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UTAH MIDDLE-LEVEL SCHOOL COMMUNITY COUNCILS:
AN EVALUATION OF COMPLIANCE, PROCESSES,
AND PERCEIVED IMPACT

by

Richard Jackson Nygaard

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

of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in

Education

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2008

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ABSTRACT

Utah Middle-Level School Community Councils: An Evaluation of
Compliance, Processes, and Perceived Impact

by

Richard Jackson Nygaard, Doctor of Education

Utah State University, 2008

Major Professor: Dr. Scott Hunsaker
Program: Curriculum and Instruction

The historical perspective of schools in our democratic society provides a framework of tension between local parent and community control versus professional and state control of public school decisions. Today, federal and state requirements demand increased student achievement. The state of Utah requires each public school to have a school community council (SCC) that is responsible for the development of plans for school improvement. Limited funds are provided to each school community council through the School LAND Trust Program to assist in the implementation of the developed plans for the purpose of increased student achievement. Three Utah middle-level school community councils participated in this qualitative strength-based process evaluation. Two of the SCCs were identified as exemplary and the third SCC was just beginning to function as a new SCC.

The evaluation concludes that the exemplary schools evaluated are compliant with the basic legal requirements, utilize strategies identified in the literature that show the most promise for increasing student achievement, and perceive the implemented programs are having a positive impact on student achievement. Exemplary middle-level SCCs were selected to identify those characteristics and strategies that show the most potential for improving student learning. The themes that emerged in the evaluation related to what works especially well and what concerns arise in the school community council process are: (a) the proper functioning of a school community council is dependent upon generating sufficient interest in participation; (b) the full participation of the council in making important decisions to improve the school served as the foundational source of member confidence; (c) the use of multiple forms of data helped focus deliberations and decisions on student learning; and (d) the mechanisms for communication within the council were strong, but there was a great need to improve communication with the larger school community related to the work of the school community council. In addition, the SCC processes employed at the evaluated schools demonstrated an effective balance between the professional expertise and the democratic involvement in decision-making.

(281 pages)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There is a trail behind my home where I took a daily bike ride during the heart of the writing process. The trail is dusty and leads up through fields of sage and prairie grass until it reaches dry farms of potatoes, wheat, and barley for as far as the eye can see. The ride is primarily uphill. As I made my daily ride, there were moments when I had plenty of energy and pushed hard as I ascended the hill, but the final ascent always tested my will to endure.

One day as I started the final ascent, I down shifted, and the chain came off. I lost my balance and tipped over. With no real damage done, I took a moment to brush off the dust and restore the chain. After the chain derailment, I had to start from a stand still going uphill. It was a challenge to get started, but I managed to get some momentum and made it to the top of the hill.

After taking a moment to enjoy the view, it was time to descend. About one fourth of the way down the first hill, I got caught in a rut that threw me off balance, and I found myself lying flat on my face in the dirt. My knee was scraped and my arm was sore from trying to catch myself, but I was able to brush myself off and continue down the trail. The rest of the ride was pleasant, but I proceeded cautiously after the fall.

My daily bicycle ride served as a metaphor to motivate me through the dissertation process. As challenging and steep as was my learning curve, I was able to persevere. At moments, my chain was derailed as I made mistakes out of ignorance or negligence and would have to take time to fix things. Once repaired, it always felt as if I had to regain momentum going up a steep slope. Even when I thought I had reached the

downhill, I found myself having to go back and rewrite whole chapters in a whole new style. As the process concludes, I proceed cautiously doing my best to enjoy the ride.

Along the ride, I have not been alone. Each participant, under no obligation, willingly shared their time and experience to make this evaluation possible. My doctoral committee chair, Dr. Scott Hunsaker, has invested countless hours reading and providing me invaluable advice to improve quality, content, and style. Dr. Lisa Boyce continued to ask the right questions to help me clarify my methods. The other committee members, Drs. Gary Carlston, Barry Franklin, and Rebecca Monhardt, have also served as a great support. Cari Buckner, a fellow doctoral student, colleague, and friend, has also been a tremendous support as she read, questioned, and provided inestimable feedback on every chapter as well as the raw data.

My parents provided more than financial assistance. They provided the educational foundation upon which this doctoral work has been built. I could not have even begun the process without them.

My children, Kaleb and Joshua, have shown incredible patience and support as they have seen a lot less of their father throughout the process. Being away from home gathering data only to return to long hours cloistered in my writing room required a lot from two teenage sons. It was a joy when we could make the morning bike rides together.

Along this ride, Heather has been beside me, encouraging me, sustaining me, and carrying the largest bulk of the home and family duties. She took the time to read everything I wrote, so she could talk to me about my work and help me clarify my understanding. Heather's support is immeasurable.

As challenging as this ride has been, I have nothing but gratitude for the journey. Though it often seemed to be a solitary journey, I know I was not alone. To each of you I owe my deepest gratitude. Thank you!

Richard Jackson Nygaard

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

What is the role of a school in a community? What is the role of a community in a school? As both schools and communities have evolved over time, a relationship between them exists, but the nature of this relationship can be highly variable (Crowson & Boyd, 2001). Public school has the responsibility to serve public purposes (Bullough, 1988). As professional educators develop ideas of how best to serve public purposes, how does the community influence these ideas? There is a link between schools and their communities, but those responsible for schools and communities respectively do not always utilize that link (Warren, 2005). Site-based school community councils (SCCs) are becoming more widely used as an attempt to unite parents, teachers, administrators and community members in a body to govern and monitor school improvement (Crowson & Boyd; Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 1991; Hess, 1999; Malen, 1999; Stein & Thorkildsen, 1999; U.S. Department of Education, 1994).

SCCs have been legislatively required at every public school in the state of Utah since the year 2001 (Children's Land Alliance Supporting Schools [CLASS], 2004). The term *community* is a commonly used term in education today, and its use can take on several possible meanings (Fendler, 2006). In the case of Utah SCCs, the term *community* refers specifically to the combined group of school personnel, parents, and guardians of students at each school. The term *community* is used to represent this group possessing a common interest in serving the students of the respective school. The SCC is a group of elected representatives of the school community and the school principal.

As the SCCs may have originated simply as a desire to get parents more involved in their local schools, specific outcomes with regard to student achievement are not required; however, a description of responsibilities has evolved through legislation that strongly implies improved academic achievement as the objective. Utah is not alone in including SCCs in the work of improving student achievement. SCCs or similar local councils are politically popular across the nation and even internationally (Caines, 2006; Hawaii State Department of Education, 2005; Khan, 2005; Swift-Morgan, 2006; Talley & Keedy, 2006). The federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 also established a parent involvement component that requires parent involvement in decision-making at the local school level for the expressed purpose of increasing student achievement.

Problem

Although community councils are politically popular and are becoming more common across the nation, I have found little convincing evidence that they have had a significant impact on student achievement or effectively engaged stakeholders in improving education. The research that has been conducted has had mixed results. The proliferation of shared decision-making is often advanced as an unquestionable school improvement strategy, yet there is surprisingly little credible and consistent evidence of its appropriateness and effectiveness (Hess, 1999; Malen, 1999). In fact, there is a great deal of evidence of inconsistency suggesting that “participatory decision making may exploit or empower people, stifle or stimulate organizational change, and reinforce or redefine the patterns of power and privilege in organizations” (Hess, p. 209).

As SCCs have such strong political support and have a strong potential in both positive and negative directions, it is essential that each SCC be given tools to increase success. Currently, there is no specific information identifying what those tools are for Utah councils. SCCs in Utah are directed by a law that prescribes how members are selected and specifies council responsibilities, but very little is known about how a SCC in the state of Utah can or should function to bring about the desired results. Each school is left to its own understanding and ingenuity to achieve the desired results.

As each school in Utah is grappling with issues of increasing student achievement, middle school is of particular interest in a study of SCCs for three reasons. First, the research has demonstrated for years that there is a decrease in parent involvement when students reach middle school (Epstein & Dauber, 1989; Halsey, 2005). Second, there is an increased emphasis on student achievement as students reach middle school (Heller, Calderon, & Medrich, 2003). Third, although some successful characteristics of high school and elementary SCCs have been identified, an extensive literature search has not revealed any studies documenting the characteristics of middle SCCs that have most effectively addressed issues of student achievement. It would seem imperative to know if the characteristics of successful high school or elementary SCCs also apply to middle schools.

Purpose

Each school district identifies 10% of the schools in the district that are implementing exemplary plans, and the Utah School LAND Trust program

administration also makes visits to 10% of the schools each year (Utah State School Board, 2006). What can be learned from the middle SCCs that are designated as exemplary? First, are the SCCs being implemented as the law prescribes? Second, what strategies are employed to develop these exemplary plans for increasing student achievement? Finally, how are these plans being implemented, and are they having an impact on student achievement?

The purpose of this study was to conduct a strength-based process evaluation of Utah SCCs at the middle-school level. I use the term strength-based to capture the essence of the qualitative approach to this evaluation. The terms *strength-based* or *asset-based*, is used in various contexts. Special education used the term as an approach that seeks the strengths of the child and uses those strengths in designing interventions that will develop greater success rather than a more traditional deficit model (Brendtro, Long, & Brown, 2000; Carpenter-Aeby & Kurtz, 2000; Hewitt, 2005; Winter-Messiers, 2007). The term strength-based is also cited as an approach in several diverse areas such as programs for supporting families and children (Huebner, Jones, Miller, Custer, & Critchfield, 2006), rehabilitating juvenile offenders (Clark, 1997), diagnosing and treating ADHD (Hallowell, 2007), developing community (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996), and developing leadership (Mack, 2007). In each of these cases the term strength-based is used to emphasize the strengths in people, organizations, and their environments. A strength-based approach examines the strengths that can be built upon as an alternative to a deficit model that is traditionally used to identify a problem that can be diagnosed and repaired.

Through this qualitative strength-based approach to a process evaluation, I do not focus on what is not working and why it is not working. Instead, I focus on what is working especially well, examine why it is working well, and seek ideas for making similar performance more common (Preskill & Catsambas, 2006). A criticism of a strength-based approach is the potential neglect of any serious problems that may exist; however, just because these problems are not the focus does not mean they are neglected. Problems emerge and are addressed in the current evaluation within each site as well as through the unexpected opportunity to evaluate a newly established SCC that possesses the desire but lacks the knowledge and experience of an exemplary SCC. “One characteristic of qualitative research is to represent multiple perspectives of individuals in order to represent the complexity of our world” (Creswell, 2002, p. 194). Including the fledgling case along with the exemplary cases provides the opportunity to learn more by intensively studying cases at extreme ends of the continuum of program implementation (Patton, 2002). By including the nonexemplary case, the exemplary characteristics become more pronounced. All cases contain strengths and weaknesses, and by studying cases with variation, we are better able to understand the exemplary processes of program implementation. Using a strength-based approach with the selected cases exposes weakness, but it seeks to address those weaknesses through the strengths of the organization.

