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Multi-Party Mobilization for Adolescent Literacy in a Rural Area:

A Case Study of Policy Development and Collaboration



Edmund T. Hamann and Julie Meltzer

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Multi-Party Mobilization for Adolescent Literacy in a Rural Area: A Case Study of Policy Development and Collaboration

By **Edmund T. Hamann and Julie Meltzer**

Between 2001 and 2005, the state of Maine shifted the focus of its statewide high school improvement efforts to include an explicit focus on adolescent literacy. One trigger for that change in focus was a 5-school adolescent literacy initiative previously launched in a rural county under the federal Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory contract. This monograph describes the multi-party mobilization that led to the creation and implementation of the adolescent literacy project and explains the link between that modest rural effort and the change in state-level reform efforts. The project was designed and implemented at the intersection of what we know about adolescent literacy development, systemic educational reform, and rural education. The case study's basis in and ties to those literatures are noted. Because of this "location" at the interface of research, practice, and policy, the story is one of understanding local and state needs from a variety of perspectives and looking at how a focus on literacy might address these needs. Thus ethnographic strategies designed to capture group and individual processes for making change were appropriate methodological tools to ground this monograph. The project promoted a new focus on adolescent literacy across content areas as a lever for school improvement in five participating high schools in one rural county. As reflected in the education reform literature, this required teachers, administrators, and other participants to understand and subscribe to the new focus. Because of the participating schools' rural isolation, limited resources, lack of nearby expertise, and learned skepticism towards externally initiated change efforts, the project also required the mobilization of multiple partners, each of whom could contribute resources, expertise, credibility, and/or access that made the project more viable and sustainable. This multi-party collaboration seems to have helped convert the county-focused effort into a vehicle for a broader state-level pursuit of high school improvement.

Key Words: educational partnerships, school reform, adolescent literacy, rural education, high school change

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Executive Summary

The Maine Department of Education's (MEDOE) framework for high school improvement—*Promising Futures*—included only a single reference to literacy when it was released in 1998. By 2004, through MEDOE's Center for Inquiry on Secondary Education (CISE), adolescent literacy across the content areas was a key component of state-supported high school improvement efforts. Between these two dates, MEDOE personnel joined several other institutional entities to support an adolescent literacy initiative launched at five rural high schools in 2002.

The Adolescent Literacy Project, as that partnership came to be known, was supported by the two Maine education commissioners who served during the project's duration and was carried out by The Education Alliance at Brown University and its partner, the Center for Resource Management (CRM), as part of the federally funded Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory contract. This monograph describes the multi-party collaboration that supported the project. It offers a detailed depiction of what happened locally, regionally, and systemically as five high schools in one rural Maine county agreed to adopt research-based changes in teaching and learning to improve literacy development. As a case study, this monograph focuses on what occurred at the county, state, and partner levels (rather than at the school level) to depict *who* mobilized, *how*, *why*, and *in response to what* opportunities and concerns. This systemic orientation is important. One clear lesson learned from the project was that a systemic approach to educational reform in rural schools must go beyond a single local district to include partners from other entities and levels of the educational system.

The adolescent literacy project asked partners to think and then act differently. It asked each partner to consider literacy across the content areas as a new organizing logic for classroom practice and school-wide change, then to act on behalf of this newly prioritized goal.

By the project's end, it had succeeded in being the longest, externally initiated, continual improvement effort in which any of the five target high schools had participated. In May 2005, all of the participating schools presented sustainability plans for continuing the work beyond the period of funding and all of the project partners had explicitly identified adolescent literacy as central to their institutional missions.

The adolescent literacy project illustrates a number of key issues relevant to the promotion of adolescent literacy across the content areas as a vehicle for high school improvement:

- A multi-school initiative can be a catalyst for capacity building (e.g., creation of the University of Maine’s graduate courses in adolescent literacy and development of local literacy expertise) to ensure ongoing support for schools.
- Adolescent literacy is a topic around which diverse educational entities (institutions of higher education, local educational consortia, schools, state education departments, etc.) can rally, each finding its messages and implications salient.
- A “getting to ready” period may need to precede comprehensive adolescent literacy projects, particularly those requiring educators to change their teaching and learning strategies.
- Both coursework and on-site teacher coaching are necessary to support shifts in classroom teaching and learning.
- By having a reflective responsive design—monthly meetings at each school preceded by careful planning and followed up by careful review—an emphasis on literacy can be pursued consistently and insistently.
- Lack of turnover in key intermediary positions (e.g., head of the county consortium and monthly professional development provider) can prevent a literacy initiative from foundering in an ongoing cycle of orientation and trying to build credibility.

The adolescent literacy project also suggests a number of implications for the study and improvement of rural education:

- Multiple entity mobilization is possible, perhaps even necessary, to sustain a long-term, multi-dimensional rural education initiative.
- Rural sites can be sites of acute need. The types of need experienced by an individual school may vary substantially from the needs experienced by other equally rural schools.
- Resource and infrastructure scarcities need to be addressed if research-based professional development is going to be viable in rural areas.
- Rural educators who participate in change efforts need not do so for exactly the same reasons as project promoters.
- Even well designed plans require some element of serendipity.
- Coordination of efforts between individual local sites and regional or state entities is necessarily multifaceted and requires efforts by more than one individual and from more than one type of partner.

The partners who coordinated efforts to launch and sustain the adolescent literacy project in Maine moved what might have been a small, peripheral, low-impact initiative to something with extensive statewide implications. This took someone in a catalyst role, in this case, The Education Alliance and CRM, along with willing collaborators at the state, university, county, and local levels. That project supporters in each of these institutions mobilized on behalf of the project is a tribute to educators at all of those levels who recognized that collaborative efforts to improve education in high schools are not only relevant and worthwhile, but also possible. Converting what works according to the research into what might work in practice in a specific rural context required multi-party mobilization to create the necessary capacities, structures, and activities. Whether contemplating adolescent literacy, systemic school reform, or rural education, that is an important story to tell.

I. Adolescent Literacy is a Rural Education Issue That Involves Multiple Partners

Current federal educational research policy emphasizes the importance of determining how to help the millions of students not meeting grade-level expectations to become more successful. Increasingly, there has been a focus on the large role academic literacy development (or the lack of it) at the middle and high school level may play in students' abilities to meet challenging content-area standards, handle the demands of postsecondary education, and function proficiently in the workplace and civil society (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999).

In 2001, as part of the first phase of the Adolescent Literacy Project, an effort funded primarily by the federal Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory contract (the LAB contract), author Julie Meltzer conducted an extensive review of the research on adolescent literacy within the context of school reform. This review was translated into the Adolescent Literacy Support Framework, a synthesis of recommendations from the literature across several fields for engaging adolescents with literacy in the context of content-area teaching and learning (Meltzer, 2001, 2002). The framework describes a research-grounded hypothesis—that effective systemic incorporation of explicit literacy instruction and promising literacy support practices across the content areas will help underachieving high school students fare better academically (see the framework summary in Appendix A). The framework does not, and cannot, answer two important complementary questions—first, what kind of mobilization is required and by whom to create the necessary capacities, structures, and activities to convert a research-based framework into successful and enduring practice at the school level? Second, if schools are rural and have resource challenges, what do policymakers and intermediaries outside of a given school need to do to ensure sustainability of such practices?

In 2002, the next phases of the LAB's Adolescent Literacy Project were launched: (1) a technical assistance initiative to promote adolescent literacy as a strategy for school-wide change at five high schools in a rural Maine county; and (2) an applied research study to document the implementation of that assistance and thereby make the lessons of this initiative accessible to others. This monograph, a study of the multi-party collaboration and action, is part of that applied research effort.

This monograph offers one detailed depiction of what happened locally, regionally, and systemically as several high schools in one rural Maine county agreed to adopt research-based changes in teaching and learning to improve literacy development. As a case study, this monograph focuses on what occurred at the county, state, and partner levels (rather than at the school level) to depict *who* mobilized, *how*, *why*, and in response to *what* opportunities and concerns. This systemic orientation is important.

For almost 20 years, if not longer, high schools have been loci of substantial reform-oriented attention (e.g., Boyer, 1983; Lightfoot, 1983; Sizer, 1983, 1984). However, despite that attention, high schools have not typically become more successful learning environments for most of their students. The point here is not to label high schools as “good” or “bad,” but rather to suggest that American high schools have not, in aggregate, gotten better. The flatness, nationally, of high school students’ NAEP achievement scores over time attests to this lack of improvement (Campbell, Hombrook, & Mazzeo, 2000; Grigg, Daane, Jin, & Campbell, 2003). Although the explanations for the failure of high school reform are complicated, two major explanations emerge: (1) longstanding resistance of high schools to reform efforts (Lee, 2001; McQuillan, 1998; Muncey & McQuillan, 1996; Sarason, 1990) and, (2) over-reliance on key personnel to initiate and sustain those reforms that do succeed (Fink, 2000; Wolf, Borko, Elliott, & McIver, 2000). In other words, high schools are hard to change, and even when they do make purposeful change, it is often temporary, disappearing when a teacher retires, a principal moves, or a superintendent is fired.

As Fink (2000) clarifies, schools are entwined in larger systems—educational, political, and economic. If an individual school attempts to initiate comprehensive change when the larger system of which it is part does not, the school, though improved, will be out of equilibrium with the system’s supports. The result can be a school pressured to return to equilibrium (i.e., to drop its innovations/improvements) or seen as an anomaly, implementing a change effort that other schools cannot reproduce (see Davidson and Koppenhaver, [1993] for a description of system-wide adjustments in support of three middle school level school-wide literacy efforts). In the case of rural schools, the sites for systemic change likely extend beyond the level of an individual school district. Rural districts often have only one or a few schools, have severely limited resources, and/or are attempting to manage schools across multiple townships and territories and have only loosely coupled management structures. Their governance structures are either locally bounded, or territorially bounded, which is often a mismatch for funding (tax structures) and decision making (political processes).

Our case lays out the participating organizations and partners in the adolescent literacy project and offers many individuals’ rationales for participating (see glossary for a list of key project participants). None of the involved parties could have mustered or sustained full mobilization on their own. This study, therefore, portrays one type of collaboration that may be necessary for a substantive effort to change teaching and learning in rural high schools. For the 5-school project described here, the partners’ collective actions supported monthly on-site technical assistance for interdisciplinary teams of high school teachers (who were charged with developing and sustaining a school-based literacy initiative), on-site support by a literacy coach (offered only during some portions of the project), teachers’ engagement with online tools developed and hosted by Brown University, and teachers’ participation in graduate coursework in literacy education through the University of Maine and other teacher professional development through a county-level education consortium.

Originating from the technical proposal for the LAB contract that was drafted in 2000, the project was enacted with the participating schools between April 2002 and May 2005. The 3-year enactment period coincided with a period of increasing pressure on Maine high schools to improve how they served their students. The federal No Child Left Behind Act was passed just as the project was beginning. At the state level, the press for high school reform that had been launched with the publication of *Promising Futures: A Call to Improve Learning for Maine's Secondary Students* (Maine Commission on Secondary Education, 1998) continued. Despite this policy pressure and the fact that the participating schools were struggling with substantial numbers of students not meeting standards, adolescent literacy as a catalyst for whole school change was not a strategy with which most local high school educators were familiar as the project began. Yet in June 2003, just 18 months after the first attempts to recruit schools had begun, several individuals—representing the participating schools, a county educational consortium, technical assistance providers, and the MEDOE—were able to compellingly describe the project, its logic, and its early successes to a meeting of the LAB Board of Governors held in Portland, Maine. Eighteen months after that, at a December 2004 meeting of Maine high schools in the state capital, Maine's education commissioner, Sue Gendron, identified adolescent literacy development as a key improvement priority for all the state's high schools. By the end of the funding period, more than 100 educators from the county had participated in some form of content-area literacy professional development through courses and book talks during the three years of the project, nine had trained to become content-area literacy mentors, and 26 teachers from the five participating schools had completed a 6-credit graduate course developed and offered by the University of Maine as part of the project.¹ Furthermore, in May 2005, all of the participating schools presented sustainability plans for continuing the work beyond the period of funding. By May 2005, all of the project partners explicitly identified adolescent literacy as central to their institutional missions. Tracing how the concept of adolescent literacy as a “lever” for school reform developed from an unfamiliar concept to an operative rationale supported by educators at the local, regional, state, and university levels is one part of the story related here.

The adolescent literacy project asked partners to think and then act differently. It asked partners to consider literacy across the content areas as a new organizing logic for classroom practice and school-wide change. Then it asked partners to act on behalf of this newly prioritized goal. Thus, the adolescent literacy project faced the challenge that any policy implementation effort faces; the involved partners needed time, space, and support to reconcile their new goals and new charges with their existing roles, priorities, and responsibilities (Grant, 1988; Marris, 1975; O'Brien, Stewart, & Moje, 1995).

¹ In total, 35 teachers from the target county took the 6-credit course in 2002, 2003, or 2004, but two were not from the five target schools, one did not complete the final course requirements, two took jobs at other schools, and four subsequently left teaching altogether. Hence, the May 2005 tally of new capacity in the five project schools equaled: $35-2-1-2-4 = 26$.

Key project partners worked to develop nuanced understandings of what was meant by a “school-wide adolescent literacy initiative” and helped to enact initiatives at the participating schools. More specifically, partners collaborated to create:

- New structures, like locally and regionally offered professional development coursework on strategies to improve students’ content-area reading comprehension
- New roles such as “content-area literacy teacher mentor,” “adolescent literacy coach,” and “school implementation coach.”²
- New online and in-person communication networks
- New or modified state policies, like adapting the championing of the statewide high school reform framework—*Promising Futures*—so that it deliberately included space for a focus on literacy (see Appendix B for the 15 core practices that comprise *Promising Futures*).

In short, partners created new capacities and practices that aligned with research recommendations and that did not exist prior to the project.

McLaughlin (1987) has suggested that studies of policy implementation need to be sensitive to chronology. Sometimes it is premature to appraise implementation based on student outcomes (e.g., did dropout rates change or did more students meet standards?). In those cases, the research focus is better directed at considering process outcomes. As Erickson and Gutierrez (2002) have noted, “A logically and empirically prior question to ‘Did it work?’ is ‘What was the it?’—‘What was the treatment as actually delivered?’” (p. 21). An appropriate assessment of project value at the partnership level might be: Did the implementation yield different structures, policies, and practices? And were these new processes more likely to generate success than the ones they replaced? Although we see what occurred as promising, we cannot assert that the structures and processes described here will continue to thrive. However, it is possible, both at the school and partner level, to begin to assess project success according to Cuban’s (1998) criteria of longevity, popularity, and adaptability. We can outline what occurred and can affirm that there are new local and systemic structures, policies, and practices in place at the time of this writing that were not in place at the beginning of the project. We can also affirm that project partners thought that their participation in the project supported their focus on important issues and on strategies to address them. Most substantively, we can identify new attention from MEDOE to adolescent literacy in the content areas. Over the course of the project, this topic evolved from being an area of interest of Commissioner Albanese to a focal strategy for state support of high school improvement.

² As is further described later, Ken Quincy was the adolescent literacy coach, Lenore Saxon was the school implementation coach, and several educators, including Ken, trained to be adolescent literacy content area mentors.

Underpinnings for Studying a County Wide Literacy Initiative

This case is covered by the overlapping traditions of policy implementation studies (McLaughlin, 1987; Odden, 1991), ethnography of education policy (Hamann, 2003; Sutton & Levinson, 2001), and ethnography of bureaucracy (Heyman, 2004), where a focus of inquiry is how policy gets adapted and regenerated by intermediaries as they convert a blueprint into practice. Young (1999) has observed: “The research frame one uses dictates, to a large extent, the way one researches the problem, the policy options one considers, the approach one takes to policy implementation, and the approach taken for policy evaluation” (p. 681). The growing body of literature on education policy implementation argues that, at every tier of the educational system, implementation is a process that entails a complex web of interpretation, negotiation, bargaining, managing ambiguity, and exercising discretion (Coburn, 2003; Elmore, 1980; Goggin, Bowman, Lester, & O’Toole, 1990; Hamann & Lane, 2003, 2004; Honig, 2001; McLaughlin, 1987; and Spillane, 1998). From this perspective, individuals take action based on their sense of what is, what *can be*, and what *is supposed to be*, thereby affecting the policy as implemented in practice.

As Rosen (2001), an anthropologist, has noted,

In the domain of education, when we perceive that children or schools are not performing as we imagine they should, we seek or construct stories to explain why, and to orient our efforts at addressing perceived problems. Education policy is implicated in these myth-making processes: any plan of action, recommendation for change, or statement of goals involves (either explicitly or implicitly) an account of purported conditions and a set of recommendations for addressing them. (p. 299)

Policies can be defined as part problem diagnosis and part action strategy intended (viably or not) to address the identified problems (Levinson & Sutton, 2001). For example, two related problem diagnoses have undergirded the standards movement: (1) it is unclear what high school students need to master, so state-by-state expectations of what students should know and be able to do across the content areas should be delineated; and (2) in a knowledge economy, students who do not master a minimum threshold of skills will not be ready to meet adult responsibilities (Fuhrman, 2001; Smith & O’Day, 1991). In terms of state educational policy, Maine responded to these problem diagnoses by articulating content area standards—the Maine Learning Results—and by directing attention to changing high schools to support more students to meet the articulated standards. However, particularly in the county targeted by the project, the second strategy of changing high schools was not sufficiently clear, compelling, or robust at the time the project began, as measured by the number of students not meeting expected standards.

The adolescent literacy project described here can be viewed as a multi-part strategy that was intended to resolve certain identified problems. Partners were asked to agree on three key points:

- Maine needed to improve the quality of its high school educational experiences.
- The lack of systemic support for adolescent literacy at the high school level was hindering student academic success.
- The target county would benefit from external intervention.

Then partners needed to concur with and participate in the strategies for the resolution of these “problems.” To do this, partners needed first to reconcile these concerns with those more closely related to their own context, purposes, and missions. The proposed adolescent literacy project intersected with several problem diagnoses at the state, university, and regional levels. This allowed potential partners to agree (or disagree) that the project was “close enough” or complementary to their current charters.

Other problem diagnoses were also foundational to the project. Since 1965, the federal government has supported regional educational laboratories based on the premise that state departments of education, school districts, and schools need regionally coordinated applied research and technical assistance. In the 2000-2005 round of the regional educational laboratory contract awarding, the federal government’s request for proposal (RFP) asked that efforts target low-performing schools with the goal of converting them into high-performing learning communities. Thus, this project was proposed within a federal context that sought to gain knowledge about how to assist and “turn around” low-performing high schools and that was intended to operate within a fixed time frame (i.e., the 5-year grant cycle ending in 2005). The project was developed within a working context that prioritized state, regional, and school-level partnering with an external educational laboratory. Literacy was conceptualized, in this case, as a “lever for school reform” and thus was consistent with the theme of targeting whole schools for intervention (as opposed to a more targeted effort with math teachers, for example). The federal request for proposals also mandated that the regional educational laboratories direct a portion of their activities to rural areas of each region. This is one reason that this case study is explicitly tied to the research on rural education.

The adolescent literacy project also fit easily within the state-level problem diagnosis that Maine’s high schools were weaker than were schools serving younger students and thus needed state-level support and attention. That conclusion emerged from an analysis in the mid-1990s of Maine’s NAEP scores, which were well ahead of the national average at 4th grade, somewhat ahead in 8th grade, but only middle of the pack by 11th grade. The formation of the ad hoc Maine Commission on Secondary Education in 1996; the publication of *Promising Futures* as a framework for high school change in Maine in 1998; and the creation of the Center for Inquiry in Secondary

Education (CISE) within MEDOE, in 1998, were all strategies to address the concern about weak high school performance. An additional state-level diagnosis—that the county where the project was implemented had significant educational needs—also shaped the project.

