not feel the same “power dynamic” (Holme et al., 2014, p. 39) was available toward the reform.

Research Sub-Questions & Understanding Context

This section will comparatively synthesize findings in relation to sub-research questions in the effort to move from conceptual applications to practical examples of

experience. In these two cases, full rejection of *CCSS* reform was not observed; thus, it will not be a part of this analysis. However, it is important to note that some may view Dr. Smith's shared tensions about elements of *CCSS* reform as a form of *rejection*.

Advance reform. Although not a replicable study by any means, in the case of Laguna School, from a technical-rational perspective, consistent themes of ideological match between and among central office, the building principal and Laguna teachers certainly seemed to be key in advancing *CCSS* reform. In addition to consistent messaging, a focused multi-year district plan with aligned intentions and actions also supported advance of this reform. Furthermore, Laguna and the broader district employed consultants to support efforts; they created structures that supported professional development and curriculum development associated with reform changes, and they paid teachers after hours to increase the trajectory of the completion timeframe for implementing *CCSS*. Work products have since emerged “from the bottom up” both authored and “owned” by Laguna staff rather than from a top down implementation from central office. From a mutual adaptation perspective, however, one must consider the contextual circumstances present at Laguna, factors of race and ethnicity for example, that shape reform response (Datnow & Castellano, 2001). These factors seemed to be interpreted by teachers as a single, collective opportunity. For example, staff and Mr. Jones expressed strong responsibility and deep efficacy for improving learning outcomes for kids as a result of reform, but in doing so, their plans did not seem to take into consideration cultural differences within their student population. They emphasized the consistent belief that *all* of their students could be successful learners—a powerful

statement, but their practices seemed less developed in how contextual circumstances would inform their plans and actions.

At Sunny Brook CCSS reform advancements were evident in written documents and curriculum implementation. However, tensions about the reform's demands conflicting with progressive tenets and practices—ideologies about teaching and learning—made full reform advancement difficult from both linear and multi-directional approaches, absolutely reinforcing the concept of “structure, culture and agency” (p. 15) shaping change. In this case, the cultural norms and values at Sunny Brook supported stability of maintaining at least aspects of previous practices. Both Dr. Smith and staff participants felt strongly that they had been very successful with their existing standards-based, *progressive* practices, and although most participants were able to identify some positive aspects of CCSS implementation, Dr. Smith and his teachers were definitely not ready to “throw the baby out with the bathwater.”

Symbolic display. In further consideration of Sunny Brook, CCSS reform seemed to be in some cases on symbolic display. Both Dr. Smith and his teachers shared experiences of “padding” district expectations with different practices or approaches. This finding is not to say that Sunny Brook staff did so in a malicious manner; rather, they felt the adjustments or tweaks to programming that they made at Sunny Brook were *better* practices for their students than those prescribed. Dr. Smith and staff felt that the philosophical roots promoted by their principal and the broader district—progressive philosophy and practices—were being challenged to a certain degree by CCSS, and this ideological tension resulted in conflict rather than full reform advancement.

In addition, Sunny Brook's leadership and staff's "local circumstances" (Datnow & Castellano, 2001, p. 39) of previous freedom from state, federal or public media sanctions, with the exception of the recent "3rd grade ISAT event," likely allowed existing ideologies about teaching and learning to prevail. Oakes et al. (2005) called this phenomenon the "mediation zone." Holme et al. (2014) went on to describe it as "the range of potential decisions considered feasible by...actors...and educators themselves" (p. 39). In this case, Sunny Brook's unique history of progressive instructional practices situated among clientele power culture, likely afforded Dr. Smith and staff more latitude to display reform when it did not fit Sunny Brook's philosophical position.

No such barriers were observed at Laguna; all parties in this study believed in the benefits of reform. This statement does not imply a lack of contextual significance; rather, it suggests the interplay of contexts observed did not result in a symbolic display of reform.

Critique

In the findings I presented an accounting of the practices I observed at two suburban elementary schools. I was deeply honored and impressed by the efforts at both schools to take care of kids by providing a safe and supportive learning environment for students. Through this experience, several ideas have been affirmed. First and foremost, strong principals are key to reform in school settings. As Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) found, "Leadership has significant effects on student learning, second only to the effect of the quality of curriculum and teachers' instruction" (p. 2). In my experiences in both school settings, I observed the messages, agendas and actions of the school principal to be paramount to teachers' reactions and decisions for change. As

Mr. Jones so succinctly noted, messaging for change “starts at the top”, and in both cases, these messages—either specifically voiced or symbolically displayed—were received by building staff (Rorrer & Skrla, 2005).