Using a strength-based approach in this evaluation, I selected an extreme case sample that provides information rich exemplary middle school cases of SCCs (Patton, 2002). In addition to the extreme case sampling, appreciative questions were used to flesh

out the experiences that have created the exemplary nature of the selected SCCs. In addition to identification of strengths through appreciative questions, probing questions were used to determine participants' perceptions of how the strengths can be used to improve the process and achieve the desired outcomes (Preskill & Catsambas, 2006).

The purpose revolving around determining compliance, identifying successful processes, and examining perceived impact of exemplary middle SCCs lends itself to a qualitative evaluation that studies success systematically to discover both what is working well and what improvements need to be made to foster further success (Preskill & Catsambas, 2006). The results of this study will serve to inform the participating schools and districts and also provide data to the state School LAND Trust administration at the Utah State Office of Education concerning current practices of exemplary middle SCCs.

Context

Currently, each SCC should be established and has been legislatively given a specific list of duties to fulfill. To start with, each year the SCC is required to view a 15-minute training video, which talks about the history and use of the Utah trust lands. It discusses the state's responsibilities to manage the lands placed in the trust and how the funds are for the benefit of schoolchildren. The video also explains how the permanent fund continues to grow, how the interest is distributed to the schools, and that the SCC is responsible to use those funds to improve academic performance (Utah State Office of Education, 2007b).

There is also a training and tips section of the School Learning and Nurturing Development (LAND) Trust website. The website contains documents that can be downloaded that include purposes and requirements of SCCs; tips for community councils such as sample agendas and a letter of clarification from a former state superintendent; information on working as a team; and links to access the Utah state core curriculum, state law, and assessment results (School LAND Trust Program, n.d.). The number of hits on the site are tracked, and some of the materials have been distributed at SCC training meetings. School LAND Trust personnel indicated that the state hired a new employee to address issues of training in summer 2007, but the position was discontinued in summer 2008. Although several districts report having some kind of annual SCC training, the School LAND Trust personnel have not attended the training or reviewed training materials. The need for more formal training is recognized, but different groups at the state level are still developing training as of summer 2008.

As a point of clarification, the term *school community council* (SCC) is a term that is used in the state of Utah. Other terms cited in the literature that represent the same type of council are school management councils, local school councils, school-based decision-making councils, and school advisory councils. There are other general terms that can refer to the same concept such as school-based management, shared-decision making, shared governance, and site-based decision-making.

Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1a-108 (2008) establishes the following criteria for each Utah school: (a) a school community council (SCC) will be established at each public school; (b) the SCC will develop a school improvement plan; (c) the SCC will develop a

School LAND Trust Program (d) the SCC will develop an access routing plan; (e) the SCC will assist in the development and implementation of a professional development plan for school staff; and (f) the SCC will advise the school and district about programs related to the school environment. The council may form subcommittees to develop any of the plans, but all plans are subject to approval by the whole council. Members of subcommittees do not need to be members of the SCC. In the following paragraphs each of these criteria will be discussed.

Establishment of SCC

An SCC is a committee formed at each public school in the state of Utah. Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1a-108 (2008) established strict guidelines related to membership in the SCC. A parent majority is required for all Utah SCCs. The school principal is an ex-officio member of the SCC with full voting privileges. Parent members of the council must be elected by a majority of parents voting in the election. School employee members of the council must be elected by a majority of school employees voting in the election. Once elected, members serve for a 2-year term with a maximum of three consecutive terms. Any parent or guardian of a current student can declare candidacy. Any member of the council (except the principal) can serve as the chair of the SCC.

Development of School Improvement Plan

Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1a-108.5 specified how the school improvement plan should be developed and what it should contain. It states that the SCC will evaluate the Utah Performance and Assessment System for Students (U-PASS) test results (privacy

laws restrict parent members from viewing individual student scores) and use the evaluation in developing the plans. The U-PASS report card is a report provided to each school and published to the community providing a measurement of student performance. Tests included in the report card are: (a) norm-referenced achievement testing (administered in third, fifth, and eighth grades); (b) direct writing assessments (administered in sixth and ninth grades); (c) criterion-referenced tests (administered at the conclusion of grades 2 through 12) for basic skills courses such as Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science; and (d) the Utah Basic Skills Competency Test (UBSCT) (administered in the 10th-grade year with sections being repeated if not passed). This report card measures not only the school average scores, but also proficiency rates, individual proficiency scores, and disaggregated subgroup scores (i.e., ethnic minorities, economic disadvantaged, limited English proficiency, and students with disabilities) (Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1-602).

After reviewing this assessment data, the SCC will develop a plan that will include: (a) identification of the most critical academic needs; (b) a proposed course of action to meet those needs; (c) information on needed programs, practices, or materials that will facilitate the proposed course of action; (d) how any financial resources, such as the School LAND Trust Program funds, will be used to improve academic achievement. In addition to identifying the most critical academic needs of the school, the plan may also include school climate or other academic needs. This plan is then to be implemented by the professional staff with appropriate reporting and accounting of progress (School Improvement Plan of 2002).

*Development of School LAND Trust
Program Plan*

The School LAND Trust Program permanent fund has resulted from the sale and use of the school trust lands. The school trust lands are parcels of land that were granted to the state of Utah when it was inducted as a state in 1896. These lands are managed by the state for the benefit of schoolchildren. For the first hundred years of statehood the land did not yield significant benefit for Utah school children. In 1994 the trust lands administration management was reorganized on a business model. This reorganization has created a growth in the fund that has exceeded expectations. Prior to 1999, the impact of the trust land fund on education was negligible. In 1999, legislation established the School LAND Trust Program and in the first year (2001) of operation, 5 million dollars was distributed to Utah schools on a per pupil basis. This amount doubled to 10 million dollars by 2005, and although that amount was expected to double every ten years, it has increased to 25.3 million dollars in 2007-08 (CLASS, 2004; Utah State Office of Education, 2008).

The School LAND Trust Program plan was developed by the SCC and outlines how the money from the school trust lands will be utilized to facilitate the increased academic achievement outlined in the school improvement plan. These funds come from interest and dividends from the school trust lands permanent fund (School LAND Trust Program. Utah Code Ann. § 53A-16-101.5, 2008). The funded activities must target academic achievement.

Development of Access Routing Plan

An access routing plan outlines the safest routes for students who walk to school. Development of this plan is the responsibility of the SCC in cooperation with public officials. This plan addresses any concerns the community may have about the safety of walking routes to and from school. It is not outlined exactly what data are used to develop this plan, but councils are directed to the Utah Department of Transportation for resources to assist them (Utah Code Ann. § 53A-3-402).

Development of Professional Development Plan

The SCC has the responsibility to assist in the development and implementation of the school professional development plan. It is required that this staff development plan also be aligned with the school improvement plan. This plan should include a focus related to school improvement goals, a schedule of activities, instructional leadership and support, and a system of accountability. This professional development plan also needs to be aligned with the district professional development plan (SCCs; Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1a-108).

Advisement of School and District

Although the council is primarily addressing issues related to student achievement, it does have the additional responsibilities of safety with respect to the access routing plan and this general responsibility of advisement concerning the school environment. This provides SCCs with the ability to express general concerns about the school environment, but does not grant the authority to develop the plans to address these

concerns (SCCs; Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1a-108).

Models

Given the list of responsibilities of the SCC, if a SCC were functioning according to the prescribed law, what would that look like? Is there a set of successful practices that are well established that could be used to stand as a model?

Anderson (1998) suggested a potential framework consisting of five criteria necessary for moving “toward authentic participation” (p. 586) by community members in school governance. They are (a) inclusion—participation moves towards greater social equity; (b) relevancy—participants have a clear interest in the decisions being made; (c) authenticity—prescribed participatory structures are implemented fully and successfully; (d) coherent expectation—means and ends of participation are clear; and (e) inequity focus—broader societal and institutional structure facilitates a greater balance of power. As insightful as this framework is, it does not provide a clear picture of how SCCs might meet these criteria.

Some researchers have identified specific positive characteristics of shared decision-making in schools. Petress (2002) suggested that group decision-making always utilize the principles of critical thinking, stakeholder involvement, and mutual support of the final decision. Effective decisions also require adequate, high quality information available to all members of the group. Johnson and Pajares (1996) found that stakeholder confidence, adequate resources, established democratic procedures, and principal support enhanced shared decision-making. These characteristics add elements of clarity, but the

picture of exactly what an effective SCC does to increase student achievement is incomplete.

The most recent study to provide a picture of what a model SCC might look like studied three high-performance schools in an urban Kentucky school district including two high schools and an elementary school. This study found that the positive characteristics that built instructional capacity in a school were (a) principals sharing power, (b) a network of staff and parents engaged in problem solving, (c) use of data to focus on student achievement, and (d) collective accountability for student achievement (Talley & Keedy, 2006). Talley and Keedy provided the most clarity for what effective practice may look like, but while this study provided valuable information on what makes SCCs successful at the high school and elementary level, it begs the question of SCC success at the middle-school level.

Questions

In reviewing the requirements of the law in conjunction with the characteristics from the literature that yield positive results, there are several questions that arise that are worthy of evaluation and that will be the focus of this study. The questions relate to implementation, process, and impact.

1. Are Utah middle SCCs identified as exemplary implementing the law as prescribed?
2. Do Utah middle SCCs identified as exemplary utilize strategies of effective site based management and shared decision-making identified in the literature?

- a. Which strategies do the council members report using?
 - b. How are these strategies implemented?
3. To what degree are the plans developed by exemplary middle SCCs being fully implemented, and are they perceived by council members and school personnel as having a positive impact on student achievement?

Delimitations

The primary delimitation of this study is that it is based in Utah and reflects the legal requirements of Utah law. The results, therefore, will not necessarily generalize directly to other states or countries that use a form of shared governance in schools that differ from Utah's.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review examines current literature describing community involvement in public education generally and site-based governing councils specifically. It outlines a historical glimpse at community and public school connections, the acceptance of site-based community councils, who participates, what participation looks like, some concerns with current practices, what practices are most effective, and some areas of need.