Because the project drew on a number of problem diagnoses and strategies, it complemented other ongoing efforts and was ideal for attracting attention and support from partners with related agendas. Yet this same virtue also meant that preserving the identity of the project and its stated aim to focus on academic literacy development was, at times, difficult. From the technical assistance provider's standpoint, adolescent literacy was *the* reason for the project. Over time this became a more and more important rationale for the other partners too. Initially, however, partners participated in the project for a variety of other reasons—for example, to further the work of *Promising Futures*, to gain contact hours required for professional development purposes, to bring resources to a region that needed them, and so forth. Over the course of the project, it became clear that one important thing that needs to happen locally, regionally, and systemically for research-based, literacy-related changes in teaching and learning to be adopted, is alignment between the problem diagnoses and ensuing strategies of action that prompt different parties to participate.

Project Background

This case addresses the time period from the summer of 2000 to the end of the LAB funding of the on-site portion of the project in the spring of 2005. This 5-year span is split into three sections—planning, mobilization, and institutionalization—that correspond approximately to mid-2000 through February 2002, the beginning of 2002 to June 2003, and then from the Portland meeting in June 2003 forward to the spring of 2005. On-site project implementation began in schools in the spring of 2002 and continued through the spring of 2005. As the labels imply, there was no adolescent literacy initiative during the first phase, just plans to launch one. During the second phase the emphasis was on getting all of the constituent pieces up and running. Although some were still unsteady, all of the component pieces were in place by the June 2003 LAB Board of Governors meeting. At that meeting, the operating conditions of the project changed, particularly beyond the county, because the project was now deemed sufficiently viable, public, and able to be a source of lessons and recommendations for sites elsewhere. Although ending this case study at the end of the federal funding period is somewhat arbitrary, after the spring of 2005 there was no longer a LAB-funded external agent assuring that the multiple efforts being pursued across project schools and at the county level remained aligned and complementary.

Seven institutional formations figure significantly in this case study: (1) The Education Alliance at Brown University, (2) its partner, the Center for Resource Management (CRM), to which it is formally related through the LAB contract, (3) the Maine

Department of Education (MEDOE), including CISE, (4) two campuses of the University of Maine, (5) the newly created Maine Adolescent Literacy Project Advisory Council, (6) the County Educational Consortium, and (7) superintendents, principals, and teachers from five high schools. Although five different schools participated in the project, they are considered as one bundled entity in this case study because the focus of this project was not the ways in which the schools and the school-level implementation differed. The county consortium was created by the member school districts as a vehicle to pool resources and create opportunities that the tiny constituent rural districts on their own could not obtain. However, because it is located separately from any of the district offices and because it has a county-wide charge, the orientations and perspectives of its personnel are not the same as those who are leading the individual schools and districts. Therefore, for the purposes of this case study the county consortium is considered a separate entity from that of the participating schools.³

The roles, responsibilities, proximity to the county, and interests of each of these institutional players vary. Indeed cooperation, initiative, and follow through across that variation are core elements of this case. To better understand the context of the case, the next section reviews relevant literature in the areas of adolescent literacy, secondary school reform in Maine, and rural education, particularly as these pertain to the history and socio-demographic realities of the county within which this project was launched. The literature review is followed by a description of the research methodology used to develop this case study. Sections III, IV and V depict what occurred during the phases of the project from the vantage points of multiple players. Segment VI summarizes analytical themes in the case study that may have implications for other collaborative partnership projects serving to support rural school improvement. Taking advantage of the time this case study was written—just at the end of LAB funding of the external supports for the five high schools’ adolescent literacy efforts—Section VI also asks if a different configuration of local and regional partners could sustain and further the initiative. This question is posed as part of an analysis of the factors that appear to have supported the planning, launching, and consolidation of the partnership.

³ For reasons touched on again in the methodology section, the institutional partners mentioned here are not equally identifiable. In general, we have identified our own organizations and those that are large, singular, and publicly prominent (e.g., Maine Department of Education and the commissioners) for which hiding their identity would require distorting the story. On the other hand, pursuant to our IRB agreement, we have kept anonymous all identities of individual participants and institutional entities that are at more local levels. See the glossary on p. 75 to keep track of individuals and institutions.

II: Context and Methodology

The adolescent literacy project was constructed at the intersection of multiple overlapping topic areas. The relevant literatures that contributed to the project's design and implementation include adolescent literacy development, high school improvement, and rural education. To better situate readers, we have summarized some key points from each of these literatures that emerged as particularly pertinent. The summaries differ from a more conventional literature review in two ways: (1) some connections to the case are noted within the summaries, so readers will not need to keep reviews of three topic areas in mind before seeing how they connect in subsequent sections, and (2) there is an intentional re-creational logic to the telling. None of the project partners began with a nuanced understanding of all of the activities related to adolescent literacy that were necessary for the project's launch and operation. Likewise, partners did not necessarily realize the impact of the realities of rural education and high school improvement on the implementation of an adolescent literacy initiative at the school level. Following these summaries, we describe the methodology used to construct this case study.

Adolescent Literacy Research

There are many academically struggling adolescents who have not developed or do not demonstrate literacy skills at the level expected by the secondary school curriculum (Alvermann, 2004; Carnegie Corporation, 2001). In fact, the Alliance for Excellent Education (AEE) estimates that six million middle and high school students are reading below grade level (Joftus, 2002). Students with special needs make up only a small fraction of this much larger student population. The vast majority are students who struggle with academic reading and writing across the board and those who are “below average,” “average,” or even “above average” readers and writers in some areas, but who nonetheless struggle to meet standards in other content areas and to independently carry out academic literacy tasks. To address these students' needs, the literature supports school-wide literacy initiatives that include such components as coaching, strategic interventions, and support across the content areas (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Joftus, 2002). Students who enter high school 1 to 3 years behind in terms of reading may need additional support, including more time and opportunities to practice in order to accelerate their academic literacy development. Literacy interventions should include a focus on vocabulary development and text structures, more authentic opportunities to read and write, and explicit reading and writing instruction within the context of content area teaching and learning (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Meltzer, 2002; Meltzer & Hamann, 2005).

There have been several recent extensive reviews of the educational research on adolescent literacy that describe what we know so far about adolescent literacy support and development (e.g., Alvermann, 2001; Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Curtis, 2002; Kamil, 2003; Meltzer, 2002; Strickland & Alvermann, 2004). To be able to articulate and work toward a vision for literacy support and continued development for all students across content areas at the secondary level, the various project partners needed to understand several key ideas from that literature.

Literacy, and the more specific terms *academic literacy* and *advanced literacy*, refer to a vast array of interrelated cognitive sub-skills and habits of mind that pertain to learning both generically and within particular academic disciplines (e.g., Colombi & Schleppegrell, 2002; Langer, 2000; Lee, 2004; Schoenbach, Greenleaf, Cziko, & Hurwitz, 1999). Although the rudimentary skills of phonetic decoding and knowing conventions of print are pieces of literacy, so too are more complex competencies such as comprehension and production skills like genre recognition, context recognition, understanding tone, knowing cultural referents, knowing how to use analogies and irony, and knowing how to share empirical evidence. The pieces of literacy should not be misunderstood for the whole. The literature clearly supports the integrated use and development of reading, writing, speaking, listening/viewing, and thinking skills to address academic literacy development at the secondary level (e.g., Langer, 2000, 2001; Meltzer, 2001, 2002; Meltzer & Hamann, 2004, 2005). However, despite the fact that reading and writing are two primary instructional vehicles for learning in each of the content areas, literacy development at the high school level, until recently, was assumed to be the responsibility of the English department. Indeed the first challenge of the project was to help partners understand that this was not a project designed for only English language arts teachers.

Developing academic literacy habits and skills requires coordinated concerted support across content areas. This is critical because the academic disciplines require different types of literacy habits and skills and although someone may be on grade level in an area where s/he has received excellent instruction or has particular interest, this may not be the case for that student in other subject areas (Alvermann, 2001). It is also important to note that just by being in school, not all students at the middle and high school level make a full year's worth of literacy progress during each school year. Therefore, a student who enters ninth grade on grade level may not be on grade level a year or two later without targeted, purposeful, ongoing literacy development as part of content-area teaching and learning. Even some temporarily successful students may not sufficiently develop their literacy skills to be able to adequately pursue more advanced tasks. Remedial reading and writing courses and centers are widespread at the university level, indicating that many average or good readers are finding themselves unprepared for literacy demands at the post-secondary level (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000a; Scarcella, 2002). Also, English language learners (ELL), a fast-growing population, have widely varying literacy skills in their first languages. These

students often face limited assistance in simultaneously building content knowledge and developing academic literacy in English (Meltzer & Hamann, 2004, 2005). Because of these varying issues, adolescent literacy education must involve mainstream content-area teachers in helping students address literacy-related challenges.

A second initial challenge for some project partners was understanding that the adolescent literacy project was not an intensive intervention program for struggling readers who arrive at high school reading at a “below basic” level. (Recent estimates indicate that only a small percentage of adolescents who have difficulty with academic reading and writing are still struggling with basic decoding [Curtis, 2002].) The five-school project was not a program specifically for students requiring basic remediation in reading, nor would it directly address those students’ needs, other than to highlight the need for additional intervention. In selecting appropriate intervention programs, project partners had to understand that the initial processes of “cracking the code” and learning to read are quite different from academic reading across genres and purposes. Selected reading programs had to reflect that understanding. In addition, the developmental level and world experience of the adolescent learner are quite different from that of a young child (Alvermann, 2001). Teachers working to improve the academic literacy skills of adolescents can reference life experience, genre and language conventions, and content knowledge as tools for adolescents’ further literacy development. As Martin (2003) and Walsh (1999) have noted, even immigrant adolescents with limited prior schooling bring to the classroom an awareness of storytelling conventions, humor, and the plasticity and adaptability of language. Unlike early readers, those adolescents who struggle the most with academic literacy usually have some literacy skills (Alvermann, 2003; Lee, 2004; Moje et al., 2004; Obidah, 1998). These are resources upon which skilled teachers can build. One premise of the project was that participating schools would have intensive interventions in place for beginning readers and that the project would work with content-area teachers to address the academic literacy needs of the rest of the students.

For the project described here, several other research-based issues pertaining to adolescent literacy were necessary for partners to understand including: motivation and engagement, content-area literacy instruction, teacher professional development, and literacy supporting structures and leadership. Each of these topics is important for the effective literacy development of adolescents (Meltzer, 2002). Because of their different project-related tasks, however, project partners with varying proximities to the classroom required different nuanced understandings of the particulars of effective intervention.

The research on **motivation and engagement** with regard to literacy indicates that:

- Students' motivations to read and write are highly variable and dependent on purpose, perceived value, self-efficacy, interest, and context (e.g., Alvermann, 2001, 2003; Baker & Wigfield, 1999; Dornyei, 2001; Guthrie & Knowles, 2001; Jetton & Alexander, 2004; McKenna, 2001; Meltzer & Hamann, 2004; Ruddell & Unrau, 1996).
- Sustained engagement in reading and writing tasks is what leads to improved learning (Guthrie, 2001).
- Classroom environments and teacher actions can sustain and encourage, or undermine, student motivation with and engagement in academic literacy tasks (e.g., Alvermann, 2003, 2004; Harklau, 2000; Ivey, 1999; Langer, 2000; McCombs & Barton, 1998; Obidah, 1998; Ruddell & Unrau, 1996; Van den Broek & Kremer, 2000).

Classrooms that promote student engagement and motivation to read and write are characterized by connections, interactions, and responsiveness (Meltzer, 2002). Such environments differ substantively from those encountered in most high school classrooms, including English language arts classrooms (Langer, 2000, 2001).

The literature on **content-area literacy instruction** (e.g., Alvermann, 2001; Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Curtis, 2002; Kamil, 2003; Meltzer, 2002; Meltzer & Hamann, 2005) stresses explicit teaching and modeling of before, during, and after reading strategies. The research also recommends developing meta-cognitive skills, like rereading, making connections, questioning, predicting, visualizing, clarifying, and summarizing. It recommends:

- Frequent assessment of student reading, writing, listening/viewing, thinking, and speaking
- Use of varied groupings to support instruction
- Frequent use of higher order critical thinking tasks
- Authentic reading and writing
- Inquiry-based instruction and learning
- Both general and content-specific vocabulary development
- The explicit teaching of text structures found in various disciplines
- The use of an apprenticeship model to assist learners to become competent readers, writers, thinkers, and speakers of each content area (e.g., readers of history, mathematical thinkers, and scientific writers)

Because few came to the project with a comprehensive understanding of these tasks, it was to issues like these that the partnership needed to direct attention and capacity building.

Partners also needed to understand what the research tells us about effective **teacher professional development** generally and content-area reading professional development specifically. Effective teacher professional development requires that teachers work together on relevant materials over time (Eidman-Aadahl, 2005; National Staff Development Council, 2001). In a study of 44 middle and high school teachers from 25 schools (14 schools that were “beating the odds” in terms of academic performance and 11 that were typical), Langer (2000) identified six characteristics of teachers’ professional lives and workplaces that were associated with improved student achievement in reading, writing, and English:

- (1) Orchestrated, coordinated efforts to improve student achievement
- (2) Teacher participation in a variety of professional communities
- (3) Structured improvement opportunities that offered teachers a strong sense of agency
- (4) Valued commitment to the profession of teaching
- (5) A caring attitude toward colleagues and students
- (6) Deep respect for lifelong learning

These six principles support the strategy that was pursued in the county as part of this project. Although schools had flexibility in how they pursued the task of implementing the adolescent literacy framework, they were encouraged to develop, cultivate, and sustain a professional development culture at the project level in order for it to happen at the school level. One outcome of this project was an understanding of the important role the partners played in creating and maintaining these principles in the lives of the participating teachers and administrators at these far-flung small rural schools.

Most secondary level teachers, including English teachers, have not had any courses in content-area reading. Such a course is not required for secondary certification in most states, including Maine (Romine, McKenna, & Robinson, 1996). Many secondary teachers resist taking on reading as one of their teaching responsibilities (Greenleaf, Schoenbach, Cziko, Mueller, 2001). This was true of the majority of teachers in the participating schools in the beginning of the project. They recognized that many of their students had not developed the necessary academic literacy skills to be independent users of reading and writing. However, directing class time to these skills competed with other class time priorities. It also involved pedagogical tasks and roles with which teachers felt uncomfortable. Content-area reading instruction is seen as “foreign” for many teachers because it challenges the dominant paradigm of teacher-directed instruction in high school classrooms (e.g., an IRE instructional model where the primary speech acts are teacher *initiation*, student *response*, and teacher *evaluation*; see Mehan, [1979].) At

the participating schools, teacher feedback about professional development repeatedly emphasizes the enormity of the pedagogical changes required to improve content-area learning and the shifts in participating teachers' perceptions of their teaching since the beginning of the project. Not all teachers were willing or able to make that shift, even with the project resources available to support them. Across all participating schools, however, teachers were less resistant to the need for this shift than at the beginning of the project.

Support for content-area literacy development requires not only an enhanced knowledge base about teaching and learning, but also assessment, planning, lesson/unit design, and other skills that many teachers have never been asked to develop. The development of comfort and competence with these skills as well as the conviction that they are needed and useful takes time. Vying with a literacy focus for teachers' time are external accountability mandates and changes in practice such as the expectation to integrate technology through the use of laptops. There are also limited resources to support teachers' development of these capacities. The professional development task is complicated by the fact that teachers, like other learners, learn in different ways. Professional development thus needs to support heterogeneous learning styles and occur in a variety of formats. For the project, this meant that several forms of teacher professional development needed to be sponsored, designed, and offered. This was a large task, one in which partners featured prominently and which was not anticipated prior to the start of the project.

Adolescent literacy is a relatively new issue on the national educational agenda. The International Reading Association's Commission on Adolescent Literacy issued its policy statement in 1999 (Moore et al., 1999), spurring more focused attention on literacy at the secondary level. The current emphasis on adolescent literacy is perhaps a "fourth wave" of secondary school reform if one accepts Desimone's (2002) characterization of the comprehensive school reform movement as a "third wave" (p. 434) precipitated by the publication of *A Nation At Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).⁴ (In Desimone's taxonomy, the first wave refers to the standards movement and the second to efforts to improve home-school communication, teacher preparedness, and capacity.) This fourth wave has emerged from a concern of both education researchers and policymakers that structural educational reforms have not adequately improved teaching and learning (Elmore 1996, 2002, 2004; Goodman, 1995; Howley & Howley, 2004; Jennings, 1996; Spillane & Zeuli, 1999). This concern is coupled with an outcry from the business community about the extensive resources being placed into remedial reading and writing (upwards of \$1 billion in 2004) for workers at all levels, including college graduates, and the finding that the vast majority of high school dropouts and prison inmates have limited literacy skills (Allen, Almeida, &

⁴ Goodman (1995) also refers to a "third wave" of education reform, using the work of Reigeluth (1987) to create a different chronological starting point. According to Reigeluth's historical taxonomy, "first wave" refers to one-room schoolhouses in an agrarian society and the "second wave" includes reforms appropriate to support industrial society.

Steinberg, 2004). In Maine, project partners did not start with a common understanding of adolescent literacy as a fourth wave of high school reform. As the case demonstrates, however, it is an accurate representation of the general understanding of educators at the local, regional, and state levels as a result of the project. This raises intriguing questions about how educational partnership endeavors carried out at the intersection of policy and practice can generate new policy and potentially new conceptualizations of educational reform.

Systemic Education Reform at the High School Level

The adolescent literacy project sought to precipitate school reform in the five participating high schools. Thus it needed to be reconciled with concurrent attempts at high school reform in Maine, whether these were federal policy, philanthropic largesse, or efforts by MEDOE or the state legislatures. Twenty years ago, the nearly simultaneous publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) and a number of books on the state of American high schools (e.g., Boyer, 1983; Lightfoot, 1983; Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985; Sizer, 1984) made the case for substantive adjustments in the structure, practice, and purpose of high schools. Since then, there has been a growing concern that traditional high schools will never serve all, or even most, students well. In Maine, that concern generated two related reform initiatives—the standards movement and the comprehensive school reform movement.

In the early 1990s, Maine adopted the Common Core of Learning, later renamed the Maine Learning Results. This framework articulated content standards for almost all subject areas (including visual arts, reading, writing, science, health, mathematics, and social studies). The intent was to help teachers and the public to understand and buy into common instructional goals for all students (MEDOE, 1997). As in most other states, the development of state standards also led to the development of standard-aligned standardized tests, the Maine Education Assessments (MEAs). Unlike in some other states, however, the MEA was deliberately not developed as a high stakes test. Indeed, it was stipulated at the time of its creation that MEAs could not count for more than 10% of overall student assessment and that local school districts were responsible for crafting local common assessments (LCAs) that were to be the primary vehicle of measurement. This LCA task stems from a historic distrust in Maine to centrally imposed educational policy (Ruff, Smith, & Miller, 2000). It also means that districts were facing the large task of crafting assessments at the same time the adolescent literacy project was proposed. None of the participating schools had made much progress on this task at the time the project began and many were scrambling (as were schools throughout the state) to “put something together.” Although this need and the work of the adolescent literacy project were related, school personnel did not immediately recognize the overlap between the project and the assessment mandate. Local concerns that disproportionately affect rural schools related to school consolidation, sudden resource unavailability and cutbacks, and policy compliance (see the section on rural schools below) further complicated the issue.