Additionally, mandates alone are an insufficient method for truly enacting intended reform (Nicole & Berliner, 2007). In two different settings—although both situated demographically in the same “suburban elementary setting”—very different approaches to implementation were taking place. In one setting, teachers had become so cognizant of the standards that they had become a daily function within their classrooms, unpacked, posted in student-friendly language and reflected upon by students through a goal setting process. In the other setting, the standards were viewed, rather, as a broad message of “depth over breadth” in instructional planning and delivery, and not a single participant indicated—nor did I observe—direct communication or posting of standards in their classrooms. This summary is provided not to highlight that one method was better than the other; rather, that imposing a mandate does not necessarily lead to consistent interpretation of that mandate. Clarity of systems, structures, and expectations for change are critical to truly enacting reform that results in changed in learning experiences for students. And, the technical implementation of reform—highlighted above—represents just one piece of a much more complicated, co-constructed and ongoing change experience. The contextual factors—whether these are affluence and the privileges of elevated human capital at Sunny Brook or the opposite challenges observed at Laguna—all interface with the reform to ultimately, shape outcomes.

Because of these contextual factors, the needs of students are vastly different even within similar demographic demarcations. In my experiences, I visited arguably one of

the most affluent school settings in the Chicago suburbs, and I found staff who were most concerned about loss of autonomy in students owning their learning paths, adult pressures to “teacher to the test” versus autonomy of instructional planning decisions, and perceptions of heightened student anxiety and stress levels in relation to *CCSS* implementation. Within the same regional typology classification, I then studied a school with over 70% of its student body living in poverty, and I found staff who, did not even bring up student stress levels or autonomy concerns, but, rather, focused concerns upon effectively reaching their English language learners and better understanding the impacts of poverty to increase their effectiveness. If this variance occurs within the “affluent” suburban schools, the variance among all public schools must be just as extreme. Therefore, how can presenting *CCSS* reform as a single, “technical-rational” package to so many different populations truly result in raising the bar for all students?

Recommendations

The findings in this study amplify a few recommendations for consideration. First, principals very much matter (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). Districts must deeply consider the ideological foundations of the principals whom they employ. If reform efforts are to be successfully embedded at the operational level—where they actually make a difference for children—the building principal must foundationally believe in the changes he/she is expected to promote. As Castellano and Datnow (2001) found, reform is most consistently enacted when there is a direct ideological match between the enactor’s beliefs and the reform agenda.

Furthermore, policy makers and district leaders should consider the significance in cultivating “why” (co-construction) and not just “what” (technical-rational) in

messaging for reform. And, this “why” should be tailored to the local needs of a district, not imposed as a one-stop message for all. “Why” Sunny Brook needed to implement CCSS was different than “why” Laguna needed to do so. Furthermore, this study illuminates the importance of efficacy and autonomy in teacher practices for kids. In both cases, where teachers “built it,” buy-in and ownership were much greater. Reform approaches that impose curricula upon teachers, although faster and “easier,” are not well received in terms of garnering the types of teacher ownership needed for improved outcomes for kids (Meyer, 2013).

Additionally, reform interpretation varies greatly due to contextual variances. This fact is not a commentary on some interpretations being better than others; rather, if officials can get past accountability metrics that ask for a common interpretation and, instead, rely upon districts to, understand, interpret and measure what reform might mean for their unique student populations—in ways that emphasize the power of structure, culture and agency as part of that meaning-making—perhaps we can begin to better understand and improve upon issues of equity within our education system. For example, Dr. Smith was *allowed* to, in some ways, reject CCSS policy. He voiced concerns associated with the reform, and his staff then echoed similar concerns in subsequent interviews. What contextual circumstances existed at Sunny Brook that granted Dr. Smith the public freedom to question this mandated reform? He worked in a district that took pride in questioning and critically examining policies and mandates; his own superintendent encouraged this behavior. Thus, likely, the power and prestige strongly grounded in the school community allowed agency for Dr. Smith to express his beliefs openly without fear of censure. To put it simply, doing so was in a way, Dr. Smith’s job

as a district administrator. On the other hand, Mr. Jones, at Laguna, did not feel the need, or possibly the authority, to question the reform. He, his teachers and his central office colleagues accepted the reform as it was presented (Holme et al., 2014).