As I have conducted the literature review, it has been a recursive process. I began by conducting a search for articles using the search terms *school community councils*, *site-based management*, *shared decision making*, *parents and shared decision making*, and *shared governance*. For the historical perspective, I used combinations of terms such as *history*, *public schools*, *parent involvement*, *democracy*, and *common schools*. The searches were conducted using WilsonWeb, JSTOR and ERIC. As articles or books were found, references were checked for relevance and sought using the Utah State University electronic library or Brigham Young University—Idaho electronic library and copies requested through distance services when unavailable on the Internet. Citation searches were also conducted using the web of science reference search. The articles were in turn checked for citations and those citations checked as well. In addition to the published articles and books, I also conducted a search of dissertations using the same terms in the ProQuest database for dissertations available at Utah State University.

Historical Connections Among Schools and Communities

The relationship between local communities and the schools within those communities has a varied history. Every state and locale has its own laws and policies that govern such relationships, and the policies have evolved mostly independently in different districts and states. Several historical examples demonstrate the evolution and shifting of control between local communities and state or professional educators.

The first laws in America to require education began with a Massachusetts law of 1642, which required parents to ensure children were educated in principles of religion and citizenship. The 1642 law provided requirements for educating children in basic reading and writing, but the law did not establish schools. At the time, a child's education was considered the responsibility of parents or apprenticeship masters. In 1647 the Old Deluder Satan Act, was instituted in the colony of Massachusetts, which required a town with 50 families to hire a teacher and a town of 100 families to establish a grammar school. The Old Deluder Satan Act of 1647 was the first step towards compulsory education and granted the responsibility to the local citizens (Barger, 2004).

Schooling evolved independently in the different American colonies. Issues of religion, language, and ethnicity heavily influenced the politics of education through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The advancement of science and freedom of thought conflicting with religious education created the concern for who should control schools (Spring, 1997).

Tax supported public education in the United States began to evolve shortly after the Revolutionary War. Though public schools did not fully materialize, schools

developed in New York City during the 1790s were closely related to what later became known as common schools (Kaestle, 1972). Although the lines between private and public were not clear, the school system in New York City in the 1790s was a private system (Cremin, 1980; Spring, 1997). There were two types of schools at the time—common pay schools or charity schools—and 50% of the school-age children were enrolled in the schools at any one time. The charity schools were run mostly by local churches, and the common pay schools were run by schoolmasters and staffed by both men and women teachers. Neither school type was initially supported by tax dollars, and the success of the schools depended on customer satisfaction. During this time, the legislature of New York designated money to go towards schools, but the common governing council established in New York City determined that the money would not be distributed to the existing common pay schools due to the council's inability to control them. The council, instead, determined the money would be used by local communities to hire teachers on salary. Kaestle described how the community would hire a teacher and pay as much as it could and then petition to the council responsible for the state money to cover the difference between the contracted amount and the local funds. The council initially determined that other funds would be used to build schools, and from 1795 to 1800 the concept of public school in New York City changed from being any open place where people learned together to specific places that were to be built and maintained through government assistance for the purpose of education; however, in 1800 it was determined that the public school buildings would be too expensive, and the capital that had been acquired was either invested or distributed to the existing charity schools.

Although the episode in New York City does not introduce local parent governance as an issue of public schools, it does introduce the issue of who ought to control local public schools. The common pay schools had schoolmasters and hired teachers who often had specific political agenda (Kaestle, 1972). The political agenda could conflict with local values of the people who had control of the funds available for schooling. Because of the potential political conflict, the local council elected not to support the common pay schools with public funds because the council feared it would not be able to control the education introducing the dichotomous relationship between professional and local citizen control of schools.

The common school movement of the mid-nineteenth century transformed schools from local enterprises to tax supported and state operated public schools with the ideal of being open to all. Horace Mann, Secretary of the Massachusetts State Board of Education, led the transformation. The main ideal of the movement was not local control but universal access to a quality education (Osgood, 1997). The common school was also seen as a means of improving society. Before common schools, states had passed laws requiring schools to be established, but there was no system of state oversight. State oversight of public schools began with the new position of state superintendent in New York in 1812, but it was not until the 1830s that state control became a major educational reform. The state control of schools was not universally accepted; and in 1840, Orestes Brownson led an attempt to abolish the state control in Massachusetts and restore local control (Spring, 1997). The attempt failed, and under Horace Mann's influence public common schools evolved in every part of the United States throughout the nineteenth

century.

Post-Civil War Texas created a state mandated system of public education. The Texas system was established by law in 1871 and governed hiring, firing, and salaries of teachers; the curriculum and textbooks; and duties of school boards and districts. Local communities did not appreciate state control, so four years later the plan was rejected, and a system of community schools was established that put the control of schools back in the hands of local communities (Garrett, 2000). The establishment of locally controlled schools was done primarily as a rejection of the state government controlling how local children were educated. As new local community schools were established in Texas, they were provided state funding based on enrollment. Each school was established for a single year, but local corruption had rolls filled with students who never attended, and funds were seen as being wasted because the community schools were terribly inefficient. The community schools were not regulated, so teachers were often underqualified, and favoritism was rampant. Under local jurisdiction there were problems of quality control and discriminatory practices as well. Because of these problems, the state began to reclaim authority within three years and established a stable state system by 1884.

Although community schools were not successful in Texas (Garrett, 2000), the history teaches some very important things about community involvement in education. The Texas citizens established that communities definitely had an interest and desire to have a voice in children's education, but the experience also exposed the need for base standards and regulations to guide the community involvement and reduce potential favoritism and discrimination.

In the same era there is a contrasting example of how community involvement supported schools that otherwise would have failed. Following the Civil War there was a great need for schools for the freed slaves. Black teachers went to small, rural communities where the schools became central to the Black communities, even though they were extremely poor and had meager resources. The school was the place where ideological differences could be put aside and the community could stand together for the good of their children (Savage, 2001).

In the African American Tennessee schools cited by Savage (2001), the principals faced hostile conditions yet made significant contributions to improvements in curriculum and development of the schools. The community involvement was the primary resource to provide extra resources to teachers, as the African American schools were drastically underfunded.

The importance of community in the African American schools of Tennessee is summed up well in the statement:

Regardless of what the school district allocated to the school, the school belonged to the Black community. As a member of the community, school personnel had the power to make something out of nothing. Ownership gave them a control of their destiny. Certainly not absolute control, but teachers and principals had enough control that with the assistance of the community, they could provide a solid foundation for their students. (Savage, 2001, p. 200)

The history of African American schools of Tennessee provides evidence of the desire of community members to contribute to the education of their children. The absence of tension between state or professional authority and the local community is a unique characteristic of the independent African American community schools of Tennessee.

The professionals and community members demonstrated that when they work in

cooperation with one another, positive results could be achieved.

At the start of the twentieth century, the attitude in education became focused on scientific management and greater roles for administrators and shrinking roles for school boards (Ravitch, 2000; Spring, 1997). The ideals of scientific management collided with democratic ideals as education became the domain of professional educators.

A discussion of community involvement in public schools at the start of the twentieth century would be incomplete if it did not mention the National Congress of Mothers, which later became the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). The PTA served to maintain connections between home and schools during the era of centralization and scientific management of the early twentieth century. The PTA promoted both educational and recreational needs of the communities. The women members of the PTA had a strong influence on what and how the children were being taught. Although the contributions of the PTA were initially welcomed, tension developed as male administrators expressed concern that laywomen were gaining too much influence in public education. By the 1930s PTA involvement was limited to cooperating with teachers, helping with student homework and activities, teaching parent workshops, and conducting school approved fundraisers. Interestingly, with the reduction of influence came an exponential increase in membership over the following decades (Woysner, 2003).

The history of the PTA is further evidence of the desire of parents to be involved in their children's education. It also demonstrates the tension that can arise between professional educators and interested community members.

As a part of the New Deal resettlement era of Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency, schools were established in cooperation with the impoverished community of Arthurdale, West Virginia, among other areas. The schools were an experiment in applying the methods of John Dewey in rural communities. The curriculum was progressive emphasizing principles of democracy, scientific method, and adjusting to individual child interest and capacity (Wuenstel, 2002). Schools like those in Arthurdale were considered successful experiments in community cooperation. However, within five years the schools had reverted to a more traditional school model. Two possible reasons were cited for the decline of the progressive curriculum established in the Arthurdale schools; (a) the absence of communication with the community, and (b) the desire of the community to have a more normal curriculum. The transformation back to a traditional school occurred even though the innovations were highly successful and initially received tremendous support from parents and community (Wuenstel).

The experience of the Arthurdale schools shows the importance of continued communication with the community. It also demonstrates a tendency towards complacency when schools are successful. It is interesting that, although the schools were placed in a community, the schools had very little involvement from the local community beyond the initial establishment. The schools were very much run by professionals, and it is interesting to note that the failure to continue a very positive program was due to the absence of community involvement.

In a study of community schools in New Haven, Connecticut, Harbison (2003) documented a tension between centralization of school control to professionals and

decentralization granting more community control. During the early twentieth century, a rising bureaucracy of school control separated schools from the communities they served; however, in conjunction with the civil rights movement of the 1960s, decentralization of schools began to occur in many parts of the country. New Haven is one example. The community schools in New Haven took the public school program to a new level of service. The schools not only provided education but also social and health services in response to the changing demographics and socioeconomic conditions of urban schools.

The New Haven community schools were built upon the community school model that began in Flint, Michigan in cooperation with Charles Stewart Mott (Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, n.d.). The New Haven effort was a massive project that was funded through a grant from the Ford Corporation. New Haven created schools that linked to the community in areas beyond education, including health and dental clinics, legal help, libraries, and recreational opportunities. These community schools effectively shifted the leadership roles, decentralized the organizational structure, and provided community access to decision-making procedures (Harbison, 2003).

Unfortunately, the merging of all the different services into one community school proved most challenging. Professional educators felt their expertise was being superseded by outsiders. As a result of obstacles and conflicts, the school system in New Haven today, as well as across the country, is primarily a centralized system (Harbison, 2003). From the New Haven experience we learned just how involved the community could become in the schools, and yet the tension between professional educators and lay community members contributed to the dissolution of community schools.

Through these historical snapshots a cycle from centralization of school control to decentralization with community involvement and back to centralization is evident. Through the cycles a tension between professional expertise and democratic control are palpable. A contemporary example from New York City demonstrates that the cycle continues. A community control movement in New York City schools began in 1966 with decentralization of schools and concluded with Mayor Bloomberg's recentralization in 2003. A study of two of the New York City districts demonstrates that the decentralization and community involvement were a positive move that had significant benefits for the students of the districts. However, other districts proved to be filled with corruption, thus the impetus for Mayor Bloomberg's takeover (Lewis, 2006).