The second relevant reform strand in Maine was comprehensive school reform. Commissioner Albanese, whose later suggestion initiated the adolescent literacy effort, convened the ad hoc Maine Commission on Secondary Education in the mid 1990s. In 1998, that commission published *Promising Futures*, a voluntary framework for high school reform. Strongly influenced by the Coalition of Essential Schools philosophy—Coalition founders Ted and Nancy Sizer were two of only four non-Mainers involved in drafting *Promising Futures*—this framework was clearly located within the high school reform movement and the comprehensive school reform movement that emerged after *A Nation At Risk*. Since “[T]he Commission agreed on the importance of an overriding strategy for whole school change: no single core practice could make a significant difference alone, and they were embedded in one another and needed to be undertaken as a whole,” it recommended 15 integrated core practices (Donaldson, 2000, p.103) (see Appendix B).

Promising Futures’ primary purpose was to promote change in school structures and cultures. Though teaching and learning changes were implicit goals, recommended changes in these domains were not elaborated to the same degree as structural changes. Recognizing the importance of connecting to existing state initiatives and the limited explicit attention in *Promising Futures* to teaching and learning, one of the earliest documents produced for the adolescent literacy project was a worksheet clarifying how it aligned with *Promising Futures*, which itself has little to say about literacy. The word appears only once in Commissioner Albanese’s September 1998 cover letter to the 74-page document, identifying *Promising Futures* as part of a strategy “to elevate literacy to a level where Maine citizens are among the best educated in the world.”

Shortly after *Promising Futures* was published, MEDOE received permission to tie it into the new federally funded Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration project (CSRD). In 1999, and again in 2001 and 2002, dozens of Maine’s 140+ high schools applied to the state for federal funding to implement CSRD and, in the process, described their plans for pursuing several of the recommended core practices from *Promising Futures* (Hamann & Lane, 2003, 2004; Hamann, in press). Two of the project schools were among these applicants (one successfully, one not). By 2005, 33 Maine high schools had been awarded \$50,000 per year for three years through CSRD.⁵ As part of MEDOE, CISE had the double directive of promoting *Promising Futures* and overseeing the CSRD program. In 2002, Maine’s Mitchell Institute received \$10 million from the Gates Foundation to coordinate with CISE to further roll out *Promising Futures* under the Great Maine Schools Project.

⁵ For the first four years of CSRD implementation in Maine—1999-2000 through 2002-2003—Education Alliance staff provided technical assistance and evaluative support to CISE’s CSRD implementation, but those efforts were not coordinated with the implementation of the adolescent literacy project.

Promising Futures, CSRD, and the Great Maine Schools Project all pertain to this case study in several ways:

- (1) These three activities were points of emphasis and attention amongst potential supporters of the adolescent literacy project at the state level.
- (2) *Promising Futures* provided a change framework not inconsistent with the Adolescent Literacy Support Framework.
- (3) Several high schools in the literacy project's target county had received funding to implement CSRD and/or the Gates initiative. This meant, depending upon the site, that the work carried out as part of the adolescent literacy project needed to be coordinated with *Promising Futures* or that the prospective participating school chose not to join the project because of its involvement in the other initiatives.
- (4) The state and the Mitchell Institute created a *Promising Futures* support infrastructure that could be used as a vehicle for sharing the efforts of the participating schools with other Maine high schools.

By 2004, CISE, in collaboration with the Mitchell Institute, had begun to include work from the adolescent literacy project schools as an element of state-initiated professional development activities. In a December 2004 interview, Bob Simpson, CISE's liaison to the county-based adolescent literacy project, noted that CISE had added a position for an adolescent literacy specialist and suggested that promoting adolescent literacy would be a primary function of CISE in 2005 and 2006.

For her initial work for the project—the drafting of the Adolescent Literacy Support Framework—Meltzer (2001, 2002) examined adolescent literacy research within the context of educational reform (e.g., Davidson & Koppenhaver, 1993; Langer, 2000; O'Brien et al., 1995; Peterson, Caverly, Nicholson, O'Neal, & Cusenbary, 2000; Schoenbach et al., 1999) to identify the institutional and leadership capacities required to initiate and sustain school-wide literacy initiatives at the secondary level and develop quality teacher professional development in content-area reading. The intent of the project (and one thing that distinguished it from merely being a teacher professional development initiative) was that adolescent literacy support and development would be connected with school structures, policies, and procedures related to curriculum, instruction, assessment, leadership expectations, school vision and mission, and resource allocation. Therefore, content-area academic literacy support and development were seen as levers for whole school reform. This was a substantive shift for schools and partners previously conditioned to think of explicit reading instruction at the secondary level as primarily or exclusively remedial.

As a final note about whole school reform, it is worth considering the findings of Wolf and colleagues (2000) regarding exemplary implementation of the externally initiated Kentucky Education Reform Act. According to Wolf, the success of reform

implementation (success demonstrated by improved student achievement) was related to teachers' stance towards learning—specifically the willingness to try new strategies and to trust colleagues' efforts—and towards leadership. The county-based adolescent literacy project required teachers to undertake a great deal of learning and changes in practice, and it asked school and district leaders to create and support the conditions for such learning to take place. It follows that the planning and interactions between project partners would largely relate to the presence or absence of enabling conditions.

Rural Education

Maine is 1 of 12 states where the majority (74.8%) of students attend rural schools; Maine trails only Vermont as the state with the greatest percentage of rural public school enrollment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000b). Therefore, the traditional opportunities and challenges of rural education, including limited resources, less competitive teacher salaries, consolidation pressure, long distances between schools (with distance technology a feasible but limited option), a scarcity of credentialed teacher candidates, the out-migration of young adults for college and work, and intriguing prospects for place-based education, clearly apply to this case (Arnold, Newman, Gaddy, & Dean, 2005; Corbett, 2004; Donaldson, 1986; General Accounting Office, 2004; Jimerson, 2003; Mageean, Ruskin, & Sherwood, 2000; Robbins & Dyer, 2005).

According to Fan and Chen (1999), aggregate academic achievement outcomes for rural students are not noticeably different from those of suburban and urban students. Howley and Howley (2004) clarify that this similarity obscures important regional differences. Nationally, "rural" describes some of the highest performing districts in the country (in northwestern Connecticut, for example) as well as some of the weakest (e.g., central Appalachia). Arnold and colleagues (2005) note that definitions of rural education vary so much that depending on the definition used, the national tally of students in rural public schools varies from 1.1 to 11.6 million. Still, the educational challenges in rural Maine are sufficiently acute that Susan Collins (R-Maine) was one of the four senators to request that the federal General Accounting Office (2004) draft a report on the additional assistance and research needed to help small rural districts adjust adequately to the No Child Left Behind Act.

Maine can generally be divided into two parts: the southern region that is economically relatively healthy and gaining or holding population and the eastern, western, and northern regions that are economically and demographically in decline. Large swaths of rural Maine are seeing extraction industry jobs (e.g., logging) either dwindling or being restricted in number (e.g., fishing, lobstering), while paper mills, shoe factories, and other manufacturing plants continue to close. The county that hosted the adolescent literacy project had an unemployment rate twice the state average in 2002 (Margaret Chase Smith Center for Public Policy, 2003). Maine managed to grow by 3.8% between 1990 and 2000, but still ranked only 46th among the 50 states in proportional

population growth for the decade. Due to location, economic development patterns, and immigration patterns, Maine's population is comparatively less diverse than most other states. With the exception of Portland and Lewiston, and a modest Native American population in both the state and the county where the project took place, the vast majority of Maine's population is white, non-Hispanic, with multiple generation histories within the state.

The population of the project's target county is poorer and older than that of other counties in Maine. Population decline was about 4% between 1990 and 2000. Less than 14% of the 2000 population had lived outside the county five years earlier. The median age was over 40 and 80% of households had incomes of \$50,000 or less, with 64% making less than \$35,000. More than 20% of the population over age 25 had not completed high school (or earned a GED). The county's poverty rate was 80% higher than the state average and its usage rate for food stamps was more than 50% above state average (Margaret Chase Smith Center, 2003). The poverty and demographic decline had implications for school and municipal budgets. Literacy coach Ken Quincy's explanation for why one of the five project high schools decided it could not assume the costs of his continued services in the spring of 2005 is telling: "[That school] was very much on board. They were one of the very first places to approach me about continuing. But they're really having some serious impact from the local people now from layoffs, and they're just not willing to spend the money right now. It's that simple."

The literature on rural education consistently refers to the issue and impact of consolidation. Advocates for consolidation argue that merging small schools allows more comprehensive services and more efficient administration. Opponents of consolidation note that marginal communities tend to decline rapidly after one of their key points of local identity (i.e., the school) is eliminated (Lyson, 2002) and that the alleged economic savings of consolidation are rarely realized (Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999; Killeen & Sipple, 2000; Striefel, Foldes, & Holdman, 1991). Consolidation was a contested issue in the county at the time of the project. The two smallest high schools in the project struggled throughout the three years against arguments and pressures to close, which impacted the project in at least two ways. On the one hand, resisting consolidation was a more pressing concern than adolescent literacy, however reasonable the latter appeared to be. On the other, focusing on the project could end up supporting school and community resistance to consolidation. That is, favorable public attention to the adolescent literacy project countered the interpretation that a particular school was not worth sustaining on its own.

Another theme of the rural education literature is the reality of school isolation. Rural areas are thinly settled and thus schools are situated at a distance from each other. This distance makes joint professional development activities less attractive. A teacher's willingness to improve her capacity to attend to literacy instruction in her content area is affected if she must drive two hours to be part of the training. Distance learning and

communication technologies can partially remedy this, but such technologies are often not as successful or compelling as face-to-face interaction (Bernard et al., 2004). In the case of this project, distance learning technology installed at each school site through a grant being managed by the county consortium was not operational or reliable until well into the project and well after participants had become used to a different flow of project assistance and events on site at each school. The LAB and CRM-affiliated project staff won credibility through an extensive travel schedule that allowed professional development activities to occur on site as much as possible. As the project leader, Meltzer noted in an early report, “This difference between responsiveness to on-site versus mediated communication seems to relate to the value placed by rural educators on having ‘people come to them if they really care about us and our schools’.” Supporting a strategic level of on-site presence continues to be a challenge for the project.”

The rural education literature (and general literature regarding resource poor schools) highlights the issue of high teacher turnover and emergency credentialing (Holloway, 2002). One cause of this is the lower compensation rural teachers receive (Jimerson, 2003). Another is lack of adequate supply and the related hiring of less qualified teachers (Holloway, 2002). At the participating schools, for example, significant teacher turnover (up to 30% of the entire staff at one school each year of the project) at four of the five sites meant that the project needed to provide repeated opportunities for new teacher training. In addition, the schools found it difficult to find highly qualified teachers, and the superintendents in participating districts insisted that project-associated teacher professional development address this issue. This meant that a number of teachers at the participating schools had minimal teacher preparation or experience. Already stretched, these schools did not have formal mentoring programs for new teachers. Many of the teachers had not yet developed adequate planning, assessment, classroom management, and lesson/unit design skills. In 2005, Ken Quincy noted the project’s positive impact on some of these teachers: “There’s younger teachers who found the protocols and the planning templates extremely helpful, because their planning skills are weak. They’re not teachers. They’re non-traditional people coming into the teaching occupation from a different background. So for them they really found it very beneficial.”

Finally, Scribner (2003) suggests that rural high school teachers are more isolated than their suburban and urban counterparts. He posits that because they usually operate in small schools with even smaller departments, they are more dependent than other teachers on finding a professional community beyond their own school buildings. He also notes that there has been a relative paucity of research about rural high schooling and in particular about teacher learning and change in such settings.

Some Notes About Methodology

Crafted as an ethnographic case study of policy creation, implementation, and adjustment, this monograph triangulates qualitative data—interview, observational, and documentary—gathered through different methods. In keeping with an ethnographic framework, our study considers the varied understandings and strategies for inclusion and action among the heterogeneous *community* of partners who together shaped and implemented the project. It is important to note, however, that community is not being defined here as synonymous with a particular geographic space. In traditional anthropology, it was relatively safe to equate a community with a certain location, perhaps a village, and then to try to define the ways of that community by going to visit it. But as Michael Agar (2004) recently summarized, our world has become a network of “contingencies and connections” (p. 411). The ethnographic task here was to clarify who was welcome, by invitation or self-assertion, to become a contributing member of the multi-tiered mobilization that was the adolescent literacy project and to clarify how, under what identity, and why they participated. In essence, the ethnographic task was to depict the ways of the community of mobilizers. To observe and study this community required some on-site work in the target county—that is where Ken Quincy and Catherine Rivers worked, where Lenore Saxon traveled to monthly, etc.—but it also required observation of work happening elsewhere (e.g., at Maine Adolescent Literacy Council meetings) as well as other data collection strategies. Only 2 of the 11 individuals noted in the glossary at the beginning were based in the target county and much of the action described here did not transpire within its borders.

The study is grounded by substantial participant observation by the first author (Hamann) of Maine’s efforts to convert state-initiated high school reform frameworks into school-level change and substantial applied observation by the second (Meltzer). Meltzer was the project director who, since the project’s inception, was supported by the LAB contract to pursue a mobilization for literacy in these five high schools as design-based research (Design-Based Research Collective, 2003) while simultaneously providing limited technical assistance to the state of Maine on adolescent literacy.⁶ The coauthors thus bring different but complementary perspectives on the project to this case study. These vantage points are described in more detail below, followed by more information about the case development process.

Hamann had first-hand access to the Education Alliance’s leadership of the LAB contract and long-term familiarity with CISE and the “big picture” of Maine’s efforts to improve high schooling. Hamann began collaborating with CISE personnel in 2000 as they led Maine’s attempt to link *Promising Futures* implementation to the federal CSR program.

⁶ The Design-Based Research Collective (2003) defines design-based research as: “An emerging paradigm for the study of learning in context through the systematic design and study of instructional strategies and tools” (p. 5).

Hamann was coauthor of five formative evaluations of state-level CSRD implementation and the author of several research papers about MEDOE-based educators' promotion of school-level high school reform. In those roles he has made more than 80 days' worth of site visits to more than 25 Maine high schools and observed and examined the documentary record of school/state department of education interaction in relation to implementing *Promising Futures* (Hamann & Lane, 2004; Hamann, in press). As part of these efforts, he worked at length with Bob Simpson of CISE, with other CISE personnel, and with other MEDOE-based educational managers, including visiting high schools with them and co-presenting at meetings convened by the U.S. Department of Education. He was well positioned to see that adolescent literacy was not a significant element in the state's initial roll out of *Promising Futures* and how, over the course of the county adolescent literacy project, CISE personnel and Maine's education commissioners changed their perspective.

In March 2004, Hamann visited the target county to meet key local supporters of the project and to see the 20+ teachers who had participated in the project's advanced training in adolescent literacy offered in the summer of 2003 and the 2003-04 academic year by the University of Maine present their action research. He subsequently attended two meetings of the Adolescent Literacy Project Advisory Council and co-presented with the county consortium director and one of the participating teachers at the 2004 National Rural Education Association annual convention. In the winter of 2005 he also conducted lengthy interviews with seven key project partners.

Meltzer joined Hamann during the March 2004 site visit, but, for her, those three days constituted just a tiny portion of the time she has spent in the county. Between 2001 and 2005, Meltzer visited the five project schools at least twice a year, as well as district offices, the county consortium office, the two University of Maine campuses that supported the project, and other sites where the project coordination work was carried out. She kept field notes on each of these visits, as well as copies of meeting agendas and other documents. Between visits, she kept in touch with school-based educators and project partners by e-mail and telephone. She started the Adolescent Literacy Project Advisory Council in 2002 to support and sustain the project (a strategy that also put key project partners in direct communication with each other) and drafted summary notes for all nine meetings of the council. Meltzer participated in monthly planning and debriefing meetings with Lenore Saxon, the New Hampshire-based former teacher who provided on-site technical assistance to the school teams from the beginning of the project and participated in numerous ad hoc planning and strategy meetings with project partners at the state, university, county, and local levels. Her ledger of activity highlights the variety of partnerships involved in this project and thus provides a wealth of data.

For this study Hamann reviewed a large body of project-associated documentation. This review included hundreds of pages of e-mails, planning meeting agendas, grant proposals, updated annual plans, Web sites, and other pertinent policy documents. In

articulating an agenda for the anthropology of policy, Shore and Wright (1997) identify policy documents as a key and traditionally underused data source. Nader (1972) and Eisenhart (2001) also suggest that these types of documents can be key sources of insight regarding how situations are understood and what actions are deemed appropriate when studying management and education.

Our purpose in collecting and reviewing these data was to discover the roles, motivations, timeline, and interpretation of activities of the diverse partners who collaborated in various ways to support the adolescent literacy project. Hamann produced intermediary syntheses related to these topics and then asked Meltzer to review them and respond to questions that arose in the analysis. Meltzer did so as one closely familiar with the project and as one who had studied adolescent literacy in great depth. She was able to provide feedback on chronology, context, and emphasis, as well as on project issues and challenges. Over the course of the project, Meltzer also developed relationships with Maine's higher education project partners, and with the regional and local partners in the project. These partners continually provided input and feedback that Meltzer used to adapt project design, responsiveness, and implementation.

Hamann triangulated Meltzer's responses with data from other sources to improve the analyses and interpretations. This process was repeated in an iterative fashion throughout the development of the case study to assure accuracy of included facts, what Maxwell (1992) calls descriptive and interpretive validity.

As noted, both authors can claim close familiarity with some of the partners in this initiative. In addition to being a key aspect of the project's viability, this familiarity helped assure the comprehensiveness of the data set. Guba and Lincoln (1994) note that the information a qualitative researcher can gather is inextricably intertwined with the relationship between the researcher and the subjects (i.e., individuals or groups) of study. The more familiar the relationship is, the more nuanced the available data will be, and the more likely they will reveal not only the facts but also opinions, interpretations, goals, and guiding logics. Toma (2000) asserts that by illustrating one's bias regarding a topic (in our case an interest in promoting adolescent literacy and improving educational prospects in an economically depressed region), one can solicit more authentic expressions of interest and intent on the part of those others involved. Given that those are essential data of interest in this case study, this was determined to be a useful strategy.⁷

⁷ Toma (2000) has suggested that 'insider' status can be a crucial asset to qualitative research because the insider has access to the conversations, opinions, articulated strategies, and habits of work of other insiders. Yet our insider status might make some readers wonder about our rendition. Following Erickson's (1984) dictum regarding what makes the ethnography of schooling ethnographic, we quite consciously try to put readers in a position to scrutinize our claims, that is here is our evidence; here is how we gathered it; this is why we think our interpretations are on target. Also per Erickson, we know our view is partial and that there are data we did not gather and interpretive lenses we did not use (wittingly or unwittingly). We think our interpretations best fit the available data, but we make such a claim provisionally.

III. Planning: The First Partners (Summer 2000 – February 2002)

In this section we introduce each of the initial project partners and describe the logic for their participation in the adolescent literacy project. We first describe how the partners' institutional goals, geographic scope, size, and proximity to the county varied. These introductions are followed by a chronology of the initial mobilization that led to the designation of the county as the project site in the autumn of 2001 and to the first site visits and professional development activities. All but one of the institutions that ultimately partnered to launch and sustain the county-level adolescent literacy project existed prior to the project's launch. The sole exception was the Adolescent Literacy Project Advisory Council, created in 2002.