Policymakers would do well to learn from past mistakes and consider the ways in which districts are presently encouraged to make linear interpretations about mandated reform. For example, notions of the co-constructed nature of change are not even a part of the present public discourse. This reality is then further reinforced by districts and schools' successes or failures being judged by a single accountability metric like ISAT or the soon-to-be-released PARCC assessment (Desimone, 2013).

Policymakers must find better measures to define success for students. Relying upon the same standardized test to determine success or failure for students who come from vastly different experiences and challenges is just simply unethical. In the cases of Sunny Brook and Laguna, I heard stories of ISAT "failure" due to mismatches in philosophies on developmental readiness of students versus testing expectations, to teachers not teaching the required content by the time of testing, to student language barriers, to school attendance barriers due to transience and poverty. These circumstances all present as vastly different challenges; yet presently, the reform package is the same.

Conclusion

The case study offers implications for suburban school district leaders and for policymakers who seek to better understand and improve educational experiences for students through reform agendas. This case study suggests that technical-rationale reform approaches, such as that of *CCSS*, will continue to result in different interpretations and experiences for students. Clune's (2001) description of standards-based reform

emphasized the ideas of policy leading to new curriculum that ultimately, then, led to improved achievement. This method, as others have previously suggested (e.g. Datnow & Castellano, 2001; Desimone, 2013; McClure, 2011; Uline & Johnson, 2005), fails to address both the significance of context and situation as crucial factors for how policy is received and implemented (Honig, 2006; Spillane, Resier & Gomez, 2006). It fails to take into consideration existing belief systems, social and cultural factors, and other many other organizational characteristics that are unique to each district setting. In doing so, such reform approaches open the door for social reproduction rather than result in an increase of equity opportunities for traditionally underserved students (Shields, 2009; Theoharis, 2007). Welton, Diem, & Holme (2015) found “while technical changes in structures and instruction are, indeed, an important foundation for change, such changes will not succeed without attendant changes in district norms and politics.”

For example, Sunny Brook and Laguna, each situated with its own unique local norms and politics, both viewed the same reform package very differently. At Sunny Brook respondents, in many respects, viewed the imposition of *CCSS* and accompanying accountability measures as having resulted in a *loss* of local control toward local ability to decide what was best for students. On the other hand, Laguna participants indicated that *CCSS* implementation had *increased* their local control—improved feelings of efficacy—toward ensuring positive outcomes for students. Teachers felt more empowered at Laguna to reach students *after* implementation.

Furthermore, this study affirms that *CCSS* policy reform has, in fact, resulted in change, even if change has been limited by the topics previously discussed. This implication is significant because it points to those in positions of power, from

policymakers to principals at individual school sites, having tremendous responsibility in changing lives for children. When policy is imposed, the manner in which it is received, unpacked and implemented is important. If as Gamoran (2007) claimed, “Pervasive inequality is the most pressing problem facing U.S. education,” then we must learn from our mistakes, create new opportunities and then lead for change with policies and practices that are inclusive of “structure, culture and agency” (Datnow & Castellano, p. 15).

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Semi-Structured Principal
Imposed Reform and Its Impact on Principal Leadership

Date: _____

School: _____

Interviewee (Title and Pseudo-Name): _____

Interviewer: _____

Documents Obtained: _____

Post-Interview Comments/Leads/Notes: _____

Introductory Protocol

To facilitate note taking, I would like to audio record our conversation today. Please sign the release form. For your information, only researchers on the project will be privy to the recordings, which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. In addition, you must sign a form developed to meet our human subject requirements. Essentially, this document state that, (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) I do not intend to inflict any harm. Thank you for agreeing to participate!

I have planned for this interview to last no longer than 45-60 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to explore. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning.

Introduction

You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as a suburban principal who had a great deal to share about leading for teaching, learning and assessment at your school. My research project as a whole focuses on understanding principal perspectives around imposed reform, such as that of the CCSS movement. Specifically, I am interested in how principals make sense, construct meaning and, ultimately, enact change via leadership in response to imposed reform agendas. My study does not aim to evaluate your thoughts, experiences or leadership techniques; rather, I am hopeful that this study will ultimately lead to a broader and improved understanding of suburban principals' leadership in relation to current imposed reforms.