In addition to the development of the public schools within states and districts, the national government has become a major contributor to the politics of public schools with the passage of the original Title I Act of 1965. Fege (2006) provides a historical perspective on how the national government has influenced the role of parent and community involvement in schools from the time of *Brown vs. Board of Education* and the first authorization of Title I through the current No Child Left Behind legislation. With regard to the responsibility schools have to their communities (focusing on poor communities), Senator Robert Kennedy stated he would support Title I only on the condition that the school be responsive and accountable to the constituencies it serves. Senator Kennedy is cited as the one to introduce a mandate for assessing student progress to provide a political tool for holding schools publicly accountable, but initially the national laws governing schools held no requirements for public participation in schools.

Parent participation requirements began to appear in the law authorizing Title I in 1969 and became more demanding through the 1970s. In 1978 requirements such as participation in school governance and program establishment and evaluation were introduced. Many of these requirements were removed by Congress in 1981 because of concerns that parent special interests wielded too much influence or districts' were too resistant to parent involvement. The Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 increased the production of data resulting from standards-based and achievement tests. No Child Left Behind has served to increase emphasis on testing. Fege reported that, although the data were initially envisioned by Kennedy as a means to empower parents to influence educational quality, increased testing has not yielded a greater involvement of parents and community in helping increase student achievement, but it has caused more of a focus for schools to pass tests and meet legal requirements.

The historical glimpse of community connections to their local public schools demonstrates how the dichotomy between professionals and the public they serve has continued to evolve through federal, state, and local policies as well as locally established practices and traditions. In spite of the potential for conflict there are continual efforts to have the two entities come together to make important decisions related to improving schools and increasing student achievement.

Contemporary Community Involvement in Public Education

When individuals choose to participate in a community they express a dedication to both improve individuals and the community as a whole (Bullough, 1988). There are

many ways for a member of a community to participate in a community school, but Swift-Morgan (2006) demonstrates that the term community participation in schools is still very vague. Does community involvement relate to aspects of management, finance, teaching and learning, or other functions of schools?

The CCSSO (1991) used six basic categories for types of family involvement: (a) the provision of basic needs (health, safety, and life skills); (b) school-family communication; (c) family involvement as volunteers, aids or other learning activities at the school; (d) learning activities in the home; (e) school and program governance and advocacy; and (f) participation in programs that foster development such as adult education and job training. The same six categories are also used as the framework promoted by the National Network of Partnership Schools, a national organization of member schools dedicated to increasing parent and community involvement and research-based strategies to improve student learning (National Network of Partnership Schools, 2007).

The type of involvement of interest for the current evaluation revolves around the fifth type of involvement, school and program governance and advocacy. Interest to involve community stakeholders as participants in school improvement was rekindled in 1983 with the publication of the report, *A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Hess (1999) identified three waves of school reform that have occurred since publication of the report. The three waves include (a) a focus on performance that emphasizes testing, (b) restructuring and professionalism of teachers and administrators, and (c) a focus on placing stakeholders in

charge of important decisions through school choice or community control of schools.

The last two waves are a reminder of the dichotomous tension between the professionals and local communities. Although Hess refers to the three reforms as coming in waves, the current evaluation will demonstrate that all three reforms have a prominent role in Utah middle school SCCs.

Warren (2005) conducted three case studies of three different urban communities who placed a focus on community stakeholders taking charge of important decisions related to control of schools. Each school demonstrated a different model of community involvement in school governance. The three models consist of (a) the service approach, (b) the development approach, and (c) the organizing approach. Warren's organizing model is most like Utah's SCCs. The organizing model of parent school collaboration views parents as change agents and community leaders rather than as merely consumers of services. Warren concludes that each type of involvement requires investment in parent-engagement for the long term. The current evaluation demonstrates that successful long-term engagement requires a large initial and ongoing time investment. One of the primary advantages of involvement is the way "any reform strategy conforms to their values, interests, and understanding of local conditions" (p. 167). When reform strategies reflect community values and interests stakeholders are more committed to making it a success.

Community Involvement in School Decision-Making

Utah, like many other states, has passed laws related to schools including parents

on local decision-making councils (Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1A-108; U.S. Department of Education, 1994). Involvement of parents and community members in school decision-making takes on different forms in various locations in the United States and around the world. Many of the studies provide insight into the implementation and impact of the various policies.

A four state case study of California, Florida, Alabama, and Minnesota state agency policies and practices for increasing family involvement in schools was conducted by CCSSO (1991). Although the case study looked at several forms of family involvement, a prominent reform effort in all four states included a heavy reliance on community and parent involvement in the school improvement process. Each of the four states had unique characteristics with regard to its shared decision-making policies, but each state created policies to make parent involvement a part of the system of public education. The study revealed the existence of shared decision-making policies and made site visits to see how the policies were being implemented. Great variation existed between the different states' policies and practices, which hindered the ability to assess effectiveness of shared decision-making generally.

Internationally, community engagement in schools is also considered essential to improving teaching and learning. International locations such as Canada, New Zealand, Australia, England, Pakistan, and Ethiopia have laws linking schools to the community and mandating participation from the community and teachers (Caines, 2006; Khan, 2005; Leithwood & Menzies, 1998a; Swift-Morgan, 2006). Caines conducted a case study of two elementary schools in Alberta, Canada that had exemplary councils.

Through interviews and observations Caines exposed the potential politics of a school council and the value of principal leadership, but did not address issues of the processes used by councils to improve student achievement. Leithwood and Menzies conducted an extensive literature review of 83 articles, including international sources, on different types of site-based management. In all those studies, there was insufficient evidence to conclude that site-based management of any kind results in increased student achievement. Khan, more recently, reviewed 33 articles on developing countries use of school councils and found that, although 75% of councils make decisions related to pedagogy, pedagogical decisions were infrequent, and it was unknown how the process worked or to what results. Khan went on to study eight rural public schools in Pakistan using qualitative case study methods. Khan focused on issues related to the politics of participation and decision-making and found that less than 10% of the decisions made in councils related to pedagogical decisions. The impact of the pedagogical decisions on student achievement was not included in the study. Swift-Morgan conducted a qualitative case study of the parent and community engagement in decision-making in rural Ethiopia. Again, the findings were related primarily to the politics of participation, and the only discussion on learning impact was related to how parents support their own children. No connection was made between the shared decision-making and student achievement.

Community involvement in shared decision-making is a prominent element of many contemporary schools. The studies on SCCs, site-based management and shared decision-making primarily focus on the politics of participation. Issues of impact on

student achievement are not as abundant, nor do they clearly delineate practices that will impact student achievement. The connection between shared decision-making practices and student achievement are not prevalent in the literature because of the difficulty in isolating shared decision-making as a cause of improved student achievement (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998a; Malen & Vincent, 2008). Even when it appears to make a difference, the improvement would be more closely linked to the specific decision made rather than the process of making that decision. The current study evaluates the processes of the Utah middle school SCCs identified as exemplary that are making a difference in student achievement.

School Community Council Participants

The law governing SCCs in Utah requires that parent members be elected by parents of students currently attending the school and requires the majority of council members to be parents (Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1a-108). Chicago was one of the first school systems in the United States to implement school councils with parents and community members as a majority for school governance (Hess, 1999). As of 2005, 34 states had statutes on site-based decision making. Membership procedures vary in the different states between appointment and election to council membership, but often procedures are left to the local school boards. Many states specified a desire for parity between school professionals and parent and community membership, but only Illinois, Colorado, and Utah mandated parent and community membership to serve as the majority of the councils (Dounay, 2005).

In her case study of rural Ethiopian schools, Swift-Morgan (2006) revealed the concern that participants in a SCC were the elite, and ordinary citizens did not have an equal chance as a result of both economic and social factors. The phenomenon of participation favoring the elite citizenry has also been found in studies of community councils in the United States and Canada (Caines, 2006; Schutz, 2006). Schutz reviewed literature published from 1993 to 2003 that focused on urban school-community relations and in regard to involvement with site-based decision-making found that “people with privilege tend to dominate” (p. 710).

When factoring out economics, Swift-Morgan (2006) concluded that the variables that most heavily influenced participation were (a) encouragement from the school staff; (b) respectful relationships between staff and parents or community members; and (c) frequent meetings providing opportunities for parents, staff and other community members to come together. Encouragement, respectful relationships, and frequent meetings are important means to increase parent and community involvement but can also serve as a detriment to the democratic ideal, as there is a tendency of administrators to get parents who will support their programs in council positions and prevent critics from pursuing positions (Malen, 1999).

The variables cited as influencing participation in SCCs exist in Utah’s exemplary middle school SCCs. Whether the variables enhance or inhibit the democratic ideal is not a topic of the current evaluation; however, the processes of becoming a participant in each of the evaluated SCCs will be documented.

School Community Council Member Responsibilities

The structure and responsibilities of shared decision-making councils vary widely. Laws and policies create general goals and specific responsibilities, but the SCCs do not always meet the goals or satisfy the responsibilities. The responsibilities also can serve to simultaneously grant decision-making authority and restrict what decisions can be made.

One primary goal of an SCC is school improvement and community development focusing on improvement of learning (Hess, 1999; Warren, 2005). Another purpose of a SCC is increased accountability to and satisfaction for the community (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998a). Other goals of SCCs include seeking more cooperative relationships between administrators, teachers, and parents on topics ranging from safety to pedagogy.

Laws and policies create specific responsibilities for community councils. Florida and Minnesota school advisory committees have the responsibility to make an annual report to their local communities concerning what decisions have been made and provide data on how the decisions and implemented programs have impacted the school (CCSSO, 1991). Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1A-108 established that Utah SCCs have the responsibility to develop plans and programs focused on school improvement and increased student achievement, but as responsibilities are granted, successful fulfillment is not guaranteed.

In 1973, Salt Lake City School District began some of the first site-based SCCs. The councils were granted authority on budget, personnel, and programs (Malen & Ogawa, 1988). With the current evaluation taking place with Utah SCCs, Malen and Ogawa's case study of Salt Lake City school district is of particular interest. The case study involved surveys of council members, review of meeting minutes, and in-depth

interviews. The literature review for the study documents the expectation that site-based councils would provide parents with influence on school programs and policies resulting in governance that is more responsive to student needs at the local level. The Salt Lake City schools were selected for the case study because of the existence of four structural components: (a) the council in each school was located at the school site; (b) each council was granted authority to establish policy and programs; (c) democratic parity between teachers, administrators, and parents was established; and (d) some training had been provided to councils.

Malen and Ogawa (1988) concluded that the Salt Lake City School District was a confounding case.

The study constitutes a confounding case, in that the research findings do not fit the research expectations. Despite the existence of highly favorable structural arrangements, teachers and parents did not wield significant influence on significant issues in these arenas. (p. 252)

The results suggested that (a) although designed to create programs and policies, in practice, SCCs served to merely endorse and advise; (b) although established to create parity, in practice, principals controlled the councils; and (c) although granted decision-making authority, SCCs made no effective difference on decisions made.