A. A Profile of the Initial Partners

For clarity, the many partners associated with the project are grouped here under three headings: (1) out-of-state partners (i.e., The Education Alliance at Brown University and the Center for Resource Management); (2) state-level Maine partners (i.e., the Maine Department of Education, the Center for Inquiry in Secondary Education, the University of Maine; and (3) county and local partners (i.e., the county consortium and the county schools/districts).

Out-of State Partners: The Education Alliance and The Center for Resource Management

The Adolescent Literacy Project was initially suggested in the summer of 2000 as one of several program possibilities in a letter of support from Maine's Commissioner Albanese. Albanese drafted this letter to support The Education Alliance's bid for the federal Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory contract. At that time, The Education Alliance was finishing the previous 5-year LAB contract. In the carrying out of the first contract's work, from 1996 to 2000, the Alliance and the Center for Resource Management (CRM) had built a substantive and successful partnership with each other and with MEDOE. That record helps explain why Commissioner Albanese offered his enthusiastic support for the next 5-year contract. In the new technical proposal, CRM was identified as a full partner in the adolescent literacy work to be carried out in Maine and as a full partner in another LAB project addressing urban high school reform.

At the time of the proposal in 2000 and since, The Alliance has identified that its work "promotes educational change to provide all students equitable opportunities to succeed. We advocate for populations whose access to excellent education has been limited or denied" (from: <http://www.alliance.brown.edu>, accessed 6/2/04). Although affiliated with Brown University, The Alliance is a self-supporting department that uses grants (primarily from the federal government) to support a range of applied research

and technical assistance projects. The Alliance employs about 70 people and, for the duration of the period discussed in this case study, the majority of its financial support came from the LAB contract. Thus the bulk of its work was carried out in the six New England states, plus New York, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

In addition to linking The Education Alliance, CRM, and MEDOE, the regional laboratory contract included three other salient expectations. First, it expected recipients to focus attention on regional needs. Therefore, acting in response to the commissioner's expression of interest and stated need was in line with contractual expectations as well as organizational interest. Second, the contract emphasized improvement of low-performing schools, a fact Maine's commissioner would have known when he selected the rural county as the intervention site (as opposed to selecting already successful sites that might lend themselves to quickly becoming demonstration sites). Third, the LAB contract included expectations of dissemination. Both the federal Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) and its successor, the Institute for Educational Sciences (IES), expected the adolescent literacy project to be concurrently implemented and studied and for findings to be shared. This research expectation was known and accepted by project partners from the very beginning, but it was one way in which the Alliance's and CRM's project-related tasks differed from those of other partners.

Initially, The Education Alliance positioned the Adolescent Literacy Project as one of five LAB-funded efforts contributing to a larger secondary school redesign initiative. That framing changed, however, when The Alliance elected to consolidate the LAB work and focus resources on those projects, including the adolescent literacy project, which seemed to be most promising. As the adolescent literacy initiative was reaching its peak, The Alliance described it on its Web site: "In collaboration with [CISE] in Maine and CRM, The Education Alliance continues to produce research-based resources to provide guidelines for planning implementing and sustaining adolescent literacy initiatives at the secondary level; and to support professional development by illustrating the application of effective secondary literacy classroom practices in subject areas. The emphasis in this project will be to disseminate useful research-based materials in Maine and analyze their application for wider dissemination." (retrieved on June 2, 2004, from: <http://www.alliance.brown.edu/topics/literacy.shtml>)

CRM has a specific focus on adolescent literacy, standards-based curriculum and instruction, and data-driven decision making. More specifically, they provide "research, evaluation, professional development, data management, and data warehousing products and services to education agencies at national, state, and local levels." Their Web site cites their mission as follows:

We are committed to the goal of high standards for all students, and for more than twenty years have played a leadership role in education reform initiatives...CRM helps schools achieve equity for all students, accountability for results, and continuous improvement through the

application of research-based knowledge, sustained professional development, cutting-edge technology, and collaborative partnerships. (retrieved on June 2, 2004, from <http://www.crminc.com/About.aspx>)

During the establishment phase of the project, Meltzer, the project leader and a staff member at CRM, was able to build on the precedent of work carried out by others under the label “LAB at Brown.” Because of the positive history of work carried out under that banner by CRM and Education Alliance-based staff, being from the “LAB at Brown” provided entry to meetings and conversations with partners at multiple levels—state, county, and university. As a project partner would later reflect: “The LAB was a different type of entity and, as such, one not in competition with them in any way. That meant that Maine educators who may have been hesitant to work with each other, because they were competitors for resources, for example, did not bring their skepticism to working with the LAB.” That does not mean all prospective partners were eager to play a role in the project, only that the institutional identity under which the project leader and later the school implementation coach came into the target county was not viewed as threatening competition.

During the project, CRM incorporated adolescent literacy into many of their ongoing projects and made further capacity in this area an organizational priority. In 2004 and 2005, state-level and local-level partners in Maine contracted with CRM for additional work related to adolescent literacy. The project director was CRM-based and other CRM staff assisted with research and administrative aspects of the project. Various Education Alliance staff were involved in the project through LAB contract management, quality assurance, applied research, and development of the internet-based *Adolescent Literacy in the Content Areas* spotlight on The Knowledge Loom (<http://knowledgeloom.org/adlit>). Upon the project director’s recommendation, The Education Alliance hired Lenore Saxon, an independent consultant with a background in reading, to be the school implementation coach who delivered the technical assistance to school sites and, later, Ken Quimby, who played the role of literacy coach during the Fall of 2004.

Initial State-Level Partners

The Maine-based partners in the initiative were from CISE and other more traditionally structured parts of MEDOE, the University of Maine, the county consortium, and the participating high schools and districts within the county. MEDOE/CISE and the University of Maine are described below and the county consortium and the districts and schools are described under the heading “local partners” which follows.

At the time the adolescent literacy project began, leadership at MEDOE was atypically stable for a state department of education. That stability was manifest in the consistency of vision and focus on high school improvement (Hamann, in press). During Commissioner Albanese’s tenure, *Promising Futures* had been commissioned, published, and implemented with some creative targeting of funds as a support structure for high school reform. CSRD funds had been reserved for high schools and

tied to *Promising Futures* through a federal waiver (Hamann & Lane, 2003, 2004). The commissioner had also established two centers—the Center for Inquiry on Secondary Education (CISE) and the Center for Inquiry on Literacy (CIL)—that were part of MEDOE, but outside MEDOE’s traditional structure as center staff reported directly to the commissioner. These centers were housed at the MEDOE and jointly staffed by MEDOE employees and independent consultants. Their funding was limited but independent from the rest of MEDOE, an arrangement intended to make them more responsive and flexible to school needs and which permitted later actions taken by the MEDOE on behalf of the adolescent literacy project. CISE, the primary partner assigned by the commissioner to work with project staff, was funded by the MEDOE through independent non-profit organizations (initially the Maine Math and Science Alliance, then the Mitchell Institute).

The MEDOE also supported the adolescent literacy project through assistance, advocacy, dissemination, awareness, and funding using the regional liaison structure. From the beginning, Tom Jeffers, the representative for the target county, was very helpful in securing support, policy changes, and resources and ensuring coherence between the project and other initiatives, such as the local comprehensive assessment development mentioned earlier. He was in frequent contact with the director of the county consortium, Catherine Rivers, and, in 2004, was a content-area mentor at the *Promising Futures* Summer Academy that focused on adolescent literacy.

Over time, as the adolescent literacy project became better known, other MEDOE staffers with content-area portfolios worked with CISE and CIL to support the project. This broadening of support within MEDOE was complemented by the movement of former MEDOE staffers to other positions from which they advocated for the project. For example, a former CISE staff person who headed a school that adopted *Promising Futures* early became the director of the Great Maine School Project, a vantage point from which she supported a focus on adolescent literacy as an enhancement of the *Promising Futures* framework. Nonetheless, as measured by time contributed or actions taken on the project’s behalf, it was Bob Simpson and other CISE staff who were the primary project partners at the state government level.

The University of Maine system was also a kind of state-level partner, though it straddled national, state, and local spheres through its participation in national initiatives like the National Writing Project and its operation of campuses within and near the target county’s boundaries. One of its faculty members, Jeff Wilhelm, was a nationally prominent adolescent literacy expert. Because only one campus in the system offers doctoral degrees and only two offer masters’ degrees, arranging graduate level coursework for the adolescent literacy project required collaborating with campuses beyond the county borders. However, the regional campus within the county could support the project as a meeting site and resource in other ways, even though it could not offer graduate level courses. That campus, like several others in the University of

Maine system, operated as a semi-independent college and supported the offices of the county consortium (described below). The relationship between the regional branch of the university and the consortium varied over the life of the project depending on a host of variables including changes in college personnel and perceived resource and mission congruence or conflict on both sides. The role of the local campus as a partner in the project also changed as its role in relation to the University of Maine's flagship campus was negotiated during a state university system reorganization taking place simultaneously with project implementation. Still, representatives of the education department at both campuses were members of the project advisory council and participants in pieces of the applied research study.

The flagship University of Maine campus was the primary higher education partner in developing the project-associated teacher professional development, notably the graduate courses that occurred each summer (2002, 2003, 2004) and extended well into the following academic year. (The course is currently scheduled to be offered again in the 2005-2006 school year and beyond.) This campus had already hosted a piece of the National Writing Project and thus had created a mechanism for offering summer institutes at the College of Education. In addition, administrators at this campus provided tuition relief for teachers from schools participating in the project. Participating in the project helped the university realize its outreach agenda. It also allowed Jeff Wilhelm and his doctoral student, Theresa Cooper, to work with the project director to co-develop an innovative, university-sponsored, teacher professional development approach to address the state wide vacuum of content-area reading courses directed at middle and high school teachers. The fact that the local adolescent literacy project catalyzed the filling of a statewide need returns us to the concurrently local and systemic nature of this project.

Local Partners

The county consortium was the key local partner for the project. This was true both institutionally and because of the individual efforts of its staff, particularly its director. Institutionally, the consortium handled many of the logistic elements of the initiative, ranging from providing the project director with local office space to compensating professional development providers and content-area teacher mentors. As one faculty member explained:

“I don't know how I was paid. I mean, I got my money from... [pause]...I did get paid, through the [county consortium], so I'm no sure how they... [pause]... where that money came from. It came from tuition—there was a tuition agreement between [county consortium] and the university.”

Physically housed on the local university campus, “the county consortium is a partnership of the school districts of the county, the local branch of the state university, and the county technical college. It was founded by the Superintendents of Schools

in 1994 with the goal of helping to improve the schools in the county” (adapted from the consortium Web site, accessed 6/2/04). The county consortium’s staffing varied during the project depending on grant funding, although its director, Catherine Rivers, remained constant throughout the life of the project. At its peak, the consortium staff consisted of Rivers, a curriculum coordinator (Ken Quincy), a technology director, and a secretary, but for much of the project the consortium had only Rivers on full-time payroll. She reported monthly to the county’s superintendents.

While the project was being designed and planned, Rivers was the new director of the county consortium. Previously, she had held a wide range of educational positions in two different districts in the county, most recently as one of the district’s superintendents. She also had a background as a reading specialist. Her goal was to advocate for and bring quality professional development and resources to the schools in the county and to convene the schools to collaborate on various projects. Rivers intentionally spent a lot of time attending meetings outside of the county to raise her awareness of what was happening elsewhere in the state and identify opportunities to bring back to county schools. Her belief that whenever more than one school was involved there were greater chances for funding and sustainability neatly complemented other partners’ rationales for promoting a multi-school project design.

When Rivers was first approached by Bob Simpson and Julie Meltzer to support the nascent project, she was coordinating technology professional development and county participation in several state-funded initiatives aimed at elementary schools. At that time, she was also writing a large grant with the school districts to bring distance learning technology and training to the county. Rivers perceived the proposed adolescent literacy project as good for local schools as it gave her a substantive premise through which to connect with county high schools, something she had not yet found. She wanted the consortium to be responsible for bringing the project to the county. As perhaps this brief portrayal of her “multiple hats” suggests, Rivers was adroit as an intermediary, and her direct contributions to the project ranged from logistic (e.g., arranging meeting spaces for project coordination activities), to content-oriented (e.g., using her background in reading and her learning from the project to teach a ten-week professional development class in 2005), to strategic (partnering with others to train content area mentor teachers within the county).

At the time of the project, the county where the project took place had fewer than ten high schools, all but one of which were affiliated with the county consortium. (Given the geography of the target county the one nonaffiliated high school is closer to resources in a neighboring county and pursues professional development in collaboration with schools there.) The county had approximately a dozen local school districts ranging in size from 1-5 schools. Staffing at the district level varied and was impacted by pressures for consolidation, external grant funding, and internal resource limitations. During the three years of project implementation in the schools, district

personnel shifted regularly—in seven of the districts the superintendency changed in some way (e.g., shift from full to part time; new person; combined position with the high school principal role). The high schools ranged in size from 75-300 students and were fed by 1 to 4 primary schools. In some districts the high school principal had large discretion over operations, program, and policy; in others, it was the superintendent who made such decisions. Collectively, the five schools that participated in the project enrolled 800 high school students.

Although many within and beyond the county shared an interest in supporting the target county's development, typically there had been low participation by local high schools in MEDOE-supported high school initiatives that were not locally focused (e.g., the *Promising Futures/CSRD* program). It is likely that few, if any, of the local partners involved with this project would have participated had it not been a multi-school and geographically focused project. County schools were historically skeptical of the chance to peripherally participate in initiatives that seemed to be more focused elsewhere, as the promised level of support that typically accompanied proposed projects rarely materialized due to lack of resources to sustain things locally and the distances involved. This factor raises several issues about viability, geographic entities, enlightened self-interest, and synergy when addressing rural school reform agendas.

B. From An Initial Idea to An Action Plan

Figure 3.1—Significant Events

Summer 2000 — Funding for the Adolescent Literacy Project first sought as part of a much larger proposal for the federal Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory (LAB) contract. The Education Alliance at Brown University and the Center for Resource Management (CRM) in New Hampshire are proposed as co-leaders of the effort.

December 2000 — The LAB contract is obtained.

Spring 2001 — The Adolescent Literacy Support Framework (Meltzer, 2001) becomes the framework used for designing project components and measuring project progress. The following year, the LAB publishes *Adolescent Literacy Resources: Linking Research and Practice* (Meltzer, 2002), which annotates some of the research that grounds the framework.

Spring - Summer 2001 — Initial planning meetings are held with staff at the MEDOE Center for Inquiry on Secondary Education (CISE).

October 2001 — Commissioner Albanese designates a rural county as the site for the proposed adolescent literacy initiative.

November 2001 - January 2002 —The details of the county-level initiative are shaped in four key planning meetings.

In September 2000, The Education Alliance submitted the Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory proposal. That proposal involved more than 20 applied research and technical assistance projects and had been coauthored by staff at the Education Alliance and staff from partner organizations, including CRM. (Both authors contributed to the drafting of that proposal.) The proposed work was to be carried out across the nation, but primarily in the Northeast and Islands Region—that is, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, New York, and New England, including Maine. The submitted proposal (The Education Alliance, 2000) described plans to “develop research-based products that assist secondary schools to implement and sustain a systemic focus on content area literacy and support professional development of teachers.” The technical proposal also stated that Alliance and CRM staff would “collect and share information from research and practice on content-area literacy instruction for secondary students” (p. 55) and that schools in Maine would be technical assistance implementation sites.

The proposal included a letter of support from Duke Albanese, then Maine’s commissioner of education, who wrote that the MEDOE would be pleased to collaborate with The Education Alliance on “continuing to pursue our high school development agenda with the supportive input of our Center for Inquiry in Secondary Education” and “expand[ing] our development work around literacy with the Department’s Center for Inquiry on Literacy, especially as it relates to disadvantaged students in low-performing schools” (p. 186c). In December 2000 word came that the proposal had been accepted by OERI. The technical proposal text and Albanese’s letter of support were the first written manifestations of what would subsequently become the county-level adolescent literacy initiative. No schools, or even regions within Maine, had yet been identified for the intervention. Regarding the commissioner’s understanding at that time of the project he had just helped precipitate, a CISE staffer later recounted:

You know, I don’t think the commissioner, when he... shared with the LAB that he thought this was a priority of Maine... I don’t believe it was any deep thought-out process. I think it was an off-the-cuff, “Gee, we gotta do something about literacy in our schools.” No plan. So there were no expectations from the commissioner when he basically said [to CISE], you know, “Here’s an opportunity. I don’t know if it’s something you want to engage in or not. I’ll leave that up to you.”

The first funded year of the adolescent literacy project has been aptly characterized as a planning, development, and design period. This was true in terms of preparation for the eventual on-site project and the development of research-based tools that would support on-site implementation. During year one, project staff engaged in an intensive review of the extant research on adolescent literacy. The project leader synthesized the review into the Adolescent Literacy Support Framework (Meltzer, 2001), authored the book *Adolescent Literacy Resources: Linking Research and Practice* (Meltzer, 2002), and provided the content for the *Adolescent Literacy in the Content Areas* “spotlight” on the Knowledge Loom professional development Web site, launched in the fall of 2001 (see <http://knowledgeloom.org/adlit>; accessed 3/20/05).

The Knowledge Loom, another project supported by the LAB contract, “spotlights” tools, research, school-based stories, and policy related to “hot topics” in education. At the time, content-area literacy at the secondary level was perceived by the Knowledge Loom development team to be such a topic. The development of the *Adolescent Literacy in the Content Areas* spotlight was a team effort co-led by CRM and Education Alliance staff. The content was externally reviewed by experts in the field. In addition, the development team held a series of technical assistance workshops to introduce the Adolescent Literacy Support Framework (Meltzer, 2001) as well as how to use the spotlight’s interactive tools, information, and examples to infuse literacy development into content-area learning. These piloting workshops were conducted nationally, regionally, and inside and outside the project’s target county at the end of 2001 and in the spring and fall of 2002. In Maine, workshops inside and outside the county were co-sponsored with partners—both CISE and the county consortium. The Web site thus joined the book (Meltzer, 2002) and the framework as tools available to teachers at the participating schools.

The framework subsequently guided Meltzer’s planning, design of technical assistance, and staff implementation of the county-level initiative. In later years, the framework also served as a communication tool for technical assistance on adolescent literacy throughout Maine, served as the basis for several other organizations’ design efforts, and was recognized nationally by educators working on this issue. While clearly welcomed, neither partner organization had anticipated such a favorable reception when the framework was being developed. This enthusiasm serves as one indicator of how adolescent literacy became a “hotter” topic nationally than it had been at the beginning of the project.

Concurrent with this framework development, Meltzer and others had several meetings with MEDOE-based educators in Maine to plan the technical assistance implementation. Meltzer summarized these meetings in the July 2001 quarterly report to OERI:

Two planning meetings (April and June 2001) and additional phone/email contact with the Maine Department of Education staff members who run the Center for Inquiry into Secondary Education in Maine, laid further groundwork for both the research project and the statewide focus on adolescent literacy which will begin in the fall of 2001. Through CISE staff, [the Commissioner] was updated about the project, which was established because adolescent literacy is one of his priorities. The Commissioner provided direction and input which is being incorporated into planning. We have also worked hard to coordinate the work with other secondary initiatives underway in Maine.

The reception from educators at CISE was varied and often cautious at this stage. This cautiousness is worth highlighting. It indicates that, without final sites selected, it may have been hard to take the project seriously. The small CISE team already felt overwhelmed. They saw the project as something that had been “passed off to them”

by the commissioner because he “trusted them” and because they were the ones responsible for high school reform so “it fell in their territory.” Initially, however, it felt like an extra task added to an already busy agenda.