A. Interviewee Background

1. How long have you been...

_____ in your present position?
_____ at this district?
 2. What is your highest degree?
-

B. Interview Question Starters

3. Briefly describe your leadership role as it relates to student learning and assessment?

Probes:

- a.) *How directly involved are you in curricular development, teaching, learning and assessment at your school?*
- b.) *How did you get involved?*
- c.) *Would you describe your level of involvement as typical in your district?*

4. What motivates you to lead with innovative curriculum, teaching and/or assessment techniques?

Probes:

- a.) *How do you ensure innovation in your building?*
- b.) *What improvement strategy/strategies are you using currently?*
- c.) *Do you feel good about them? Are they working?*
- d.) *How do you know?*

5. What resources are available within the district to support your leadership efforts?

Probes:

- a.) *Do you feel supported by other district leadership in your efforts?*
- b.) *How knowledgeable do you feel about CCSS? Your staff?*
- c.) *If knowledgeable, how did you learn about CCSS?*
- d.) *What leadership actions have you taken in implementing/unpacking CCSS?*

6. Have you or any of your principal colleagues encountered resistance to aligning curriculum and instructional practices to CCSS?

Probes:

- a.) *Staff?*
- b.) *Parents?*
- c.) *Community members?*

7. How do you feel about current educational reform movements?

8. What are some of the major challenges you have faced or currently face in attempting to lead for change in teaching, learning, and assessment?

Probes:

- a.) *Opportunities?*
- b.) *Building?*
- c.) *District?*
- d.) *Broader community?*

9. Describe your leadership style. What would others say about you as a leader?

10. What are some specific new teaching or assessment practices you have led staff to implementing in your building?

Probes:

- a.) *What aspect(s) was/were most successful?*
- b.) *What challenges did you face?*

11. To what extent are teaching, learning and assessment valued by your staff?

Probes:

- a.) *What do staff value the most?*
- b.) *Least?*

12. What type of staff development opportunities do you see emerging that focus on teaching, learning or assessment in the near future?

Probes:

- a.) *To what extent will you be directly involved?*
- b.) *Would you agree with these opportunities as necessary priorities? Why? Why not?*

13. What role do parents play in your school with regard to implementation of CCSS?

Probes:

- a.) *How directly involved are parents in your school community?*
- b.) *As a whole, are they in support of CCSS reform?*

14. How much autonomy do you have to make leadership decisions in your school?

Probes:

- a.) *If little, then who controls such?*
- b.) *If a lot, then what have you set as a priority? Why?*

15. What predictions would you make about the future of public school education?

C. Post-Interview Comments/Observations

Semi-Structured Small Group Teacher Interview Protocol
Imposed Reform and Its Impact on Principal Leadership

Date: _____

School: _____

Interviewees (Titles and Pseudo-Names):

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

Interviewer: _____

Documents Obtained: _____

Post-Interview Comments/Leads/Notes: _____

Introductory Protocol

To facilitate note taking, I would like to audio record our conversation today. Please sign the release form. For your information, only researchers on the project will be privy to the recordings, which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. In addition, you must sign a form developed to meet our human subject requirements. Essentially, this document state that, (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) I do not intend to inflict any harm. Thank you for agreeing to participate!

I have planned for this interview to last no longer than 25-30 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to explore. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt the group in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning.

Introduction

You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as a small group of suburban teachers who had a great deal to share about teaching,

learning and assessment at your school. My research project as a whole focuses on understanding principal perspectives around imposed reform, such as that of the CCSS movement. Specifically, I am interested in how principals make sense, construct meaning and, ultimately, enact change via leadership in response to imposed reform agendas. My study does not aim to evaluate your thoughts, experiences or teaching techniques; rather, I am hopeful that this study will ultimately lead to a broader and improved understanding of suburban principals' leadership in relation to current imposed reforms.

A. Interviewee Background

1. How long have you each been...

A. _____ B. _____ C. _____ D. _____ in your present position(s)?
A. _____ B. _____ C. _____ D. _____ at this district?

2. What is your highest degree?

A. _____
B. _____
C. _____
D. _____

B. Interview Question Starters

3. Briefly describe your roles as they relate to student learning and assessment?

Probes:

- d.) How directly involved are you in curricular development, teaching, learning and assessment at your school?*
- e.) How did you get involved?*
- f.) Would you describe your level of involvement as typical in your district?*
- g.) How would you describe the level of involvement in curricular development, teaching, learning of your principal?*

4. What motivates you to lead with innovative curriculum, teaching and/or assessment techniques?

Probes:

- e.) How does your principal ensure innovation in your building?*
- f.) How do teachers ensure innovation?*
 - a. Do you feel supported in your efforts?*
- g.) What improvement strategy/strategies are you using currently?*

- h.) Do you feel good about them? Are they working?*
- i.) How do you know?*

5. What resources are available within the district to support your teaching efforts?

Probes:

- e.) Do you feel supported by other district leadership in your teaching efforts?*
- f.) How knowledgeable do you feel about CCSS? Your colleagues?*
- g.) If knowledgeable, how did you learn about CCSS?*
- h.) What building actions have occurred so far in implementing/unpacking the CCSS?*

6. Have you or any of your teaching colleagues encountered resistance to aligning curriculum and instructional practices to CCSS?