The conclusions of the Salt Lake City study are a result of a detailed analysis of multiple forms of data by multiple researchers. The results provide evidence of another type of tension between professional control and parent or community influence in education. Malen and Ogawa (1988) called the tension “the norms of propriety and civility” (p. 264). The norms of propriety served to maintain the professional control while the norms of civility served to contain any potential for conflict. The Salt Lake City

study demonstrated the existence of the tension in spite of the structural framework that could resolve such tension. The framework being that the council was site based, possessed authority, possessed parity, and was provided training.

Although the results did not establish the framework as sufficient to guarantee successful parent and teacher influence in decision-making, the study did identify possible causes of the unexpected results. Malen and Ogawa (1988) identified components such as the lack of diversity of SCC participants, the lack of discretionary resources available to the SCC, and the lack of oversight to ensure compliance with the guidelines. Another factor that led to disappointing findings relates to the structural component of training identified as existing in the Salt Lake City schools. One of the reasons for selecting Salt Lake City schools was that training had been provided, but there was admittedly no training taking place during the study, and the only evidence of training provided was “intermittent opportunities to obtain information regarding district guidelines...and...group dynamics” (p. 254).

Although SCCs are designed to meet general goals or specific requirements, the requirements are not always satisfied or necessarily supportive of the original intent. In her review of research studies dating from 1994 to 1999 coupled with her previous review published in *The Study of Educational Politics*, Malen (1999) provided analysis of the politics of individuals and groups gaining influence. Malen concluded that parents’ influence on schools through community councils is primarily a peripheral influence. Parents are typically not engaged in the development of programs and policies but are more engaged in listening, learning, and providing support for the principal’s decisions.

In a more recent review of the literature, Malen and Vincent (2008) examined research articles related to relationships of power and micropolitics in schools from 1992-2006. In the review of more than 200 articles, Malen and Vincent identified a weakness of policies designed to provide considerable site-based decision-making authority. They argue that federal and state policies constrain the local autonomy through policies that simultaneously grant site-based councils decision-making authority and give very strict guidelines on how those decisions need to be made. The dichotomy is evident in Utah SCCs as they have been given key decision-making authority and limited resources to design and implement programs with respect to school improvement, but also have strict guidelines to target improved student achievement, which is measured through criterion-referenced tests (CRTs).

School Community Council Concerns

Malen and Ogawa (1988) raised concerns about the efficacy of SCCs to fulfill the promise of greater stakeholder involvement in site-based decision-making in the Salt Lake City schools. Hess (1999) reviewed school council policies and several studies of the policy implementation in the cities of New York, Chicago, Detroit, and Salt Lake City (citing Malen and Ogawa). The review documented a discrepancy between policies and practice. The policies in each case were established to improve schools by creating site-based councils that granted control of the decision-making process in the hands of parents, professionals (teachers), and administrators. In many cases the parents were given the majority of positions to ensure inclusion in the process. In practice, even when

councils had a parent majority, the principal controlled agendas, programs, and decisions.

The discrepancy between prescribed and actual practices can yield resentment when perceptive parents recognize they are not making a meaningful contribution to school improvement (Malen, 1999). A review of more than 200 research studies on parent involvement in education found that, with respect to involvement in shared governance, parents consider themselves capable of decision-making; however, relatively few educators feel parents are qualified to make such decisions. There is also a fear that parents will base decisions on what is best for their own child and not necessarily all children in the school (Stein & Thorkildsen, 1999). Warren (2005) focused his case study on issues of social capital and relational power. Although using different methods, Warren's conclusions expose the perception cited by Stein and Thorkildsen as being founded in issues of relational power. Warren found the reasons for not engaging parents and community include: (a) fear of interference, (b) suspicion of motives, (c) fear that involvement of uninformed parents will lead to a misguided agenda, and (d) concern that movement beyond educational needs will distract from the objective of increasing achievement.

In a review of 75 empirical and case studies conducted on the implementation of school-based management between the years 1985 and 1995, Leithwood and Menzies (1998b) identified three types of site-based management: (a) administrative control, which grants key decisions such as budget, personnel, and curriculum to the principal; (b) professional control, which grants teachers a greater role in those same areas; and (c) community control, which puts the decisions in the control of parents and community

members in consultation with the professional administration and faculty. The designation of community control is a result of the parents having the majority representation on the site-based council. As previously cited studies demonstrate, a parent majority does not necessarily translate to parents controlling the decisions of the council. Leithwood and Menzies pointed out several concerns with regard to all forms of site-based management. Most prominent were issues involving principals' willingness to redistribute the power traditionally granted to them and the enormous investment of time required on the part of the principal, teachers, and parents involved. The concern again reveals the tension between professional expertise and democratic involvement in decision-making.

Leithwood and Menzies (1998b) identified obstacles to the intended functioning of school site councils. The most frequently cited obstacles, common to all forms of SBM control were (a) principal adherence to traditional roles (b) excessive time demands, (c) poorly defined role of council, (d) difficulty in member recruitment, and (e) insufficient training of members. Along with the obstacles, Leithwood and Menzies identified strategies used to address obstacles. The most prominent strategies were (a) the provision of training; (b) a fixed committee structure, role and task clarification; (c) substantial power granted to the council by both the policy and principal practice, and (d) increased information sources.

In their recent review of the literature, Malen and Vincent (2008) demonstrated that the inability to achieve the promise of providing local school sites with a greater degree of decision-making power was not limited to the local implementation of the

policies. Malen and Vincent suggested that the decision-making power was inhibited by fundamental characteristics of the laws and policies. First, it is shown that site-based councils have not been granted true decision-making power in the three big areas of instruction, budget, and personnel. Second, the laws and policies governing site-based councils tend to be so specific that it leaves little room for true site autonomy. Third, although the local decisions are quite restricted, the responsibility and accountability for student performance lies directly on the school site and correspondingly the council. Each of the three characteristics that inhibit greater decision-making power could influence the success of Utah SCCs and is therefore cause for concern.

There are many concerns with SCCs, but the primary concern expressed in the literature deals with the authority to make decisions at the local level, and who exercises that authority. Again, the tension between the authority of the professionals and the local community is evident. While many concerns with site-based management revolve around authority, the required concern of Utah SCCs is school improvement and meeting the objective of increased student achievement.

Miller and Rowan (2006) recognized the ambiguity in the research with regard to site-based management and student achievement and conducted an empirical analysis of two nationally represented data sets to measure effects of organic management (a term they applied to multiple activities such as teacher collaboration and site-based management councils but not necessarily involving parent members) on student achievement. The analysis did not yield any significant effects of organic management on student achievement at the high school or elementary levels and did not consider middle

level schools. Miller and Rowan's study is one of the few that utilized longitudinal data and statistical analysis, but although site-based management is listed as a key part of organic management, it is questionable whether the results apply to Utah SCCs as only teachers were surveyed and the three primary measures focused on administrative support, teacher control of instructional decisions, and staff collaboration. Although the results may not directly apply to Utah SCCs, the conclusions emphasize the concern that there is little evidence that organic management, which includes community controlled site-based management, has any effect on student achievement (Hess, 1999; Leithwood & Menzies, 1998b; Malen & Vincent, 2008).

School Community Council Effective Practices

Malen and Vincent (2008) emphasized the difficulty of linking student achievement to site-based councils, but did cite several studies where improved student achievement and fully functioning site-based councils were simultaneously present. Although no causal link between site-based councils and student achievement was possible, the following is a brief presentation of findings that identified promising practices for SCCs.

The 1998 study by Anderson is one of the most commonly cited in the literature on SCCs. The theoretical article outlines a standard for "authentic participation" (p. 586) in site-based councils (previously mentioned in Chapter I). According to Anderson, the components of the framework that show the most promise for creating more democratic schools and increasing student achievement depend on issues of relevancy, authenticity,

and coherent expectation. With regard to relevancy, the participants would be making decisions that are clearly of interest to improving the achievement for all students in the school. Authenticity exists in the practices as efforts are focused to fully implement the SCC program. Expectations of participants will be clear in that they each understand their objective and what means will help them achieve those ends. The article still provides little specific information on actual practices, but it does establish important criteria for increasing democratic participation and potentially raising student achievement.

Johnson and Pajares (1996) conducted a qualitative longitudinal case study. The study examined the implementation of a site-based management program of a large public high school over the first three years of implementation. Characteristics were identified that enhanced shared decision-making. The characteristics identified as enhancing shared decision-making included (a) stakeholder confidence (in self and school community), (b) adequate resources, (c) established democratic procedures, (d) early accomplishment, and (e) principal support. These are important factors to understand in relation to how a site based council can function successfully when looking strictly at the process of working as a council, but the study did not extend the research to look at strategies used to improve student achievement or how council decisions impacted student achievement.

A review and synthesis of studies on site based management (SBM) conducted by Briggs and Wohlstetter (2003) under the auspices of the Center on Organization and Restructuring of schools, the Chicago Consortium on School Reform, and the Consortium for Policy Research in Education, identified “eight elements of schooling that

were associated with successful SBM” (p. 355). These were:

1. A vision focused on teaching and learning that is coordinated with student performance standards.
2. Decision-making authority used to change the core areas of schooling.
3. Power distributed throughout the school.
4. The development of teachers’ knowledge and skills that is oriented toward change, a professional learning community, and shared knowledge.
5. Mechanisms for collecting and communicating information related to school priorities.
6. Monetary and non-monetary rewards to acknowledge progress toward school goals.
7. Shared school leadership among administrators and teachers.
8. Resources from outside the school. (p. 355)

For each element in the list, Briggs and Wohlstetter (2003) compared the characteristics of the schools in the studies that had positive results with those that were struggling. In that the study analyzed the variables specifically as they related to student achievement, the comparison lends credibility to the conclusions that SBM can have a positive impact on student achievement,

One important point Briggs and Wohlstetter (2003) made was that struggling schools tended to concentrate all the authority and decisions into one council, while those that were more successful delegated authority for plan and program development to different subcommittees. The study did not clarify when or if parents were involved in the subcommittees. A limitation of the study is that it did not distinguish between schools utilizing parents as a part of the SBM and schools only using school personnel.

A more recent study by Talley and Keedy (2006) investigated three high-

performance schools in an urban Kentucky school district. Talley and Keedy conducted a purposeful sample of schools with a reputation to be excellent councils and that also have a track record of increasing student achievement. The case study found that the characteristics in these schools that enabled the building of instructional capacity included: (a) the principal sharing power with council members, (b) a school-wide network that allowed parents and staff to solve problems from a “bottom-up” approach, (c) use of student data in focusing on student achievement, and (d) collective accountability of entire staff for student achievement.