During 2001-2002, The Education Alliance staff were also involved in documenting CISE staff’s interaction with high school educators across Maine, particularly with regard to the federal CSR program (Hamann & Lane, 2003, 2004); in that documented interaction there was very little reference to adolescent literacy generally or the proposed project specifically. The one CISE staff person who initially seemed confident and enthusiastic about the project (a staffer with a strong combined English Language Arts and curriculum background) left to take another position in the summer of 2001. Her position remained vacant for several months. The person who filled her position was not designated to be part of the CISE team. CISE’s initial hesitancy contrasts with the attitudes of these same CISE-based educators who, with time to better learn and understand the project, became enthusiastic advocates, incorporating its insights and implications into trainings, requests for proposals, and planning. In a December 2004 interview, Bob Simpson, CISE’s liaison to the project, remembered that in 2001, “I think adolescent literacy was viewed as outside of our [CISE] agenda, not as a part of the agenda.” He then noted that three years later,

I think it’s viewed as one of the major pieces of our agenda, particularly a major piece of our future agenda. I think the fact that our summer academy, which is really our premiere professional development vehicle here in the state, moved from a conversation about whole-school reform and multiple initiatives in which to change the school, to a focus on adolescent literacy and developing school-wide literacy... I think [this] speaks volumes as to the change in perception.

In the autumn of 2001, Commissioner Albanese decided that the adolescent literacy project’s field implementation would be focused in a single, high need, rural county that had produced one of the weakest educational records in the state. One explanation he offered was that this county had not had a lot of the high quality, on-site professional development that would be “good for them to get.” Another was that if a program could be shown to work in the target county then surely it could work elsewhere in Maine. Three years into the project, this latter characterization was still remembered as pejorative and was resented by several county educators who were involved with the project.

The autumn 2001 site decision was communicated to the CISE team and others in MEDOE and viewed somewhat skeptically in both quarters. As Bob Simpson recalled,

[There was a sense that the target county] had received a lot of resources and hadn’t done anything constructive with them anyway, so why would you want to put more resources in there? And I think from the CISE perspective is... we had our own agenda—CSR and looking at

high school reform as a whole—and why would we want to invest any of our limited staff resources into this particular project? In fact, there was great reluctance to do that...I was counseled not to do that.”

Nonetheless, the commissioner had designated the particular county as the site of the project. Bob Simpson of CISE then called a meeting, the first of a series of four critical meetings that occurred during the fall of 2001 and the early winter of 2002. This meeting occurred in November 2001, in Bangor, and involved Meltzer, Simpson, Catherine Rivers of the county consortium, and another MEDOE staffer who, through an earlier grant from the Gates Foundation, was working to promote the technology literacy of administrators in the county. Highlighting the variation in initial receptivity to the project, Catherine Rivers later recalled, “Julie presented the project very well but I could tell she felt she had to convince me...I knew this would be a good project for us and if Brown wanted to work with us, I was determined that it was going to happen. So she really didn’t need to convince me.” Rivers response echoed that of the university partners who, in contrast with other partners, shared literacy expertise, and were eager to get on board with the proposed adolescent literacy initiative.

The second key meeting took place at a school in the county in December 2001. It was Meltzer’s first visit there. At this meeting, she met with most of the superintendents and some of the high school principals from the districts that were served by the consortium. This meeting occurred in the afternoon following an already scheduled morning technology leadership workshop arranged by a MEDOE staffer that included a presentation of the Knowledge Loom Web site. The Web site was presented as a tool that educational leaders could use to find information about a variety of educational issues (including adolescent literacy) and to demonstrate the quality of the technical assistance the LAB would be providing. In the afternoon, superintendents listened to the presentation of the project and made a list of conditions for their participation.

Schools had to agree not only to participate in the project over the next three years, but also to participate in the applied research study required under the LAB contract as a component of the project. The superintendents requested that:

- There be no extra assessment involved for students because of the project
- Teacher professional development be provided at a reasonable cost *within the county* and that it be practical—“things teachers can really use, you know, not university professors spouting a lot of theory”
- This project help with teacher credentialing
- Project staff work on-site at schools (as opposed to a centralized location that would mean lots of extra driving time for teachers)
- Principals not have to take on any extra work as a result of having the project at their school

From the beginning, the superintendents viewed the project as a potential positive, but also as extra work. There were clearly mixed feelings about Brown University (stereotyped as a rich private university that wants “to come look at us and tell us what to do”); participating in a research project; having to provide release time for the teachers to convene; and the lack of direct resources (i.e., funds) from the project. In addition, they were skeptical of the commissioner’s reasons for sending the project to the county (i.e., caring about the quality of teacher professional development in the county) and doubted that the state would actually provide a literacy coach for the project through the county professional development consortium (an idea that was part of the project pitch). As one of the superintendents later told Meltzer: “We figured we gave you an earful. If you listened and did something and actually came back, we would think about signing on.”

The third key meeting took place at the capital in Augusta in January 2002. It was attended by Commissioner Albanese, Meltzer, Rivers, Simpson, Jeffers, a staff member from the CIL (CIL addressed K-5 literacy needs statewide), and a staff member from the Adult Basic Education program who worked and lived in the target county. At that meeting, Commissioner Albanese said that the state would fund an adolescent literacy coach who would work with teachers and support change efforts at all of the project schools. (This person was separate from the school implementation coach supported throughout the project by the LAB at Brown to work with the teams at each school to develop, implement, and monitor their literacy action plans.) The literacy coach would be an additional staff person at the county consortium and would have expertise in reading and literacy development at the secondary level. The idea for this coach was to work directly with teachers and assist with follow-through at schools throughout the project. This person would work approximately 3-4 days per month at each school and be the local project liaison. Various ideas for how to structure this position were discussed at the meeting—it could be grant funded, a *distinguished educator* position, or an adjunct CISE staff member working on site in the county or supported by the anticipated increase in state funding to regional consortia. No consensus was reached at the meeting on how this position would be funded and ultimately it never was. However, MEDOE did substantively support the project in a variety of other ways that were less region-specific.

The fourth key meeting involved Meltzer, Rivers, and faculty members, including Jeff Wilhelm and the dean at the University of Maine. Previous discussions and preliminary design meetings had occurred between Meltzer and faculty members. At the meeting with the dean, it was agreed that the College of Education would add two new connected graduate courses that would be offered that summer and through four follow-up classes throughout the academic year. The courses would meet in the county (at another campus of the university system) under the auspices of the National Writing Project. Formal course proposal and approval would take place over the following year and then they could become permanent program additions. Meltzer would work with

the graduate outreach coordinator and the state to get approval for these courses as content-area certification courses (this task was beyond the purview of the university). The university would give a tuition rebate to the schools from the county whose teachers enrolled in the course. This arrangement would be handled through the county consortium, which would contract directly with the Writing Project to provide the first round of the summer institute and follow-up sessions throughout the 2002-2003 school year.

Rivers agreed that she would work with the state to jointly support the course and the funding of content-area teacher mentors to ensure applicability to teachers across the curriculum. At this meeting it was reiterated that the professional development would be relevant to the needs of content-area classroom teachers, not just teachers of English language arts. Meltzer agreed to co-design and co-teach the course with the university faculty to ensure it was well aligned with the project and that follow up at the school sites was coherent for teachers. The university would consider the teaching of the course in following years as part of faculty course loads as long as enrollment for the course was steady. After the first summer, the course would be open to teachers throughout the state. This was a significant amount to accomplish with one meeting and all parties honored their various commitments. After this fourth meeting, everything was in place for Meltzer and Rivers to go back to superintendents in the target county and recruit schools to participate.

IV. Mobilization: The Plan Becomes a Full-fledged Project (February 2002- June 2003)

This section describes the first phases of the project implementation at the school level through the LAB Board of Governors' meeting in Portland 15 months later. This phase of the project involved inviting eligible schools to participate, developing the University of Maine's new graduate courses, and monthly on-site technical assistance sessions facilitated by Lenore Saxon, the New Hampshire-based school implementation coach hired by The Education Alliance. This period also spans a change in commissioners at the state level.

Figure 4.1: Significant Events

April 2002—Monthly on-site meetings at four participating high schools are initiated.

June 2002—The Adolescent Literacy Project Advisory Council meets for the first time.

August 2002—The intensive component of the newly created 6-credit graduate teacher professional development course on adolescent literacy takes place.

September 2002—A fifth school joins the project.

Fall 2002—The project advisory council meets in September and November.

October 2002—The county consortium hires a full-time curriculum coordinator, Ken Quincy. He will serve as the local liaison for the project. The county consortium also hires Lenore Saxon to provide additional teacher professional development in content-area reading (beyond what the LAB contract supports).

February 2003—A meeting of the project advisory council considers possible tie ins between the county-level adolescent literacy project and other statewide secondary school initiatives.

February 2003—With a change in governors, Commissioner Albanese leaves his office after eight years of service. The new commissioner, Sue Gendron, is a former state superintendent of the year and kindergarten teacher. CISE continues as the main state-level project liaison.

May 2003—Project partners plan for the June Regional Educational Laboratory Board of Governors meeting in Portland that features the adolescent literacy project.

A. Getting the Schools On Board—Partner Roles in School-level Decisions to Participate

Meltzer and Rivers followed up on the December 2001 conversations with superintendents from the county during the winter and early spring of 2002. A series of on-site meetings were held that focused on recruiting schools for the technical assistance project. Meltzer shared information about the project, including the requirements and benefits of participation and a description of how the project aligned with Maine's *Promising Futures* initiative. This information was repeated at group and individual meetings held by the county consortium. Efforts were necessarily nuanced, as the goal was to not only broker a formal agreement with school and district leaders but also to successfully engage the teachers who would become members of the literacy teams. The superintendents of three schools signed on after additional presentations and follow-up phone calls to the project leader. Three other schools asked project staff to make further on-site visits and engage in additional conversations. One of these would sign on and then withdraw over the summer. Another high school (which became the fifth site) signed on at the end of August at the urging of the superintendent who saw the project as an opportunity to focus on instructional improvement at the high school level. Because this fifth high school started "late" it did not have the benefit of a team of teachers who had participated in the 2002 University of Maine summer class. In addition, the school's principal and teachers were not initially supportive of the project because the decision to participate was made by the new superintendent.

Securing school-based ownership of the project at all sites required ongoing negotiation with teachers and administrators throughout the 2002-03 academic year. While the dynamics of how each school came to participate in the adolescent literacy design study is not the focus of this paper, it is worth noting that the five schools that decided to participate varied in size, location, and decision-making processes (even though all were small). Because they varied, the strategies they pursued to participate in the project also varied.

The larger policy context for deciding to participate was complex. Prior to this project there were no significant educational initiatives pursued collaboratively among county high schools and few individual school-based initiatives. However, by 2002, high schools that agreed to participate had been or were about to be involved in a sudden flurry of externally-based instructional improvement efforts. These would include participation in CSRD implementation or grant writing (two of the five participating schools); a place-based education project sponsored by the Rural Education Trust (one participating school); a 5-school collaborative proposal through the Great Maine Schools Project (four of the five participating schools); the statewide technology initiative (two of the five participating schools); and CISE's *Promising Futures* Summer Academy (two participating schools sent teams the first summer of the project). In addition, during the spring of 2002, new statewide graduation requirements (Chapter 127) were considered by the legislature, the deadline for the development of local

comprehensive assessment plans was set for the end of 2003, and new teacher quality mandates as part of NCLB were soon to be put into place. Also, all of the county school districts had signed on to a county consortium-coordinated, grant-funded, distance learning initiative.

This speaks to several issues related to timing and school reform (Noble & Smith, 1999) and to “windows of local educational policymaking opportunity” (Hamann, 2003). The new director of the local consortium was successful in bringing resources and opportunities to county schools. This had the direct effect of suddenly and precipitously raising the previously low level of activity. Although several of the initiatives came with training, technical assistance, and school improvement coaches, it was expected that the existing staff would be able to take on these new activities without hiring any additional school-based staff. This expectation had the effect of pulling teachers and administrators out of the building and classrooms much more than in the past. Although the proposed projects were potentially exciting and capacity building, teachers and administrators became overwhelmed and frustrated as each competed for time on the calendar. Later in the adolescent literacy project, teachers and administrators would repeatedly assert their belief in the importance of the literacy work and echo the feeling expressed by one administrator: “There is so much going on...we are trying to do everything but I am not sure if we are doing anything well.”

Also during this period, the county became an educational priority at the state level (part of the portfolio of a CISE team member, as well as the focus of the regional liaison). NCLB and its associated list of schools not making adequate yearly progress (AYP) had again highlighted the struggles of several county schools. Furthermore, the state became aware that none of the county high schools had made significant progress in developing their local comprehensive assessment plans. The consortium and MEDOE staff tried a number of strategies to provide schools with some assistance in this area. There was also a renewed effort on the part of the Rural School and Community Trust and the Gates/Mitchell Great Maine Schools Project to direct more resources to county schools. All of these efforts were well intentioned and meant to be complementary. All also involved outside project staff working with schools on an episodic basis. Many involved the same partners as those involved in the adolescent literacy project. All of these projects represented opportunities, yet presented participating schools with a new challenge because, though similarly intended, they were not specifically aligned with the adolescent literacy project.

As part of this buzz of new activity, between March and August 2002 five schools signed on to this project and agreed to support teacher professional development, to provide release time for team meetings, and to focus on literacy support across the content areas. Initial meetings with literacy teams, collection of baseline data, including teacher and student questionnaires, introduction to project-related tools (including the Knowledge Loom), recruitment for the upcoming teacher professional development, and

development of an initial literacy action plan outline began at four of the five schools during the spring of 2002 and at the fifth in the fall of 2002.

The original project template assumed a context-responsive project design—that is, local teachers and administrators would help shape specific strategies and logistics for meeting needs of their students and would build on existing school capacities to support literacy. (See Figure 4.2 for more regarding project design and expectations of schools.) This meant that the schools ultimately developed five somewhat different models for implementing the project in the participating schools. Coordinating five emerging models of participation involved intensive monitoring by various partners—that is, the county consortium, CRM, and The Education Alliance. Depending on vantage point, the sample of participating schools can be viewed as homogenous or heterogeneous. On the one hand, all were rural, all had similar enrollment demographics, all faced substantial resource constraints, and all were subject to the same menu of Maine education policies and laws. On the other hand, each had different literacy team configurations; institutional histories; structures, schedules, and capacities; rates of teacher and leadership turnover; and relationships with their constituent communities. These differences raised questions for the project developers about sampling and the ability to generalize the applied research design: Was it more important that the five schools all enact the same program the same way—which might not be feasible or desirable—or that they all be supported to equally engage with the research grounded components of the adolescent literacy framework? The school-based teams were adamant that they only agreed to participate because the LAB promised that project staff would be conducting the initiative “with them” not “to them.” We return to these themes in the final section of this document.

Figure 4.2: Discussion Points with Prospective Schools

Possible School/District Benefits of Being Partners in the Study (November, 2001)

- Active and increased support for student success (i.e., if the school addresses literacy, a key to success in all content areas, then students will learn more in the content areas)
- Substantial professional development in content-area literacy based on best practices
- Current, free research-based materials and resources throughout the Initiative
- Professional coaching/ongoing assistance with troubleshooting or problem solving
- Additional school-wide training in (i.e., systemic initiatives, action research, and data analysis.)
- Opportunity to be in the national spotlight
- Connections to other ongoing initiatives
- Improved student performance

Part of the agreement made with participating schools was to have 50% of their content-area teachers participate in content-area reading professional development during the first two years of the project. In August of 2002, 19 teachers from the project schools participated in the first round of the University of Maine's summer course—the largest number of teachers from the county to simultaneously participate in a single graduate course to date. Groups of 2-6 teachers from each of the four original schools, plus one teacher from the fifth school attended.

This institute, with its four follow-up days throughout the 2002-2003 academic year, netted participants six graduate credits upon completion of all course requirements (course credit required participation in follow-up sessions during the academic year). Jeff Wilhelm and Theresa Cooper of the University of Maine taught the institute, with contributions from Meltzer and two content-area teacher mentors from outside of the county. The course was offered that first summer through the collaborative sponsorship of the University of Maine, the LAB, the county consortium, and MEDOE, just eight months after its approval by the dean of the College of Education.

The institute curriculum reflected both faculty members' topic areas of expertise and their personal experiences with the National Writing Project. It also bore the imprint of Meltzer, a co-developer. Five big ideas shaped the institute:

- It should model inquiry-based unit design.
- It should be intensive.
- It should include follow up throughout the academic year.
- It should focus on literacy development within the content areas.
- It should incorporate teacher action research.

Both the Adolescent Literacy Framework (Meltzer 2001, 2002) and the National Staff Development Council's (2001) professional development guidelines were explicitly heeded in the institute design. Complementing the institute design, Catherine Rivers worked with Bob Simpson and Tom Jeffers to find state funding for instruction costs and with the local university to host the course.

Regarding the first cohort of summer program participants, one of the professors from the University of Maine remembered:

I would say there was no one who positioned themselves as eagerly coming. I would say that the people who came that first summer had been identified somehow as school leaders. They were very... Well, no. Some of them were identified as school leaders, some of them came because they needed credits to get certified or recertified. Some of them came because they were offered a stipend, I think. There was some sort of extrinsic motivation, because I remember thinking at first: This is the group that was the most willing? And we're going to have

to see this again next summer. I was horrified. I was very nervous. But over the course of working with them, they became very highly engaged and it was a joy, I mean really, both summers were absolutely joyous. I just really liked doing the work with them. I felt like, in a lot of situations, they were teachers who were so under-funded, under-appreciated, had received little or no professional development that they felt was directly related to what they did, so they were like... it was like pouring water on flowers in the desert or something; they just blossomed. It was just a real privilege to work with them in that situation, I think.

Comments illustrating participants' satisfaction with and enthusiasm for the course were shared with the adolescent literacy advisory council in September 2002. Among the shared responses were:

I came into this with an "I hope I can use something" attitude. I leave feeling like this was one of the more useful things I have done in a long time.

This was without a doubt one of the most profound experiences of my professional career. I am so excited to start school this year and try some new strategies.

B. Timing is Everything: Profiles of Key Personnel and Leveraging Expertise at Partner Institutions

Although it was the engagement of teachers and students that most mattered for the adolescent literacy project to succeed, for the purpose of this story about the collaborative mobilization effort, four key implementation personnel are important to highlight. These individuals were in place at the various partnership entities that contributed to the momentum of the project beginning in the spring and summer of 2002. They are briefly described here because each played an important role in launching the project and further shaped their institution's commitment to the partnership. (Catherine Rivers was also a "key player," but she has already been profiled, consequently, her information is not repeated below.)

At the state level, Tom Jeffers, MEDOE's county liaison, was new to his role when the project started. From the beginning, he was very interested in working with the project leader and the county consortium to support and connect initiatives at county schools. He was a conduit of information between the county and the state and made sure that project staff were updated on state-level policy currents that might influence the project. Although he did not see himself as a "literacy person," Jeffers recognized the connection between reading and learning across the content areas and later served as a content-area mentor at the 2004 *Promising Futures* Summer Academy that focused on adolescent literacy. He also steered more than \$24,000 from MEDOE toward the development of the emerging statewide content-area literacy teacher mentor network

through the University of Maine graduate course. He described this success as by far the largest amount of resources that he “ever moved,” saying both that funding decisions are more typically determined at the commissioner level and that his next biggest “funding success” (for a different project) was in the \$12,000 range.