Probes:

- d.) Staff?*
- e.) Parents?*
- f.) Community members?*
- g.) Others?*

7. How do you feel about current educational reform movements?

8. What are some of the major challenges you have faced or currently face in your current classroom teaching practice?

Probes:

- e.) Opportunities?*
- f.) Building?*
- g.) District?*
- h.) Broader community?*

9. Describe your building's instructional style. What would others say about your building as a "community"?

10. What are some specific new teaching or assessment practices you have participated in implementing in your building?

Probes:

- c.) What aspect(s) was/were most successful?*
- d.) What challenges did you face?*

11. To what extent do you and colleagues value teaching, learning and assessment?

Probes:

- c.) What do teachers value the most?*

d.) *Least?*

12. What type of staff development opportunities do you hope to see in the near future that focus on teaching, learning or assessment?

Probes:

c.) *To what extent will you be involved?*

d.) *Would you agree with these opportunities as necessary priorities? Why? Why not?*

13. What role do parents play in your school and in your classrooms with regard to implementation of CCSS?

Probes:

c.) *How directly involved are parents in your school community?*

d.) *As a whole, are they in support of CCSS reform?*

14. How much autonomy do you have to make instructional decisions in your school?

Probes:

c.) *If little, then who controls such?*

d.) *If a lot, then what have you set as a priority? Why?*

15. What predictions would you make about the future of public school education?

C. Post-Interview Comments/Observations

APPENDIX B

OBSERVATION & DOCUMENT PROTOCOL

Datnow's "Framework for Reform"	Characteristics	Observed (Tally each time)	Field Notes
#1 Advance Reform	Ideologies Directly Match Actions Support Intentions Principal Assume Ownership of Reform		
#2 Symbolically Display Reform	Visible/Observable Ideological Disconnect/Tension in Aspects of Reform via Physical Display, Documentation, and/or Communication. Full ownership is not assumed. Tension not directly communicated.		
#3 Covertly or Overtly Reject Reform	Visible/Observable Ideological Disconnect/Tension in Reform Physical Display, Documentation, and/or Communication. Full ownership is not assumed. Tension may be directly communicated.		
Intended Outcomes SB-Reform Themes	Characteristics	Observed Tallies	Field Notes
Clear Road Map	Common vision, expectations Common understanding of curriculum Common assessments		
Equitable Learning Opportunities for All	Evidence of equity vs. equality Traditionally underserved students are part of the plan Clear transparency in practices		
Positive Sense of Accountability Among Principals/Teachers	Participants feel accountable for all students Reduced deficit thinking Standards "are the floor; not the ceiling"		
Impact of SB- Reform Themes	Characteristics	Observed Tallies	Field Notes
Narrowing of Curriculum	Reduced class selection Loss of funding for arts		

	Focus shift away from problem solving/critical thinking “Testing“ assemblies		
Evidence of “Teacher Proofing”	“Christmas tree” approach Limited teacher autonomy Canned/scripted curricula		
Loss of Teacher Agency	Teaching to the test “Test Factories” Teacher image: “implementer” vs. “expert” More and faster approach		
Diminished Public Faith	Schools as marketplaces Student achievement data of sole importance in valuation of teacher performance		
Datnow’s Successful Reform for Change Principals Themes	Characteristics	Observed Tallies	Field Notes
Principals as instructional leaders	As evidenced by: Integration of instructional and transformational practices Data-informed decision making Awareness of “contextual factors”		
Evidence of “teacher buy-in” toward reform	Ideologies directly match Actions support intentions Teachers assume ownership		
Principal confronts teacher resistance, does not ignore	Principal is viewed as leader Challenges are problem-solved		
Teacher empowerment opportunities cultivated	Teacher leaders exist Supported in growth opportunities		
District policies support principal and teacher leadership and necessary shift of working conditions.	Evidence of teacher role shift from traditional practices Lower rate of burnout		