The Talley and Keedy (2006) study was one of the few reviewed articles that focus on how site councils can impact student achievement. There are some key differences, however, between the Utah councils studied in the current evaluation and the Kentucky schools. In Kentucky, the schools studied consisted of two high schools and one elementary school, but there was not a middle school represented in the sample. The membership of councils in Kentucky was also different. Although the Kentucky councils do include two parents, the parents do not form a majority of the council as they do in Utah. It is not clear how the increased proportion of parents may affect the building of instructional capacity. The Kentucky study was also limited to three schools in a single district while the current study was limited to three Utah middle schools each located in different school districts. The current evaluation also looked at the specific plans developed by the SCCs, examined the implementation of those plans, and assessed potential impact on student achievement.

Utah School Community Council Needs

The historical snapshots on community involvement in education demonstrate an ongoing cycle between professional or state control and local community control. As the role of school professionals has been restructured and stakeholders have been given more decision-making authority (Hess, 1999), the cycle has settled into a tension between expertise and democracy as professionals and stakeholders are required to work together to make school-improvement decisions.

Different states and districts grant different decision-making responsibilities to site based councils (Dounay, 2005; CCSSO, 1991; Leithwood & Menzies, 1998a; Malen & Ogawa, 1988). In Utah the primary role of an SCC is to develop plans for local school improvement measured by increased student achievement (Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1A-108). With the organization of SCCs and the associated responsibilities, the review of literature identifies many potential concerns related to whether the actual practices match the requirements and the expectations. Of primary concern is how SCCs work to resolve the tension between professional expertise and democratic decision-making to achieve optimal school improvement. School improvement is measured by student achievement, but the ability of an SCC to impact student achievement is questionable. As the literature raised doubts concerning the ability of an SCC to influence student achievement, the literature also identified characteristics and strategies that may positively influence student achievement. The hope is that this study will identify whether legal requirements are being met, whether positive characteristics and strategies are being utilized, and whether improvements in student achievement are perceived.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Several characteristics of this study support the use of an evaluation approach. This study seeks to determine the value of Utah middle school SCCs. It utilized “inquiry and judgment methods, including (1) determining standards for judging quality and deciding whether those standards should be relative or absolute; (2) collecting relevant information; and (3) applying the standards to determine quality” (Worthen & Sanders, 1987, p. 22-23).

Specific elements of this study also serve the choice of evaluation rather than research: (a) The motivation is a result of desire for practical knowledge concerning Utah middle school SCCs rather than broad generalizable knowledge, (b) the results will be used to inform decisions rather than establish firm causal relationships, (c) the evaluation will describe the qualities of the SCC program rather than explain why, (d) the evaluation is more interested in the value of the program as it relates to social utility rather than hard scientific knowledge, and (e) the evaluation must follow a strict time line rather than follow researcher time constraints (Worthen & Sanders, 1987).

A comprehensive evaluation of Utah SCCs is a large endeavor, and the scope of such an evaluation is beyond the capacity of this dissertation. To bring the evaluation to a level that is manageable but also meaningful, as indicated in Chapter I, the focus was narrowed to three middle school SCC cases. The evolutionary nature of qualitative research provided an opportunity to obtain more variation in sites than was initially expected. The first two schools were identified as exemplary, and the third middle school

was in the early stages of SCC development. The third middle school provides variation to help understand the exemplary processes of the program and expose challenges that arise as the SCC program is implemented. In planning this evaluation, it was important that the design (a) ensured the data collected are credible and useful, (b) met needs of stakeholders to address established questions, and (c) used limited resources wisely (Preskill & Catsambas, 2006).

The evaluation included a qualitative approach that utilized interviews, observations, and documents. The term strength-based is used to describe this process evaluation as a result of two important characteristics. First, a purposeful sampling was used to select middle level SCCs viewed by the Utah State Office of Education staff with supervisory authority over SCCs as exemplary. This follows from the desire to “learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry” (Patton, 2002, p. 230). Second, interviews were conducted using an appreciative inquiry approach. The purpose of the appreciative approach was to collect data about SCCs most productive strategies and the peak experiences of participants. With an appreciative approach there is often a concern about a positive bias to the results; however, Preskill and Catsambas (2006) point out that positive and appreciative are not synonymous. Where positive questioning would be biased if it emphasized acceptance, approval and what is liked about the program without questioning the negative perceptions, appreciative questions will get at the nature of achievement and solicit desires for increasing the value of the program.

Appreciative questions ask respondents to communicate their concept of the nature, worth, quality, and significance of a program or some aspect of the

organization. Moreover, they ask respondents to honor the past while expressing gratitude for, and pride in, their achievements. And, the appreciative wishes questions invite respondents to share their ideas for how to increase the value of the program. Hence, the role of appreciative questions is not to learn what respondents liked, but rather to focus on the study of successful moments that can be used to grow and improve the program in the future. (p. 76-77)

The method for using appreciative questioning comes from the appreciative inquiry methodology. The term strength-based is a core philosophy of appreciative inquiry (AI). David Cooperrider originally developed AI during his doctoral work (Preskill & Catsambas, 2006). He discovered that as he asked questions related to why things were a success, participants being interviewed were more engaged, energetic, and were genuinely more interested. When he asked questions about the problems, the energy level dropped and there was less interest. From this initial discovery evolved this appreciative approach to research. Cooperrider (1986) explained:

Appreciative inquiry refers to a research perspective which is uniquely intended for discovering, understanding and fostering innovations in social-organizational arrangements and processes. Its purpose is to contribute to the generative-theoretical aims of social science and to use such knowledge to promote egalitarian dialogue leading to social system effectiveness or integrity.... Appreciative inquiry refers to both a search for knowledge and a theory of intentional collective action which is designed to help evolve the normative vision and will of a group, organization, or society as a whole. (pp. 81-82)

AI has become a popular approach to organizational development that focuses on building upon the strengths of the organization rather than the problems (Patton, 2002). Although Patton was somewhat reserved towards AI as an evaluation tool in 2002, he did acknowledge the strength of the questioning strategies. Since that time, AI has become increasingly viable as an evaluation methodology being featured in an issue of the journal, *New Directions for Evaluation* in the Winter of 2003 in which Patton (2003)

concluded that AI provides an additional option in certain evaluation settings. AI as a method of evaluation continues to become more formalized as demonstrated by Preskill and Catsambas (2006).

There are four primary phases to AI: inquire, imagine, innovate, and implement (Preskill & Catsambas, 2006). For the purpose of this evaluation the primary contribution of the AI methodology came from the first two phases. During the stage of inquiry, appreciative questioning was utilized to discover what is of greatest value in SCCs. The stage of imagining took place through probing questions that revealed participant perceptions concerning what could be done to strengthen the program and the program's effectiveness in the desired objective of increased student achievement. The first two phases of AI, inquire and imagine, are in perfect alignment with the purpose of seeking characteristics that contribute to the success of SCCs. The approach to questioning in these first two phases allowed participants to express the value of the program and discuss possibilities for improvement. These two phases emphasize the contribution of questioning strategies. The phase of innovation takes what is learned from the first two phases and establishes plans designed to create new directions in strategy, standards, and vision. The implementation phase puts these plans in motion and then cycles back to the inquiry phase. These last two phases are beyond the scope of this process evaluation that is examining current practices of selected SCCs, but these two phases could be a natural next step based on the findings of the evaluation.

Situation Statement

The current situation in the state of Utah is an excellent match with this approach to evaluation. Each public school in the state of Utah has a SCC consisting of parents, school employees, and the principal. The SCCs have many duties primarily focused on school improvement and control of the School LAND Trust funds, which are to be used to assist with the accomplishment of the school improvement plan (Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1A-108). With the number of SCCs and the responsibility for each to effectively make decisions that will increase student achievement, it is essential that current practice be evaluated to help determine law compliance and to identify characteristics of and strategies used by Utah SCCs in development and implementation of school plans. Although the law gives the SCCs authority to deal with safety issues, the focus of this evaluation was on aspects of council responsibility most closely related to the improvement of student achievement.

Program Logic Model

“For evaluation purposes, it is useful to know not only what the program is expected to achieve but also how it expects to achieve it” (Weiss, 1998, p. 55). To develop a better understanding of the basic theory of the SCC program and help shape the evaluation questions I developed a program logic model for Utah SCCs in consultation with School LAND Trust Program personnel. A program logic model serves the purpose of providing a graphical representation of the connections between program inputs, outputs, and outcomes (Patton, 2002). The program inputs consist of the minimum

elements necessary to implement the program. The program outputs comprise the activities, participation, and products within the program that are designed to bring about the desired outcomes. The program outcomes are the short, medium, and long term desired results of program implementation. The logic model also presents program assumptions and external factors. The assumptions summarize some core beliefs about the purpose, participants, and methods of the program. The external factors consist of different influences on the program that are not a direct part of the program (Taylor-Powell & Henert, 2008). The logic model shown in Figure 1 was developed using the logic model framework from the University of Wisconsin-Extension (Taylor-Powell, Steele, & Douglass, 1996) and serves to summarize the programs purpose and the expected outcomes.