At the county consortium, after the project had already been launched, Catherine Rivers was able to recruit Ken Quincy as a curriculum coordinator. Quincy became a key resource to the project, particularly when anticipated state funds to fill the literacy coach position did not materialize. With curriculum development experience and a credible reputation with educators at several of the local high schools (who knew him because of his involvement in an earlier career preparation initiative), his duties quickly included supporting the adolescent literacy project. Soon he began attending the literacy team meetings at each school. The consortium sponsored him to formally increase his understanding of literacy by attending content-area professional development on the topic during the 2002-03 school year and then participating in the University of Maine’s 6-credit course in 2003. Later, when part of his job was to support place-based education projects at two schools, he was able to integrate the planned use of literacy support strategies into those projects at the design phase. CISE hired him to become trained as one of the statewide content-area literacy teacher mentors through the statewide literacy initiative begun at the 2004 *Promising Futures* Summer Academy. In the summer of 2003, when his formal position at the consortium ended due to lack of funding, Quincy was hired by the LAB to be the literacy coach for the fall of 2004. He was then independently hired by three of the schools through the consortium to continue that role into the spring of 2005. He also taught a well-attended, 10-week, content-area literacy course offered through the consortium in the spring of 2005 at one of the project schools. His increased capacity to serve the county schools in the area of content-area literacy development is an outcome of the partnership effort embodied by the project. Also, the consistency of his contributions to the project, offered under various identities and guises (curriculum coordinator, then literacy coach, then independent consultant), are representative of the last decade of high school improvement efforts in Maine, which often featured key individuals’ continuous participation, under varying job titles and institutional affiliations.

At the university level, Theresa Cooper became a key project supporter. She was a veteran high school educator and a doctoral student under Jeff Wilhelm, with whom she had coauthored a book. Cooper was centrally involved in Maine’s component of the National Writing Project and is a Maine native who started her teaching career in the target county. Cooper co-taught the 6-credit graduate course the first year and after that taught more and more of it herself. When Jeff Wilhelm left the University of Maine, Cooper took on full responsibility for the course and has been crucial to its viability through the time of this writing. Cooper served on the project advisory council and, as the project ended, continued to play an advisory role to ongoing efforts to sustain a focus on adolescent literacy at the state level.

One contribution of the LAB contract to the project was to pay for the school implementation coach who would meet with school teams on site and support the development and implementation of site-based literacy initiatives. This intensive position had to be filled by someone who knew the relevant content and could also work with school-based teams. Lenore Saxon, the individual hired for the position, had a strong content-area reading background, extensive teaching and consulting experience, a solid foundation in instructional technology, a good sense of humor, and uncommon persistence—all of which turned out to be key attributes. For more than three school years, Saxon spent one week each month in the county holding technical assistance sessions at each of the five schools. Saxon also met monthly with Meltzer for planning and debriefing. Her consistent presence was crucial to the fidelity and viability of project implementation. She, too, was pressed into additional project related roles; the county consortium, two project high schools, and other schools in the county found extra resources to hire her for additional tasks related to the adolescent literacy project.

These four individuals thus filled multiple roles and were broadly perceived as assets by the schools, the LAB, the county consortium, and the state. For example, Jeffers worked closely with Rivers and Quincy and later recruited math and science content-area literacy mentors from across the state for various state-level extensions of the project. Quincy was initially hired by the consortium, then the state, then the LAB, and then some of the schools. Cooper was hired by the consortium initially, then by the university, and then by the state. Saxon was employed by the LAB part time and was also hired by the consortium to provide additional professional development and by some of the county schools. Ultimately, the state hired her through a partnership agreement with CRM to provide statewide capacity building and mentor training. The expertise of each of these four was thus leveraged to expand the project's reach and deepen its work at individual schools. Their stories illustrate how the schools and project partners exploited timing and expertise. The schools were happy to work with a limited "cast of characters" who were consistent and "knew us and what we were trying to do." All four individuals presented at the June 2003 LAB Board of Governors meeting in Portland.

C. Establishing and Sustaining the Work—The Roles of Policy and Partners

At an April 2002 meeting with the LAB Director, Commissioner Albanese identified his aspiration that the county project become a national model. Referencing LAB work with the federal CSRD program and with the adolescent literacy project, he described taking the lessons of these two projects to other Maine school sites as a “high need.” Although he laid the groundwork at this meeting, the major statewide dissemination of the project would transpire under his successor.

In May 2002, Meltzer was concerned about the growing number of policy agendas distracting from the focus of the project. To avoid this distraction and gain wider project awareness and support, she founded the project advisory council. She wrote in the July LAB quarterly report:

The Adolescent Literacy Project Advisory Council met for the first time in June. The council has representatives from MEDOE, including CISE, from the target county schools and other Maine schools, from two campuses of the University of Maine, from the LAB, and from the county consortium.

This council continued to meet two or three times per year throughout the life of the project and played a key advisory role to other organizations and state planning efforts seeking to address the issue of adolescent literacy. From its first convening, the advisory council served multiple project functions and performed a variety of tasks, the nature of which changed over time. The council initially worked to improve the project’s visibility and gain additional support from educators outside the target county. As is detailed in the next section, council members played both catalytic and complementary roles relative to the emerging statewide embrace of adolescent literacy championed by Commissioner Gendron and CISE. All were members of a variety of task forces and organizations and they used meetings of these to widen awareness about and obtain support for the project. As the consortium director pointed out, she was constantly linking the project and adolescent literacy as an important topic at every state, local, and professional meeting she attended. Their combined success was embodied by the adaptation of the *Promising Futures* implementation strategy to include explicit attention on adolescent literacy across the content areas.

The agenda for the first council meeting (Figure 4.3) included seven items that together clarify how this meeting (like later ones) was a vehicle for communication and publicity about the project, as well as for strategizing about making the most of the project’s multi-partner architecture. Like later agendas (e.g., the May 15, 2003 meeting agenda), this first meeting included an explicit focus on “connecting the project to related initiatives.”

Figure 4.3: Adolescent Literacy Project Advisory Council Meeting Agenda (June 7, 2002)
Agenda

- Update on project activities to date
- Discussion of professional development component
- Discussion of partners' roles
- Clarification of funding sources
- Putting adequate personnel resources into place
- Discussion of next year's activities
- Connecting the project to related initiatives

Members of the council expressed interest in being part of an emerging statewide conversation about adolescent literacy and were able to network across differences at the meetings. The membership was heterogeneous and included state government staffers, higher education faculty, local program coordinators, school-based educators, and externally based professional developers from across Maine. All invitations to serve on the council were accepted. Attendance at meetings varied by location, but remained fairly constant despite the distances members needed to travel, inclement weather, and the absence of any compensation or travel reimbursement for participating. With the help of Rivers, some members successfully used distance education technology to attend meetings that were too far to attend in person. This represents one of the project's most successful uses of technology.

The 2002-2003 school year was the first full year of project implementation at the school sites. During that year, Saxon held 42 on-site meetings with school-based literacy teams and Meltzer visited schools three times each and presented a project update to county superintendents in March 2003. The July 2003 LAB quarterly report noted that during the winter and spring of 2003, project staff "continued to conduct customized on-site sessions, including mini-workshops, with the literacy leadership teams and to meet with administrators at project schools to ensure continued project alignment with and responsiveness to school and state priorities and mandates...project and [county consortium] staff conducted student focus group interviews at four of the five participating schools."

As project partners, the joint primary role of CRM and The Education Alliance was to provide technical assistance. Through the combined efforts of Meltzer and Saxon, customized monthly technical assistance sessions were planned and implemented with each of the school-based literacy teams. These sessions were designed to enhance the capacity of each school-based team to develop and carry out literacy activities at each school that would improve the academic literacy development and content-area learning of students. Each school team received support to plan, implement, and

monitor a site-based literacy initiative that addressed identified student needs. Team members participated in mini-workshops and received and discussed resources related to team priorities, such as descriptions of vocabulary improvement strategies; before, during and after reading comprehension strategies; and implementation of an effective school-wide sustained silent reading initiative. The school implementation coach (Saxon) also provided training to teams in the use of protocols for looking at student work, peer coaching, and planning for literacy support within the context of content-area instruction. In response to teacher requests, the LAB provided an electronic teacher forum that allowed teachers from different schools to communicate and support one another. While Saxon took the lead in delivering technical assistance to the school teams, the LAB, under Meltzer's guidance, also took on other roles, including assisting the state of Maine on adolescent literacy issues; convening the project advisory council; designing and facilitating technical assistance activities related to leadership and assessment; communicating with partners; and completing applied research.

There were two teacher professional development options and two conference presentations that also occurred in or near the county during 2002-03. First, four follow-up sessions from the University of Maine's summer professional development course were held on Saturdays over the course of the school year. Second, at the consortium's request, Meltzer helped to coordinate additional teacher professional development within the county to those who could not or chose not to take the University of Maine's advanced adolescent literacy institute. Meltzer told Rivers that Saxon was willing to put together a 5-session content-area reading workshop that would be open to county middle and high school teachers. Rivers agreed to cover the cost of this course with state money. The county consortium contracted with Saxon to offer another version of this course again during the 2003-2004 school year.

The Knowledge Loom provided another way to merge the interests and concerns of teachers in the county with those outside it. Postings on the "Ask an Expert" tool indicated that some county teachers saw this as an effective way to obtain literacy-related information during the first year of the project. However, it was much less used that year—and throughout the project—than was predicted. This was also the case with an electronic teacher forum, requested by the teachers and set up by The Education Alliance, developed as an online professional learning community. Although there are no definitive explanations for this low usage, several possibilities exist: (a) teachers like the idea of using technology in theory, but that interest does not carry over into practice, and (b) internet-based project supports intended to resolve some of the isolation problems endemic to rural school sites did not. Project staff also offered well-attended practical workshops on effective vocabulary strategies and on use of the Knowledge Loom at a consortium-sponsored education conference in October 2002. These additional opportunities provided through the consortium were open to teachers from schools across the county, regardless of their school's participation in the adolescent literacy project. Interest, as measured by attendance, was high by staff at

both participating and non-participating schools, perhaps indicating that educators in the county recognized attention to adolescent literacy as a relevant regional concern.

Two issues related to the University of Maine graduate course were pursued during the 2002-03 academic year, one unsuccessfully. Despite lobbying by project staff, university faculty, and MEDOE staff, the course was not approved as content-area coursework for teacher credentialing purposes. However, the course was approved for at least two years and the coordinator of graduate outreach made sure that it could count as an elective course for all of the education masters' programs offered through her office. To ensure the development of a statewide cadre of content-area literacy teacher mentors, funding was found for twelve mentors (2 English, 2 social studies, 4 math, and 4 science) to staff the two 2003 offerings of the graduate course, one in the county and one on the university's flagship campus. The funds for the mentors came from the Great Maine Schools Project at the Mitchell Institute and state-controlled Title II funds for math and science leveraged by Jeffers at the MEDOE. Five of the twelve 2003 mentors came from project schools. This is an example of how Meltzer and Rivers worked closely throughout the project to ensure that more general resources provided by the state were used strategically to increase capacity within the county.

The institute benefited from serendipitous timing. Wilhelm and Cooper, who had both been involved in the National Writing Project, had developed a list of things they liked about the national project and things they wished were different. This new course intrigued them because it offered a chance at correcting some of the limitations of traditional university coursework. As Cooper, who ultimately took over instruction of the course, explained:

When Julie came, Jeff and I had worked together on the [National] Writing Project for about five years. There were things about it that we really liked, and there were things about it that were necessities of the university schedule, or whatever, that we would change if we could. And then suddenly, this opportunity to design professional development to be offered through the university, but outside the constraints of the university, let us think about things that we would change if we could. So, the first thing, the first, most important thing, was the breaking the class up between summer institute and then follow-up time. Because, one of the things we had said a lot is...that if you're really learning something that's significantly new, you need time to practice in a supported way, which people never get in university courses.

To address the ongoing need for project staff to connect the project to other initiatives at the school, county, and state level, Meltzer adapted an aphorism to reiterate the centrality of literacy development to academic success in high school and beyond. She repeated often, "Literacy is not something else on the plate. Literacy is the plate." By the end of the project, participants and partners were adding this to their own descriptions

of the project. Even during the 2002-2003 school year, project staff made this connection explicitly and often. For example, they overtly highlighted the connection between literacy and stated school needs, such as assessment or technology, when talking with school teams. When talking with CISE and other MEDOE partners, project staff reiterated the connections between academic literacy development and *Promising Futures*, Chapter 127, the Maine Learning Results, the Maine Learning with Technology Initiative, and the mandate to develop comprehensive local assessment plans. In June 2003, project staff presented similar messages at the Adult Basic Education Conference in Orono.

Staying on message in such a way eventually paid off. The following year (2003-04), the Mitchell/Gates Great Maine Schools project included adolescent literacy as one of three focus strands (along with two other themes relevant to rural schooling: technology and place-based education) that proposals needed to address. In January 2005, the approved RFP for the fourth wave of CSRD grantees, limited to middle schools and high schools, included the new requirement of a school-wide literacy action plan.

During the 2002-2003 school year, the project advisory council met three times.

Primary topics included:

- Making connections to other partners and initiatives throughout Maine (e.g., Center for Inquiry on Literacy, *Promising Futures*, Maine Learning with Technology Initiative, adult education)
- Connecting the project to existing technology initiatives, state assessment mandates, support for priority schools in the region, the NOAA project (a local place-based education project at one of the project schools), alternative teacher certification, and the collaborative Gates/Mitchell proposal (which became the Great Maine Schools Project)
- Maximizing the opportunity for the 2003 and 2004 professional development courses offered through the University of Maine to establish a statewide network of content-area teachers with advanced literacy training
- Offering updates and feedback regarding the project in the county

Council members also strategized about how to address the gap left by the continued lack of a full-time literacy coach for participating schools and discussed connections to middle schools and higher education/teacher education. At the May meeting, attended by the LAB's program area leader for secondary school redesign, teachers and administrators from all participating schools discussed their experience with the project thus far. This set the stage for the June 2003 LAB Board of Governors meeting, which focused state-level and regional attention on the project.

V. Institutionalization: The Project Develops a Life of Its Own

In the spring of 2003, the LAB Board of Governors and the director of the LAB contract at The Education Alliance decided to hold their June 2003 quarterly meeting in Portland, Maine, and to feature the county adolescent literacy project as the point of focus. This meeting was an important milestone in the trajectory of the project. From that point to the end of the LAB technical assistance in May 2005, the project began to serve as an impetus for adolescent literacy development elsewhere in Maine and as an increasingly important exemplar of the conscientious enactment of the LAB contract. In the final two years of the project, both authors of this document and a number of involved intermediaries and practitioners presented aspects of the project at a variety of statewide and national venues such as the Maine School Management Association, the Maine Principals Association, the Southern Maine Partnership Spring Forum, the National Rural Education Association, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the International Reading Association, and the American Educational Research Association.

Figure 5.1: Significant events

- June 2003 — The project is highlighted at the LAB Board of Governors meeting in Portland. Commissioner Gendron attends.
- Summer 2003 — The next two iterations of the graduate level summer professional development course through University of Maine are organized — one takes place within the county and the other a few hours away.
- 2003-04 Academic Year — Monthly on-site meeting with teacher literacy teams continue.
- 2003-04 Academic Year — Three meetings of the Adolescent Literacy Project Advisory Council are held.
- 2003-04 Academic Year — The county consortium again hires Saxon to provide teacher workshops on content-area reading and assessment and begins organizing “book talks” on adolescent literacy using resources suggested by project staff.
- 2003-04 Academic Year — One project school contracts for additional on-site teacher coaching from Saxon and Quincy. A participating district hires project staff to conduct a workshop with K-12 teachers on using technology to support literacy development.

Summer 2004 — The University of Maine again offers the graduate level adolescent literacy professional development course, but not at a site within the county.

July 2004 — Project staff play large roles in designing and facilitating the statewide *Promising Futures* Summer Academy where teams from 22 schools from across the state focus on adolescent literacy development for four days.

Autumn 2004 — The LAB hires Quincy as literacy coach for all five project high schools.

Autumn 2004 — Principals from the participating schools ask project staff for support in improving their instructional leadership – three workshops take place. Project staff are hired by MEDOE to co-lead leadership for literacy workshops to support principals statewide.

December 2004 — Adolescent literacy featured in December *Promising Futures* statewide one-day workshop led by CISE. Commissioner Gendron tells the 200+ assembled educators that she considers adolescent literacy a strategic priority.

December 2004 — The project advisory council meets in December and two additional members who work as literacy coaches at schools outside the county accept an invitation to join.

January 2005 — CISE adds adolescent literacy criteria in the new CSRD RFP.

Winter 2005 — Although the LAB is no longer funding the literacy coach role, three project schools obtain funding to keep Quincy as their literacy coach. Funding goes through the county consortium.

Winter 2005 — The consortium coordinates two 10-week evening courses on content-area reading at two different county locations. CISE funds course development, books for participants, and guest appearances by content-area mentor teachers. The consortium hires Quincy to teach in one location and Rivers teaches in the other.

Winter 2005 — CRM staff, CISE staff, MEDOE staff, and USM faculty collaborate to design a course for middle and high school teachers statewide to address 21st-century learning needs, including literacy development. May 2005 — LAB sponsored technical assistance ends. The last meeting of the Project Advisory Council takes place.

Summer 2005 — A fourth year of the summer-plus-academic-year adolescent literacy project graduate course begins in August, led by the University of Maine.

Summer 2005 — Under the direction of CISE, the *Promising Futures* Summer Academies again focus on adolescent literacy. For the first time CISE offers a “Level II” *Promising Futures* summer institute for teacher teams from Maine high schools that have already demonstrated a commitment to improving adolescent literacy. All of the project schools are on the select list invited to participate.

A. The June 19th Watershed and Beyond

“Nobody at the state level owned this [project] until June 19 [2003].”
— a project partner

On June 19, 2003, in Portland, Maine, two state commissioners of education and an assistant commissioner were joined by teacher union representatives from New York City and the American Federation of Teachers, a Massachusetts-based superintendent, a PTO representative from Rhode Island, members of the Maine Adolescent Literacy Council, and others to learn about the nascent adolescent literacy effort that had been begun field implementation less than 18 months earlier. The presenters included Meltzer, Saxon, Rivers, Jeffers, a technology specialist from Rhode Island, and teachers (of math, science, and English) from three rural high schools involved in the initiative. This meeting was concurrently local and translocal—that is, it involved educators from the target schools, but also educators and educational leaders from elsewhere in the state and throughout the region—and brought together partners and interested others to present and discuss the implementation of the project thus far. Preparation for that meeting meant that project staff had to cajole county teachers, administrators, and project partners to come to Portland—a long drive for those who lived in the target county. The resulting attention catapulted the project from relative obscurity to prominence.

Commissioner Gendron, impressed by what she heard, announced that she wanted to find ways to replicate the project’s success throughout the state. She charged CISE with integrating support for adolescent literacy development into its work with high schools throughout the state. Later in 2003 the director of the Mitchell Institute’s Great Maine Schools project (GMS) (who had also attended the June 19 meeting) sent the following email to the project leader: “Could you folks write a story on Ad lit for the CISE/GMS newsletter? WE should MAKE THE CASE for Ad Lit in Maine and tell the story of what’s happening already. Need this ASAP- Friday” (Oct. 6, 2003 email to project director; capitals in original).