Evaluation Stakeholders

A primary stakeholder in this evaluation is the Utah State Office of Education, which administers the SCC program. The School LAND Trust Program administration at the State Office of Education (2007a) assisted in evaluation planning and provided information for the evaluation. One of the primary contributions they made to the evaluation was the recommendation of exemplary middle-level councils. The criteria used for their recommendations consisted of the knowledge they have of the individual councils based on the site visits they make each year, the review of all program plans, and the annual recommendations of each school district. The School LAND Trust Program administration at the State Office of Education will also be the recipient of the evaluation

Logic Model

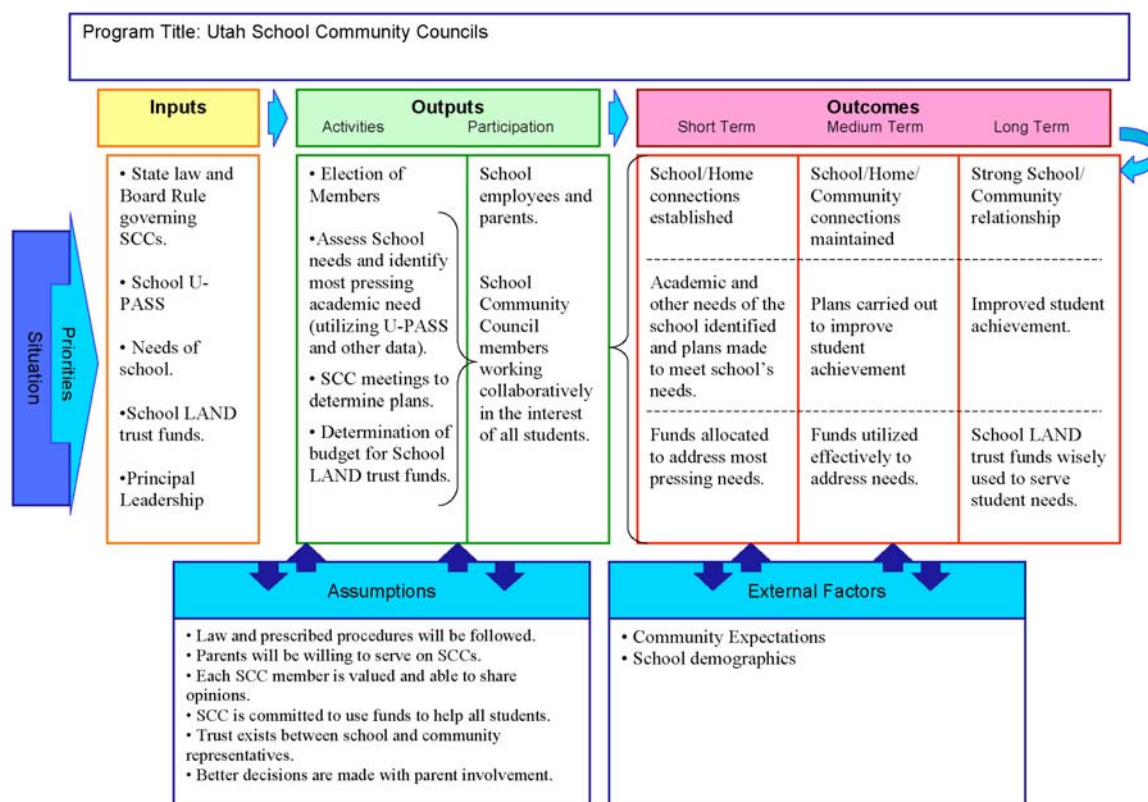


Figure 1. Program logic model for Utah SCCs developed using the logic model framework from the University of Wisconsin-Extension.

report and will be ultimately responsible for using the information from the report to determine what might be done to improve the functioning of SCCs at the middle school level.

In addition, the local SCCs that are involved in the evaluation are primary stakeholders. Each SCC served to provide the essential information to see how SCCs are actually functioning. Each participating SCC will receive an executive summary of the findings and an electronic copy of the dissertation will be made available upon request.

Secondary stakeholders are members of the communities within the area of the

schools to include students and future students of the selected schools. Local stakeholders are not involved in the study, but are the beneficiaries of the program. Tertiary stakeholders are the state legislature that has established and continues to revise the establishment of SCCs. The legislature is the key decision-making body with regard to SCCs. While the legislature may not be directly involved with the study, they could receive information through the natural governing relationship with the State Office of Education.

Evaluation Questions

In the development process of the evaluation questions, the state School LAND Trust Program educational specialists were consulted. They served to assist with focusing the evaluation questions so that information gathered from the study could be most responsive to state office needs. The evaluation focused on learning the degree of law compliance, the processes and strategies used in the SCCs to develop plans, and how these plans are being implemented. Strategies used by SCCs were identified to help inform future decisions concerning SCCs. The evaluation questions were:

1. Are Utah middle school community councils identified as exemplary implementing the law as prescribed?
2. Do Utah middle school community councils identified as exemplary utilize strategies of effective site based management and shared decision-making identified in the literature?
 - a. Which strategies do the council members report using?

b. How are these strategies implemented?

3. To what degree are the plans developed by exemplary middle school community councils being fully implemented, and are they perceived by council members and school personnel as having a positive impact on student achievement?

Evaluation Design

A process evaluation design utilizing qualitative data gathered using AI process provided the means to address the evaluation questions. As the purpose of the evaluation was to focus on identification of what is working well, examining why it is working well, and seeking ideas for making similar performance more common, the AI questioning allowed the evaluator to make connections with the interviewees that enhanced the quality of data provided (Preskill & Catsambas, 2006).

Creswell (1998) described a qualitative data collection circle. This circle provides the framework for the procedures used for this evaluation. Although Creswell points out that the process can begin at any point on the circle, the procedures used in the current evaluation began with locating the sites. Once the sites were selected, access to the sites was obtained. Access led to purposeful sampling of participants, which led to data collection, which led to a record of information. Throughout the process different logistical issues would arise that would have to be resolved. The following sections will describe the (a) site selection and access, (b) site descriptions, (c) participants, (d) data collection procedures, and (d) data record.

Site Selection and Access

Schools were selected for participation in the evaluation based on three criteria: (a) recommendation by the School LAND Trust Program administration; (b) a stated focus on improving student achievement in core subjects in conjunction with U-PASS test results demonstrating either consistent high achievement, consistent increases in achievement, or consistent progress with subgroups; and (c) a willingness to participate in the evaluation. In addition to the extreme case sampling, an opportunistic sampling was also used when the unexpected opportunity arose to select a school that provided a contrasting example (Creswell, 1998; Weiss, 1998).

Sampling first used an extreme case selection procedure (Patton, 2002). The purposeful sampling of exemplary middle SCCs followed a systematic approach using the three designated criteria for selection. First, the School LAND Trust Program administration recommended a list of 25 middle-level schools. The middle SCCs were recommended based on a subjective evaluation using information from (a) all written School LAND Trust Program plans, (b) annual site visits to 10% of all SCCs, and (c) the local school district selections of the top 10% of plans from their district.

The second criterion of selection was a review of school LAND trust plans in conjunction with the U-PASS report card data, which are available on the Internet for public viewing. The school LAND trust plans were reviewed to verify the recommended middle schools were targeting core subjects measured by U-PASS—math, science, and language arts. All 25 recommended schools had goals focused on improving student achievement in core areas. U-PASS report cards were reviewed for each school. One

middle school (M1) distinguished itself by possessing consistent high achievement for the past three years. The second middle school (M2) distinguished itself by showing improvement in proficiency rates for each of the core subjects for each of the previous three years. The third middle school selected distinguished itself by demonstrating consistent growth in the subgroup scores.

The final selection criterion was agreement to participate. The school district for M1 was contacted by telephone and upon verbal explanation, permission was granted to contact the M1 principal. The principal was contacted by phone and upon explanation agreed to participate and encouraged M1 SCC members to participate in the evaluation. The school district for M2 was contacted and an application was required to conduct research in M2s school district, so the application was filed, and permission was granted to contact the principal. The principal agreed to participate and encouraged the M2 SCC members to participate in the evaluation. The school district for the third school selected was contacted. An application to conduct research was required by the school district, which was submitted. The director of evaluation and research for the school district approved the application and contacted the principal of the selected school. The principal declined to participate in the study due to her pending retirement.

The director of research and evaluation for the third school district then contacted other middle school principals in the district and asked if they would be willing to participate in the study. One principal agreed to participate, but the SCC at the school was newly established. The criteria for selection were reviewed relative to the willing school, and the school possessed two of the three criteria. It was not recommended by the

state because its SCC had not been functioning in past years, but it did list a focus on core subjects in its School LAND Trust plan and had shown measured progress in subgroups for the past three years. The final criterion was met by expressing a willingness to participate. Having met the two criteria of willingness and demonstrated progress with subgroups, yet not having a well-established SCC, provided an unexpected opportunity to study a contrasting example of an SCC, so the willing school became the third middle school (M3) selected. The adjustment is a natural part of qualitative evaluation as “the evaluator can follow the trail wherever it leads” (Weiss, 1998, p. 181).

The extreme case sampling criteria shaped the procedures for selecting the three initial schools. Originally, a nonexemplary case was desirable, but because participation in the evaluation was completely voluntary, it was implausible that a nonexemplary case would agree to participate. When the third school chose not to participate, the director’s invitation being accepted by another school that had not had a functioning SCC but was striving to get one functioning provided an unexpected opportunity (Creswell, 1998; Weiss, 1998). Once selected the same evaluation procedures were used for all three schools. How the schools match with the selection criteria is summarized in Table 1.

Site Descriptions

Each case provides a different socioeconomic group from which each SCC is formed. M1 is located in a predominantly upper and middle class community with a small minority population. M2 is located in a growing mostly middle class suburban community with a small minority population. M3 is located in an older community within a large city and is predominantly a lower socio-economic class. The SCCs at M1

Table 1

Middle School Selection Criteria

School	State recommended	Consistent achievement (a), improvement (i), or subgroup growth (g)	Willing to participate	Selected
M1	✓	a ✓	✓	✓
M2	✓	i ✓	✓	✓
Declining middle school	✓	g ✓		
M3		g ✓	✓	✓

and M2 are well established and considered exemplary, and the SCC at M3 is brand new.

All three schools are obtaining positive results in terms of student achievement as measured by the U-PASS report card.

First middle school. The principal at M1 has been the principal for the past eight years. The immediate area surrounding M1 consists primarily of commercial shopping centers. Within a mile of the school, there are several large condominium/apartment complexes and town homes. Several different areas provide students to M1, and most students are bussed. The areas have different levels of home values, but the median price home in the area is over \$500,000. M1 is in a community of approximately 20,000 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). The median income for a household in the city as reported in the 2000 census was \$81,125. M1 serves approximately 700 students in grades six and seven. The ethnicity of the M1 student body is 86% white, 1% black, 12% Hispanic, and 1% Asian/Pacific Islander. The student body is 14% economically disadvantaged, approximately 12% limited English proficiency, and approximately 12% special education.

M1 has demonstrated consistent high achievement. The focus on high academic achievement was evident in the school plan as the primary goals involved continued improvement in core academic subjects and was reflected in the U-PASS results. The U-PASS test results for M1 are shown in Table 2. It is important to point out that the score for each subject represents the percent of students who scored proficient on the end-of-level Criterion Referenced Test (CRT) for Language Arts, Math, and Science.

Second middle school. The second middle school (M2) opened in 2004. The current principal has been in office since the school opened and was an assistant principal at a school in the same district prior to becoming the principal at M2. M2 is located in a growing suburban community that had a population of approximately 24,000 people reported by the 2000 census but has increased dramatically since then (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Subdivisions and large vacant fields surround the school. Many homes under construction are visible from the front of the school. The median home price in the area is \$230,000. The homes are being built closer to the school, but currently 100% of the students are bused to the school. The median income for a household in the

Table 2

M1 3-Year U-PASS Core Subject Proficiency Percentage Rates

Year	Subject		
	Language arts (LA)	Math	Science
2004-5	93	91	87
2005-6	90	93	85
2006-7	91	90	84
Mean	91.3	91.3	85.3

community as reported in the 2000 census was \$54,000. M2 serves approximately 1650 students in grades seven through nine. The ethnicity of the M2 student body is 88% white, 1% black, 8% Hispanic, 2% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% American Indian. The student body is 24% economically disadvantaged, 4% limited English proficiency, and 10% special education.