Commissioner Gendron’s interest in adolescent literacy held steady. During the 2003-2004 school year, she asked CISE to work with CRM staff associated with the LAB project to develop a statewide plan for adolescent literacy development.

Although much of the resulting plan was not immediately implemented due to funding limitations, two key components were put into place in 2004. First, in the spring, CISE asked project staff to present two workshops at the Southern Maine Partnership Spring Forum describing content-area literacy strategies and how to develop a school-wide literacy plan. Second, during the summer, CISE contracted with CRM to have project-associated staff design and facilitate the 2004 *Promising Futures* Summer Academy and to sponsor content-area literacy teacher mentors to be co-presenters, thus continuing to build Maine's capacity statewide. The University of Southern Maine also asked project staff to present on adolescent literacy at a regional *Dine and Discuss* session in May 2004. The session was over-subscribed and interested teachers had to be turned away. Adolescent literacy had become a hot topic across the state. CISE staff asked the project director to assist them with ideas for incorporating a requirement for school-wide literacy action plans into the RFP for the next round of CSRSD applications, a requirement later incorporated into the final draft.

Yet even as the project's success generated excitement, there was a strategic shift away from the target county in terms of state-level advocacy efforts. In December 2004, the 200+ educators assembled for CISE's one-day *Promising Futures* High School Summit had a chance to see presentations on adolescent literacy from two large high schools that were substantively less rural than any of the project schools. As a CISE staff member explained it:

The fact that it's in [the target county] and they're very small schools really makes it more difficult to sell to large school systems. This is what we ought to do. Many large school systems are larger than all of [the target] county's school systems collectively. So, the scale issue is the negative there. But I do think that, as I've said before, that the role of CISE, being independent within the department, gives us that unique opportunity to begin to see how we can shape policy directions.

At the same December 2004 event Commissioner Gendron told the audience that she considered adolescent literacy a strategic priority and mentioned or referenced "literacy" more than 20 times in her speech. Jeff Wilhelm returned to Maine to offer a keynote address titled: "Differentiated Instruction and Literacy Development." On surveys collected at the summit, the two most requested topics for the 2005 *Promising Futures* Summer Academy were "differentiated instruction" and "adolescent literacy." In just four years, *adolescent literacy*, a term not recognized by most Maine educators in 2001, had become a familiar and important term in the educational lexicon of middle and high school educators statewide.

As the project formally concluded in May 2005, the statewide mobilization appeared poised to continue with both Commissioner Gendron and CISE leading the way and the University of Maine intending to continue to offer its intensive summer course. As Cooper explained, though it had been started with just a two-year commitment, "That

course sort of developed a life of its own.” In turn, Simpson identified CISE’s central tasks in 2005 and 2006 as “a kind of communicated direction and some professional development opportunities for people” related to adolescent literacy and promised to make adolescent literacy the focal point of requests for proposals and school gatherings like the *Promising Futures* Summer Academies. In 2005 CISE and the University of Maine coordinated schedules to ensure that the adolescent literacy course did not conflict with the *Promising Futures* summer academy schedule.

Other statewide linkages and project extensions were possible. An adult education specialist on the adolescent literacy advisory committee recommended to MEDOE staff coordinating Maine’s content standards review that “the AdLit project can inform the Learning Results review process in areas of content, methodology, best practices, professional development, and community connections.” This individual also identified prospective ties between the adolescent literacy mobilization and various adult education efforts. In the spring of 2005, project staff met with MLTI and CISE staff to explore explicit connections between statewide technology, literacy, and leadership initiatives.

In the fall of 2003, The Education Alliance consolidated the LAB program of work, completing a number of projects that had been funded for the first three years of the contract. The adolescent literacy project was continued, which gave it a higher profile within the LAB program and from the federal funder, IES. It did not dramatically increase the funds available to the project, however, as the LAB contract, like all federal regional educational laboratory contracts, was level funded.

The mobilization in the target county, too, was poised to continue, but perhaps more ambivalently. Speculating in December 2004 about the future of the county project, a CISE staffer explained in an interview:

I think the [target] county leadership—school districts, superintendents, principals, school boards—need to embrace this as part of their system. It’s not something that can be supported from the exterior, from outside...If in this period of time they haven’t seen the value of it to support it, haven’t been able to begin to think about the logistics of the personalities supported, then I think it would be a project that will continue to help inform what’s happening in the state of Maine, but there’s not going to be a solution for the [targeted] county. Eventually, everything has to be local.

At the May 2005 final meeting of the project advisory council, all five high schools reported plans to continue their efforts at implementing the project. The project staff had worked with Rivers and others to ensure that continued professional development options would be available to teachers in participating schools, as well as others in the county (see Figure 5.2). Yet despite the schools’ and the consortium’s intentions to

continue the work, persistent funding vulnerabilities, the risk of losing trained staff, the limited local project support infrastructure, and the turn of the state's attention away from the county as a pilot site all meant that any long-term institutionalization of the project or staying power of changes made on the classroom level by local high school teachers were far from secure.

The project's multi-partner structure and its constant efforts to align project activities with related initiatives did create opportunities for the local continuation/extension of the project. At the end of May 2005, three of the four project high schools that also had funding support through the Gates/Mitchell Great Maine Schools grant planned to use some of their funds to continue on-site literacy coaching for teachers. The county consortium was also working on plans to support subsequent county-level sharing/dissemination efforts.

Figure 5.2: Identified Sustainability Strategies for the County Initiative (May 2005)
Professional Development Options | 2005-2006 School Year

1. Content-Area Reading Strategies Workshops

[The county consortium] will again offer a 10-session content-area reading strategies workshop for teachers and ed techs. If there is sufficient interest, the workshop will be offered in two locations and will begin in September and run every two weeks September through November. Catherine Rivers and Ken Quincy will be the instructors. Depending on interest, Rivers will hold Book Talks at various locations around the county.

2. University of Maine Course this summer in [out of county location]

UM will again be offering the Advanced Adolescent Literacy Institute this summer with follow ups throughout the year. Theresa Cooper will be teaching the course.

3. *Promising Futures* Level II Institute at Thomas College

July 25-27 in Waterville — Julie Meltzer and colleagues will be designing and facilitating this institute with CISE.

4. Literacy Coach

Schools are currently contracting with Ken Quincy, Lenore Saxon, [another professional developer], and others to assist them with continuing the work at their schools.

5. Other workshops, courses, and support are also available.

B. More and Less Than Intended

As agreed, the University of Maine offered two iterations of the summer advanced adolescent literacy institute during the summer of 2003, one in county and one about two hours away. Sixty teachers enrolled in the classes; fifteen of these were from the county. Five teachers from the participating schools who had attended the previous year were paid to be mentors, joining seven other teachers from around the state. One school which had only sent one teacher the previous year sent a team of five teachers while three other participating schools sent a second “round” of teachers. The University of Maine offered the graduate course again in the summer of 2004, but not in the county. The 2004 offering was well attended by teachers outside the county, but only one additional teacher from a project school participated; two teachers from one of the schools served as content-area mentors. A total of 104 teachers took the course during the first four times it was offered; slightly less than half of those were from the county and 33 of those were from project schools. It was the largest secondary teacher professional development initiative ever launched in the county and some of the teachers went on to enroll in graduate degree programs because of their involvement with this course.

During the first two years of the project all five schools met their agreement to have 50% of their core content-area teachers attend content-area reading teacher professional development. This was accomplished through attendance at the University of Maine’s comprehensive adolescent literacy professional development course and the more basic versions offered by the school implementation coach in collaboration with the project director and the consortium director during 2002-2003 and 2003-2004.

Also in 2003-2004, the consortium director began offering “book talks” about literacy related books such as Chris Tovani’s *I Read It But I Don’t Get It* and Kylee Beers’ *When Kids Can’t Read, What Teachers Can Do*—selections suggested by the project director for this purpose. In 2004-2005, additional teacher professional development was offered at two county sites by current and former county consortium staff during the spring of 2005, but not as graduate coursework. Twenty-five teachers from both participating and non-participating schools attended the 10-week course. CISE provided funding for books and for content-area mentor teachers to assist the course leaders. Participating teachers received contact hour credits, which were needed to comply with No Child Left Behind requirements.

Project staff continued to meet on site with literacy teams each month throughout the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years. Project-wide goals (see Figure 5.3) were shared and pursued by all five school teams during the two school years. Several issues became increasingly clear as the participants focused on deepening, refining, and growing the work during these years. Many teachers needed more developed planning, lesson/unit design, assessment, and/or classroom management skills to effectively implement their literacy support strategies. Therefore, the project increased the number

of mini-workshops provided at the schools and, in the fall of 2004, the LAB paid for Ken Quincy to become a literacy coach. Also, the principals at the schools first declined and then requested assistance from Meltzer to improve their classroom observation and instructional leadership skills. In response, she met with principals as a group three times during the 2004-2005 academic year. Although the project had been launched with an agreement that no new student achievement data would be collected, by the end of the 2003-2004 school year, several teams felt that having reading assessment data would be helpful. So the consortium director assisted schools in conducting pre- and post-reading assessment for ninth graders during the 2004-2005 school year. The LAB provided funding for this and for diagnostic reading kits and training during the fall of 2004, thus improving each school's capacity to diagnose and address student reading issues.

Figure 5.3: Adolescent Literacy Project Goals 2003–2004

In all five adolescent literacy project schools, in all content areas:

- Students in grades 9–12 will read and write more.
- Teachers will provide more reading and writing instruction.
- Teachers will collaborate to improve reading and writing instruction and to increase the effective use of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking activities to support content-area learning.
- Students in grades 9–12 will become more motivated and proficient readers and writers who can and do use reading and writing effectively to learn and to express themselves and/or for recreation in and out of school.
- Literacy teams will collect evidence that demonstrates that their literacy action plan is linked to improved student achievement.

Note: While these items refer only to reading and writing, it is understood that effective reading and writing instruction includes the purposeful use of speaking and listening strategies and promotes the use and development of higher order thinking skills.

Though deployment of an on-site literacy coach had been part of the project design from the beginning, that position was only intermittently filled during the project. Teachers who took the summer professional development course had to identify and meet four times with a peer coach. However, that effort did not reach most of the county teachers participating in the initiative. During the 2003-2004 school year, project staff tried to help schools compensate for the lack of a coach by supporting teachers to do peer coaching at two of the schools and peer workshops at one school and by suggesting increased use of the Knowledge Loom and the electronic teacher forum. Ken Quincy attended the monthly literacy team meetings with Lenore Saxon at each school. Later when funding for his position at the consortium ran out in the

summer of 2004, he served as a content-area mentor at CISE's 2004 *Promising Futures* Summer Academy and then, with LAB funding, became a formally designated literacy coach for the project during the fall of 2004. The project was thus finally, though temporarily, able to offer teachers on-site co-planning, modeling, and coaching in the use of the literacy support strategies highlighted through project associated professional development, including on-site mini-workshops. When the LAB's funding of the coach role ended in December of 2004, three schools opted to continue independent funding of his work through the consortium into the spring of 2005. Quincy was also hired by the consortium to teach one of the two 10-week content-area reading courses offered during the spring of 2005 (the other course was taught by the consortium director). Quincy's multiple titles and roles in the project are a reminder both of how successfully the project was able to cobble together tasks and funding to continue moving forward and of how dependent the project was on a very small list of key individuals. Quincy discussed his personal experiences in a January 2005 interview:

I would go in and really just kind of observe and then talk a little afterwards. "How'd it go? What might be different? What observations did I have with [regard to] engagement and motivation of students?" So probably after three or four weeks of that, I realized that wasn't even going to be enough. It needed to be further; my role needed to be a little bit further defined as far as what I was seeing—that teachers weren't adequately preparing to use the strategies. They weren't really thinking long term about where they fit into before, during, and after. Or what their objectives were to use all of these strategies. It was a hit or miss type thing, and I was under the impression that teachers were doing it generally only when I was going to be present... At that point we knew the project was nearing an end. We had a year or so left... And the questions started to rise about the sustainability. What are teachers doing? How much buy-in is there if this is what we're seeing? But I knew specifically [at that one school] the buy-in was a little bit different. We had a lot of shift in administration, we lost a principal, we lost a superintendent, we lost several staff people... So there was a lack of continuity, really, with the team. So I think I sat down with Julie [Meltzer]. And I knew the coaching piece... And I guess it was evident that – I think they needed more support. For some teachers it was an issue of comfort level. They'd been exposed to strategies. They had had six graduate credit hours in professional development, yet the application of that wasn't always there. So we continued with that. And I think it was fairly successful.

The project advisory council continued to meet periodically during the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years, but its role subtly began to change. In addition to advising the project, the council became a means for communicating and planning adolescent literacy efforts across the state. In the fall of 2003, at a meeting with the director of the Great Maine Schools and other CISE/MEDOE staff, the council was asked to generate a list of recommendations about adolescent literacy support and development for state personnel.

At the same time, the council's original advising role continued. In the spring of 2004, project staff met with representatives from each of the five schools to discuss project progress and requests for school visits from outside the county. In the fall of 2004, the council explored statewide and in-county sustainability strategies that would help maintain momentum on the issue within the county. At the council's final meeting, in May 2005, members heard representatives from each participating school discuss plans to sustain the work begun under the aegis of the project. Following that meeting, informal collaborative planning to support those efforts continued among members of the council.

C. Competing Local Agendas

By the 2003-2004 school year, several participating schools were implementing other changes not necessarily aligned with the adolescent literacy project (e.g., pursuing an opportunity to be a pilot site for a grant-funded place-based education program). In four of the schools, the successful (and unprecedented) joint application for a collaborative grant as part of the Gates/Mitchell Great Maine Schools Project meant that a collective focus on local assessment development would intensify during the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years (although there was also a prospect that the Great Maine Schools affiliation could ultimately extend the work of the project at some of those schools). In 2004-2005, schools countywide were preoccupied with serious funding cuts under the state's proposed essential programs and services model, and teacher morale was down. In a January 2005 interview, Ken Quincy identified that the smallest participating school was facing more than \$200,000 of prospective cuts, while one of the larger ones was facing a \$870,000 cut.

Two participating schools had new principals who were focusing on getting things together and for whom the literacy project was a "nice support" but not a central focus. Two other schools continued to face serious consolidation threats and the fifth school was under enormous pressure to raise test scores—a focus that teachers did not view as consistent with the literacy project. Meanwhile, the county consortium was forced to reduce staff as several grants ran out, restricting its ability to provide extensive project coordination and support. Consortium support was still evident, but during the 2004-2005 school year, that support was solely contingent on the efforts of Catherine Rivers.

VI. Revisiting Multi-Party Collaboration As It Relates to Adolescent Literacy, High School Reform, and Rural Education

In May 2005, the LAB's adolescent literacy project in a rural Maine county ended. That did not mean that project-precipitated adolescent literacy activities in the county ended, nor that project participants' newly developed expertise was lost or no longer valued. Nor did it mean that CISE and MEDOE dropped their enthusiastic embrace for adolescent literacy as a key component of high school improvement, nor even that IES monies flowing to the LAB ceased to support the project. (IES continues to support the project through the end of the Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory contract in December 2005, but the final six months of funding pays for data analysis and report writing, not action in the field.) Still, the May 2005 project ending date meant that the inter-institutional operating logic of the project changed and that major resources for adolescent literacy were gone. Post-May 2005, no single person or institution filled the role of project leader (Meltzer's role). Nor was there a school implementation coach working with literacy teams on a monthly basis (Saxon's role).

From a problem-diagnosis and strategy-of-action standpoint, the conclusion of the LAB-funded project meant an end to a clear external message that adolescent literacy should be the central focus of whole-school change efforts. On the other hand, the project had mobilized people and institutions to concur that adolescent literacy is a challenge that underperforming rural high schools (and other high schools) need to address. According to Bob Simpson,

Without the [county adolescent literacy] project, and the initiatives that I think supported it—[the] University of Maine and then CISE taking on a greater role...the new commissioner seeing it as an important leverage point for change. She speaks about it passionately...We'd be at a different point today without that project. It kept the conversation alive in Maine. It created a conversation in Maine and sustained it.

We do not know what will happen next. Projections about the project's legacy would most likely be different from a local standpoint versus a state or regional perspective. Despite the uncertainty, it is still possible to derive some important lessons from the experiences of the project about adolescent literacy, systemic high school reform, and rural education. Some of the lessons are context related—for example, it was possible to have high schools in this historically under-resourced and underperforming region maintain a sustained focus on improving classroom instruction over multiple consecutive years. Others were easier to generalize. For example, attention to adolescent literacy development was an issue found to be salient across all institutions

that make up an educational system, including state departments of education, institutions of higher education, philanthropies, local consortia, regional educational laboratories, educational consulting organizations, and schools.

Implications Regarding Adolescent Literacy

A contribution of this project is to illustrate the number of complementary routes through which purposeful attention to adolescent literacy can be promoted. For example, within the county, partners leveraged resources in various combinations to develop and offer 10 different types of teacher professional development over the course of the adolescent literacy project:

- Two University of Maine courses
- Online professional tools such as the Knowledge Loom's *Adolescent Literacy in the Content Areas* spotlight and the electronic teacher forum
- Workshops at the annual county education conference
- On-site teacher coaching
- Content-area reading workshops offered by project staff during 2002-2003 and 2003-2004
- Content-area reading courses offered by consortium staff during 2004-2005
- Custom-designed workshops for teachers and administrators to address topics such as diagnostic reading assessment and leadership for literacy
- Book talks
- *Dine & Discuss* events
- On-site mini-workshops focused on the use of particular literacy support strategies connected to schools' literacy action plans

Many of these professional development opportunities (e.g., the Knowledge Loom *Adolescent Literacy in the Content Areas* spotlight; the University of Maine courses; *Dine & Discuss* events) were also available in comparable form to teachers outside of the county and/or those from non-participating high schools. During the course of the project, partners collaborated to offer six additional forms of content-area reading teacher professional development outside of the county but open to county teachers/schools: the 2004 and 2005 University of Maine course; the *Promising Futures* Summer Academies in 2004 and 2005; CISE's 2005 adolescent literacy "Level II" institute; other presentations and workshops offered throughout the state; the new *21st Century Teaching and Learning* course in 2005; and sessions at the Southern Maine Partnership Spring Forum in 2004 and 2005. Although some of these venues and formats for teacher professional development existed prior to the project, most had not previously

addressed the topic of adolescent literacy or content-area reading issues and many were developed during and/or as a direct result of the project. These professional development opportunities are tangible outcomes of the project and are now firmly situated within partners' ongoing structures.

Since the start of this project, adolescent literacy has become a "hot" topic, both in Maine and nationally. Despite this increasing attention, in most secondary education circles in the United States, a focus on adolescent literacy as a strategy for whole school change is not a familiar one. Our review of the data suggest that adolescent literacy initiatives in any locale might, as a first step, need to overcome skepticism and a lack of familiarity with the goals, underlying logic models, and emphases of such initiatives.

In addition, comprehensive adolescent literacy projects, such as the one described here, may need to go through a "getting to ready" period before project activities begin in earnest. For this project, initial assumptions regarding teacher training infrastructure and teacher readiness proved optimistic. At the time the project began, there was no advanced professional development on the topic of adolescent literacy available anywhere in Maine. Early project energies were devoted to creating this capacity through the local consortium. As anticipated, many teachers required additional on-site assistance to successfully adapt lesson planning to include explicit literacy instruction. Project staff found that teachers sometimes needed more foundational support first—for example, instruction in how to develop effective lesson plans or direct modeling of a literacy strategy with students—before being able to successfully use and adapt literacy strategies to meet the needs of underperforming learners. The original premise that both coursework and on-site teacher coaching would be necessary to support shifts in classroom teaching and learning proved correct.

The consistent presence of a school implementation coach, shared by the participating schools, was a key ingredient. By having a reflective responsive design—monthly meetings at each school preceded by careful planning and followed up by careful review—and a coach adroit enough to adapt her coaching to fit specific circumstances, the emphasis on literacy could be pursued consistently and insistently. Because Saxon stayed with the project for its duration, she could develop a rapport and establish credibility with literacy team members. By doing so she was able to overcome some of the general reluctance to try yet another intervention and specific skepticism about adolescent literacy as a school-change framework, particularly when proposed by outsiders.

In some ways, this project provided five pilot sites to check the viability of the Adolescent Literacy Support Framework (Meltzer, 2001) as a guiding blueprint for developing effective school-wide literacy initiatives. It is still too early, at the time of this writing (June, 2005), to speak definitively about the project's impact on student outcomes (and small rural school grade cohorts make valid year-to-year comparisons

difficult). However, it may not be too soon to apply additional measurements of project success suggested by Cuban (1998), such as “popularity,” “longevity,” and “adaptability.” Against these criteria and as measured by both its growing adoption beyond the county (by schools and educators positioned in other structures like CISE and the Gates/Mitchell Great Maine Schools project) and interest from initially skeptical schools within the county, the logic and usefulness of the framework can be seen as viable. The project’s more than 3-year duration within the county also represents the longest high school professional development intervention in the county’s history. That the five participating high schools were able to sustain their participation using five different self-developed (in consultation with the school coach) models suggests that the framework can be pursued in varying ways.

Implications for Systemic Educational Reform

The adolescent literacy project can also be investigated for its implications for systemic high school reform and sustainable school improvement. In the first section of this paper, referencing Desimone (2002), we suggested that adolescent literacy might constitute a “fourth wave” of reform, a wave focusing on teaching and learning, rather than curriculum (the first wave—standards), constituent responsiveness (the second wave—parent and community inclusion), or restructuring (the third wave—comprehensive school reform). The adolescent literacy project highlights an additional domain that high school reform needs to address—explicit changes in teaching strategies. Student outcomes are unlikely to change without some change in the teaching they experience.

There is an important story suggested by the experience creating a multiple-entity partnership on behalf of this project. Fink (2000) observes that it is difficult for innovative schools to maintain their innovation absent change in the larger system in which they exist. Likewise, Stringfield and Yakimowski-Srebnick (2005) acknowledge that school reform, unaligned with system reform, fails to solve system-originating problems. The ultimate embrace of the adolescent literacy project by personnel at CISE and the Mitchell Institute, personnel who had been key advocates of the *Promising Futures* high school reform framework, is significant. Their endorsement suggests that including a focus on adolescent literacy can be part of the essential work of high school reform. Through their involvement in the project, project partners at CISE, MEDOE, the Mitchell Institute, and elsewhere learned of a gap—a missing explicit focus on changing teaching across the content areas—that their previous *Promising Futures* implementation efforts had not addressed. They changed their efforts because of this and thereby changed the context in which high schools operate in Maine. This was a systemic change, brought about and supported by a variety of partners.

Project participants were interested in participating in the adolescent literacy project for a variety of reasons. The unit of change within which they operated varied according to position, modus operandi, and precedent. For example, whether in the introduction

to *Promising Futures*, his letter of support for the LAB technical proposal, or his rationalization for selecting the target county, Commissioner Albanese was operating at a whole state scale. It is likely that one key reason for his interest in the project was its connections to state-level educational goals. If the different partners who joined in the project operated at different scales and were interested in the project for different reasons, a logical question emerges: How did the activities of the multiple different entities remain coherent? Here is where the branding of the adolescent literacy project, and the concomitant goal of promoting adolescent literacy mattered. The promotion of adolescent literacy by Commissioner Gendron likely added coherence for educators and policymakers. The varying tasks and responsibilities of the different partners were able to be connected to a multi-dimensional, multi-faceted larger whole – a focus on improving adolescent literacy. Project participants were obviously more motivated by some elements of the project than others and by some portions of the framework than others. However, they justified and connected their actions not to their individual rationales but to the larger rationale of improving adolescent literacy within the context of schools. Thus, for example, CISE’s task of promoting *Promising Futures* may have differed from the county consortium director’s organizing of a book group, but both could concur that the need to focus on adolescent literacy was a shared premise that connected their work. That helped their separate actions be complementary instead of inchoate.

So how does this intervention shed light on other prospective educational interventions that expect involved entities to adopt new roles and take on new tasks? One explanation for why so many partners were ultimately willing to collaborate on this project is that in its complex structure they found compelling individual tasks as well as a shared common ground that provided a vehicle for their efforts to align with and/or complement the different efforts of other partners. Partners were willing to contribute to the general proposition, within reason, as long as they could identify how their more particular needs or wishes could be advanced. Identifying shared and complementary interests is therefore a key component of developing and sustaining complicated, multi-entity educational partnerships.

At this point, it is important to note the role of state-level leadership in this case. Both commissioners were only modestly involved in the project in terms of invested time and (re)directed resources. Yet each took a personal interest in the project and spoke of it favorably in strategic public settings. Absent the efforts of Commissioner Albanese, this project might never have existed, at least not in the target county. In late 2003, Commissioner Gendron directed CISE to explicitly link adolescent literacy support and development with its existing mission to support high school educational reform in Maine. This directive, too, reshaped the project, giving it more of a statewide emphasis and, perhaps, less of a local one.

Both school and non-school based partners interacted with the project episodically. How many and what types of meetings generated action on the part of participants and partners was based on three factors: (1) trust, familiarity, and follow through; (2) mutual interest and shared focus; and (3) outside recognition, recommendation, or pressure. An example of each follows. Many project partners took action when they felt they had developed enough of a relationship with project staff to ask them for resources and recommendations. This tended to come about after multiple meetings during which the project staff member was “tested,” “questioned,” and “asked to respond” before the tester was willing to reciprocate. For these participants and partners, until it was clear that project staff were committed to listening, working with them, and providing useful information, there was little reason to act.

Alternatively, there were partners and project participants who took action eagerly when first presented with the project and/or their possible role in it. Several teachers and some administrators saw immediately that the project could help them address issues in the classroom and quickly agreed to participate. Likewise, one university faculty member recognized the project as an opportunity to custom design teacher professional development that would include action research and a focus on inquiry while modeling the effective use of literacy support strategies. Such people needed no further incentive to participate. Here, the salient motivating factor for action was an overlap between the project’s problem diagnoses and strategies and those the partner had, through other means, determined would be useful.

The third type of partner motivation came from outside pressure or encouragement to participate. Unlike the first example, this type of motivation was not the result of a cultivated relationship with project staff. And unlike the second example, these individuals were not motivated by a recognized congruence in intentions and agendas. For the third group it was the suggestion of a trusted and or powerful third party (e.g., the commissioner) that compelled action. Perhaps as a variation on this theme, some who contributed to the project later in its existence appeared to be motivated by a fear of being left out. An analysis of the three responses to episodic interaction with the project suggests a pragmatic approach for others hoping to catalyze partnership cooperation in relation to similar projects. It is predictable that different types of recruitment will be viable according to the persona and experience of the prospective recruit and the stage in the project’s development.

The project also had an impact on the personal and professional identities of many of the people—and organizations—involved. For example, it allowed some people to develop additional expertise and gain visibility to become known as a “literacy person,” a valuable identity in some contexts. Others became mentors through the project or became affiliated with statewide efforts in the area of adolescent literacy, identities that were newly developed as a result of the project. Prior to the project, most project staff were not well known in Maine and several key local intermediaries for the project (e.g.,

Ken Quincy, Theresa Cooper, and Catherine Rivers) were not associated with the topic of literacy. By the end of the project this had changed as these individuals had played featured roles in local, statewide, and higher education organized adolescent literacy activities and were recognized as having literacy expertise.

An important storyline in this implementation case was the substantive and multifaceted leveraging of resources to support various elements of the project. But leveraging resources for the adolescent literacy project was not the only direction of leveraging. In at least one case, the adolescent literacy project was used an argument to support and extend another effort—Maine’s statewide laptop initiative. During the 2003-2004 school year, there was a large effort to get laptops for high school students. As the idea of adolescent literacy as a necessary focus at the middle and high school level gained currency, the leaders of the laptop initiative at the state level adopted literacy development as one of their goals. Through a grant, one of the project high schools bought laptops for all high school students and the adolescent literacy project staff was asked to connect literacy to technology with the team at that school. However modest, changes like this are the crux of systemic reform. The setting in which participating high schools were operating changed and their efforts were now squarely within a state-approved context of improving instruction through a focus on content-area literacy development.

Additionally, several of the project partners had flexible structures or funding streams that enabled collaborative action on their part. These have been mentioned throughout the narrative—for example, the funding of CISE through the Mitchell Institute instead of the MEDOE, the existence of the National Writing Project as a mechanism through which courses could be offered, the partnership structure between The Education Alliance and CRM through the LAB contract. This flexibility was important because it allowed individuals and institutions to “make things happen” in a way they may not otherwise have been able. This illustrates the need for funding and partnership structures among institutions involved with systemic educational reform to flexibly support sustained efforts to put research into practice in a timely way. Without this flexibility, it is unlikely that the momentum of this project could have been either catalyzed or sustained.

As a final point about systemic reform, this project demonstrates that multi-party efforts can be enabled through the role of a local intermediary. Because of the size and flexible management of the county consortium, it was able to serve in two key roles. First, its existence as a regional consortium that provided support to the county meant that it was a functional entity through which other partners could funnel resources to various aspects of the project. The University of Maine, CISE, the LAB, and MEDOE used the consortium as a mechanism to pay for content-area mentors, provide books to participants in professional development, and provide tuition rebates. If these partners had tried to deal directly with the five individual schools, these payment activities

would have been greatly complicated and slower. Second, because the consortium director oversaw multiple small grants, she was able to pull grant funds from various sources to support elements of the project that corresponded or complemented the goals of the other grants. For example, she assigned part of the curriculum coordinator's time to being project liaison and the consortium, under her leadership, sponsored *Dine & Discuss* events, book talks and other professional development experiences related to the project.

Implications for Rural Education

To address the final theme raised in the introduction to this case study, the adolescent literacy project suggests a number of lessons for rural education.

- Multiple entity mobilization is possible, perhaps even necessary, to sustain a long-term, multi-dimensional rural education initiative.
- Rural sites can be sites of acute need. The types of need experienced by an individual school may vary substantially from the needs experienced by other equally rural schools.
- Resource and infrastructure scarcities need to be addressed if research-based professional development is going to be viable in rural areas.
- Rural educators who participate in change efforts need not do so for exactly the same reasons as project promoters. What matters is that they engage with the framework and purposefully adapt their instructional practices.
- Even well-designed plans require serendipity. This project might well not have existed absent OERI's focus on low-performing and rural schools. The absence of a literacy coach for most of the project might have proved even more problematic absent the willingness of Lenore Saxon to travel hundreds of miles and be away from home for a week each month, the willingness of Catherine Rivers to broker the project locally and to find supplementary resources for it, and the credibility of both Jeff Wilhelm and Theresa Cooper at the University of Maine with a teacher population skeptical of academic types.

This project is an example of how multi-school participation from a rural region allowed outside support to be rallied and enabled resources to be leveraged. As noted, if this project had involved a single rural school, much of what was made possible would not have been. This raises the need for vehicles to support rural school collaboration on a regional basis.

If these are lessons regarding what is possible in terms of rural education, there are also some cautionary implications to note. As the project ended, its sustainability remained fragile because of some of the hazards common to rural education. Small schools have small faculties—two or three departures (not an uncommon turnover rate in these schools) could substantively compromise the capacity of any of the project schools

to maintain a focus on adolescent literacy across the content areas. Rural schools are spread out—even though these schools were all in one county, the furthest were still two hours apart and none were closer than half an hour to each other, requiring travel over winding country roads. Coordination of efforts between these sites and with entities beyond the county was necessarily multifaceted and required efforts by more than one individual and from more than one type of partner.

At the local partner level, the heightened commitment and increased capacity of both Catherine Rivers and Ken Quincy supported literacy as a focus for school improvement. But as the accordion-like expansion and contraction of the consortium during the project period exemplifies (based on the start and end of the multiple small contracts that support the consortium), even with the careful guidance of Rivers, the consortium is a vulnerable institution. The consortium could face a funding drought and mostly or completely disappear. The need to acquire grants could also redirect its attention away from adolescent literacy to another topic with better funding. Finally, the consortium is dependent on one committed leader who could choose to retire or relocate to another job. Such a tiny organization does not have a successor “in training.” As suggested earlier, the newly developed capacities of Ken Quincy, the consortium’s former curriculum coordinator, can be seen as an accomplishment of the project. But the value of that accomplishment too could disappear if he chose to relocate or tired of the entrepreneurial solicitation of small contracts with project schools.

At the state level, as the formal project was ending, the CISE and MEDOE endorsement of adolescent literacy was growing. But even as that suggested important new opportunities for schools across the state, there was a decreasing focus on the accomplishments of the small rural county schools that had participated in the project. As the state endeavored to build enthusiasm for adolescent literacy (making it the focus of the December 2004 *Promising Futures* one-day summit, for example), describing very small and remote rural high schools was not as compelling a strategy as describing schools that were larger, more typical, and better known. So as a final implication for rural education, as a systemic reform effort gathers momentum, it may be difficult for small rural schools to remain the focal point of a broadening initiative. This appeared true even though most Maine high school students attended rural schools, perhaps indicating that the literature needs to distinguish between small rural schools and larger ones, or rural and very rural.

Final Thoughts

It will be interesting to see how the next chapters of Maine’s adolescent literacy story unfold. This continuing story will likely encompass schools from across the state, include active leadership from CISE, the rest of MEDOE, and the Mitchell Institute, and include adolescent literacy as a primary component in planned activities offered throughout the state (e.g., the next round of CSRD funding, future teacher professional development connected with the statewide laptop initiative, and upcoming

conferences). However, as of June 2005, there was no central coordination, no plans for maintaining and expanding the content-area literacy teacher mentor network, and no plans for how to actively support literacy action plan implementation at school sites or a full-time adolescent literacy coordinator at the state level. How the inter-partner experience with successful scaffolding of the county project carries through to the next level of implementation remains to be seen.

Could the effort described here have been enacted differently? Perhaps. But the partners who coordinated efforts to launch and sustain the adolescent literacy project in Maine were obviously the right ones to move what might have been a small, peripheral, low-impact initiative to something with extensive statewide implications. It took an organization in a catalyst role, in this case, the LAB at Brown, and willing players at the state, university, county, and local levels. That it happened at all is a tribute to educators at all levels who recognized that collaborative efforts to improve education at the high school level are not only relevant and worthwhile, but also possible. Converting what works according to the research into what might work in practice in a specific rural context required multi-party mobilization to create the necessary capacities, structures, and activities. Whether contemplating adolescent literacy, systemic school reform, or rural education, this is an important story to tell.

Glossary of Key Institutions and Individuals

Institutions and Contracts

Center for Inquiry in Secondary Education (CISE): This semi-autonomous center within the Maine Department of Education was established in 1998 to implement the *Promising Futures* framework for high school change.

Center for Resource Management (CRM): The educational consulting company based in New Hampshire that partnered with The Education Alliance at Brown University to co-lead the adolescent literacy project.

County Consortium: The project partner in the target county established by the local districts and intended to be a regional provider of coordination and technical assistance.

Education Alliance at Brown University: The external department of Brown University that manages the Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory contract.

Institute of Educational Sciences (IES): Part of the U.S. Department of Education that, among other tasks, oversees the regional educational laboratory system. IES was created in 2002 to replace the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI).

LAB: Shorthand name for the Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University and for the federal contract of the same name.

Maine Adolescent Literacy Project Advisory Council: The project director founded this group in 2002 to advise the adolescent literacy project. It includes representatives from state government, higher education, Maine schools, and adult education, many with direct ties to the target county.

Maine Department of Education (MEDOE): The branch of state government charged with overseeing public K-12 education in Maine (includes CISE, as well as more traditional regional and curriculum content-area divisions).

Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University (LAB): Official name of the regional educational laboratory hosted by The Education Alliance.

Project schools: Collective reference to the five high schools in the target county that agreed, in 2002, to participate in the adolescent literacy project.

Promising Futures: The name of the high school restructuring framework developed under Commissioner Albanese's direction by the Maine Commission on Secondary Education in 1998. CISE was created to facilitate the statewide implementation of *Promising Futures*.

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Appendix A

Adolescent Literacy—Best Practices from Meltzer (2002, pp. 14-16)

- A. Address Student Motivation to Read and Write
 - Making connections to students' lives
 - Creating responsive classrooms
 - Having students interact with each other and with text
- B. Implement Research-Based Literacy Strategies for Teaching and Learning
 - Teacher modeling, strategy instruction, and uses of multiple forms of assessment
 - Emphasis on reading and writing
 - Emphasis on speaking and listening/viewing
 - Emphasis on thinking
 - Creating a learner-centered classroom
- C. Integrate Reading and Writing Across the Curriculum
 - Recognizing and analyzing discourse features
 - Understanding text structures
 - Developing vocabulary
- D. Ensure Support, Sustainability, and Focus Through Organizational Structures and Leadership
 - Meeting the agreed-upon goals for adolescents in that particular community
 - Articulating, communicating, and actualizing a vision of literacy as a priority
 - Utilizing best practices in the area of systemic educational reform
 - Defining literacy in a way that connects to the larger educational program
 - Involving ongoing support for teacher professional development
 - Having a clear process for program review and evaluation

Appendix B

The 15 core practices of Maine’s Promising Futures high school reform framework

Core practices for Teaching and Learning

- Core practice 1
Every student is respected and valued by adults and by fellow students.
- Core practice 2
Every teacher tailors learning experiences to the learner’s needs, interests, and future goals.
- Core practice 3
Every teacher challenges learners both to master the fundamentals of the disciplines and to integrate skills and concepts across the disciplines to address relevant issues and problems.
- Core practice 4
Every student learns in collaborative groups of students with diverse learning styles, skills, ages, personal backgrounds, and career goals.
- Core practice 5
Every student makes informed choices about education and participation in school life and takes responsibility for the consequences of those choices.
- Core practice 6
Every student employs a personal learning plan to target individual as well as common learning goals and to specify learning activities that will lead to the attainment of those goals.
- Core practice 7
Every teacher makes learning standards, activities, and assessment procedures known to students and parents and assures the coherence among them.
- Core practice 8
Every student who receives the secondary school diploma has demonstrated, through performance exhibitions, knowledge and skills at a level deemed by the school and by the state to be sufficient to begin adult life.

Core practices for school support

- Core practice 9
Students and teachers belong to teams that provide each student continuous personal and academic attention and a supportive environment for learning and growth.
- Core practice 10
Learning governs the allocation of time, space, facilities, and services.
- Core practice 11
Every teacher has sufficient time and resources to learn, to plan, and to confer with individual students, colleagues, and families.
- Core practice 12
Every staff member understands adolescent learning and developmental needs, possesses diverse instructional skills, and is a constructive model for youth.
- Core practice 13
Every school has a comprehensive professional development system in which every staff member has a professional development plan to guide improvement.
- Core practice 14
Staff, students, and parents are involved democratically in significant decisions affecting student learning.
- Core practice 15
Active leadership by principals inspires and mobilizes staff, students, and parents to work toward the fulfillment of the school's mission and, within it, their own learning and life goals.

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