M2 demonstrated a consistent increase in achievement over the past three years. The school LAND trust plan for M2 placed a heavy emphasis on the use of technological tools to target improved academic skills in Math, science, and language arts. The U-PASS test results for M2 are shown in Table 3.

Third middle school. M3 is in a community of approximately 23,000 people within a large city (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). M3 just opened a new school building for the 2007-2008 school year after having been housed in a school outside of the community for the previous 2 years. The principal has been at M3 for five years. When the school moved back to the community into the new building the grade configuration changed from seventh and eighth to sixth through eighth grades. The new school is adjacent to an

Table 3

M2 3-Year U-PASS Core Subject Proficiency Percentage Rates

Year	Subject		
	Language arts	Math	Science
2004-5	82	66	51
2005-6	80	67	62
2006-7	87	80	75
Percentage gain	5	14	24

elementary school and surrounded by a variety of homes. The median home price is \$150,000. The median income for a household in the local zip code as reported in the 2000 census was approximately \$32,000. M3 served approximately 950 students in grades six through eight. The ethnicity of the M3 student body was 14% White, 7% African American, 63% Hispanic, 3% Asian, 10% Pacific Islander, and 3% American Indian. The student body is 93% economically disadvantaged, 43% limited English proficiency, and 17% special education.

The U-PASS report cards for the past 3 years demonstrated that M3 had made progress in subgroup scores. Table 4 demonstrates that although there were not gains every year in subgroup proficiency rates, the subgroup progress scores were consistently high. Progress scores are a longitudinal measure that shows whether individual students are making progress from one year to the next. A progress score of 190 is considered medium progress. It is possible for a student to achieve a high progress score without obtaining a proficient score. The U-PASS subgroup progress score is the average for all students in any subgroup category. If a student qualifies for more than one subgroup, she or he is counted only once (Utah State Office of Education, 2008).

Table 4

M3 3-Year Subgroup Proficiency Percentage Rates and Average Progress Scores

Year	Subgroup scores	
	Proficiency	Average progress
2004-5	67	221
2005-6	68	213
2006-7	67	201

Participants

Access was granted to the selected sites first through the district approval and then through principal willingness to participate. Each principal provided the next available date to meet with the SCC. SCC meetings are only held once each month, and the principals serving as gatekeepers each asked that I present at an SCC meeting to request participation from SCC members. Although the same general procedures were followed at each site, the time lines and circumstances caused variation from site to site. The general process consisted of meeting with the entire SCC and requesting participation. Because the evaluation focuses on the experiences of SCC members, it was desirable to get as many members as possible to participate. Members signed the informed consent to express willingness to participate after which meetings were observed and interviews conducted. A purposeful sampling was also used to interview school personnel involved with implementation of the School LAND Trust Program plan. If interviewing all personnel involved in the implementation was impractical, then a snowball sampling method based on principal recommendation was used. The variation for selecting participants and description of participants at each site will be described in the following subsections.

First middle school. M1 had an SCC meeting on January 22, 2008, where I presented information on the evaluation and requested participation by allowing observations and granting interviews. The meeting had been rescheduled from a date the prior week. The rescheduling conflicted with other engagements, so several SCC members were not in attendance. In attendance at the meeting were the principal, two

teachers, and three parents. Of the six SCC members in attendance at the meeting, five were invited to participate and signed an informed consent. One parent came in after my presentation and left before the end of the meeting, so she did not sign the informed consent at that time.

Based on the positive reception by SCC members at the meeting, the principal gave me the email addresses of all SCC members and allowed me to contact the SCC members by email to provide an invitation to participate. An email containing an explanation of the evaluation and the informed consent attached was sent to all the members. One additional parent responded to the email and mailed the informed consent form.

The SCC did not meet during the month of February, so the next meeting was attended on March 20, 2008. One additional teacher and three additional parents attended the meeting. One of the parents was a newly appointed member and was not comfortable participating in the evaluation. The parent who had mailed the informed consent was one of the additional parents in attendance. The member who arrived late to and left early from the previous meeting was also present and signed the consent form. The other teacher and parent SCC members agreed to participate and signed the informed consent.

Of the 11 members of the SCC, nine members participated in the evaluation. One of the teachers listed was never in attendance at a meeting observed by the evaluator. The SCC member participants in the study consisted of the principal, five parents, and three teachers. Each participant was interviewed and two meetings were observed at M1. Two others school personnel provided informed consent and participated in the evaluation, as

they presented at one of the observed meetings, but were not interviewed.

On April 15, 2008, I met with seven different teachers concerning their involvement in the implementation of the school LAND trust program plan and its perceived impact on student achievement. Two of the seven teachers were SCC members, and the other five were recommended by the principal based on their involvement in the program and their availability during the day. The total participation at M1 consisted of the principal (male), the assistant principal (female), five parents (2 male, 3 female), and nine teachers (1 male, 8 female).

Second middle school. The principal at M2 was contacted in early February 2008, but the principal requested I not meet with the SCC to invite member participation until the March 10, 2008, meeting. I presented information on the evaluation and requested participation by allowing observations of meetings and granting interviews at the March meeting. SCC members attending the meeting included the principal, a counselor, a student tracker, and seven parents. Of the ten SCC members in attendance at the meeting, all were invited to participate and sign an informed consent. Two parents and the student tracker did not provide a reason but chose not to participate. Five parents agreed to participate and signed the informed consent. The principal and counselor both agreed to participate and signed the informed consent. Two teachers who were not SCC members attended and made a presentation at the SCC meeting. Each of the two teachers provided informed consent.

One teacher was not present in the meeting, so the principal explained the evaluation to the teacher and asked her to mail the informed consent if she was willing to

participate, which she did. At the March meeting, appointments were made to conduct phone interviews with the five participating parents. One parent member canceled the appointment because she was moving, and another parent was not home at the designated time. Multiple unsuccessful attempts were made to reschedule the interviews through emails and phone calls.

Of the 11 members of the M2 SCC, eight members participated in the evaluation, and six were interviewed. The SCC member evaluation participants included the principal, the teacher, the counselor, and five parents. Of the five parents participating, three were interviewed. One SCC meeting at M2 was observed.

On April 28, 2008, I met with five different math teachers concerning their involvement in the implementation of the school LAND trust program plan, and its perceived impact on student achievement. The math teachers were purposefully selected because the school LAND trust plan designated a mobile computer lab and graphing calculators to be purchased for the benefit of the math department. Two math teachers were interviewed privately, and the other three math teachers were interviewed as a group due to time constraints. The school LAND trust program also provided funding for the student tracker program, so the trackers were contacted for interviews. One tracker responded and was interviewed concerning implementation and impact of the tracking program on May 13, 2008. The total participation at M2 consisted of the principal (male), a counselor (male), eight teachers (female), one student tracker (female), and five parents (female).

Third middle school. As a result of the time required for the district approval

process and the original school declining the opportunity to participate, contact with the M3 principal was delayed until March 15, 2008. The principal agreed to participate and provided the date of the next SCC meeting but asked me to make arrangements with the SCC chairman. The chairman requested I attend the SCC meeting scheduled for 6:00 p.m. on April 9, 2008. At 4:30 p.m. the day of the meeting, I received a call from the chairman indicating the meeting had been cancelled due to the principal being ill.

Although the meeting had been canceled, I was able to meet with the SCC chairman, obtain informed consent, and conduct an interview. I requested that a meeting be rescheduled within the next week, so I could present to the SCC, but it could not be arranged. The following week, on April 17, 2008, I met with the principal of M3, obtained informed consent, and conducted an interview. At that time, I asked for recommendations of any teacher who could provide information on the implementation and impact of the piano program that is funded through the school LAND trust funds. The principal recommended the piano teacher. The piano teacher was invited to participate, provided informed consent, and was interviewed on April 17, 2008.

I was invited to attend and present at the next meeting on May 14, 2008, but the day before I was called and it had been rescheduled for May 20, 2008. I presented information on the evaluation and requested participation at the meeting on May 20, 2008. SCC members attending the meeting included the principal, a teacher, a community partner who played the role of a parent on the SCC, and a parent. The SCC chairman was absent from the meeting. The SCC members were invited to participate and each signed an informed consent. There were a total of six participants in the evaluation

at M3 including the principal (male), two teachers (female), two parents (one male, one female), and a community partner (female).

Data Collection Procedures

There were three primary sources of data gathered—interviews, observations, and documents. The same general procedures were followed at each site, but the number and type of interviews, observations, and documents varied from case to case.

Instruments. Three different instruments were used for interviews. A compliance checklist (Appendix A) was used while interviewing each principal to provide a description of how the school complied with legal requirements. The compliance checklist was created by the school LAND trust program administration to be used as a self-evaluation for SCCs in June 2007.

Interviews with SCC members utilized a standardized open-ended protocol (Patton, 2002). The interview guide (Appendix B) was used for each SCC member interview. An appreciative approach to questions was used in the development of the protocol. The appreciative approach served to (a) provide a richer picture of the context of the SCCs studied, (b) reduce leading questions, (c) increase trust with participants, (d) reduce bias, (e) produce results that are less threatening, (f) reduce fear of evaluation, and (g) produce meaningful data (Preskill & Catsambas, 2006).

The interview guide was developed to facilitate a comparison between the strategies of effective site-based management identified in the literature and the strategies used by the selected exemplary middle level SCCs. Table 5 shows the correlation between the strategies and the appreciative prompts. “Because appreciative interview

Table 5

Correlation Between Strategies Identified in Literature and Appreciative Prompts

Characteristics/strategies	Reference	Appreciative prompt
Stakeholder confidence	Johnson & Pajares (1996)	Can you tell me about an instance when you felt great confidence that the work of the SCC would make a positive difference in student achievement in this school?
Professional learning community	Briggs & Wohlstetter (2003) Talley & Keedy (2006)	Think back on the experience of developing the school improvement or School LAND Trust Program plan and tell me of an instance when you felt the council was working with the school as a professional learning community that was focused on positive change for the students.
Shared school leadership/ principal support	Briggs & Wohlstetter (2003) Johnson & Pajares (1996) Talley & Keedy (2006)	Share a time when you were particularly impressed with the principal's support of the SCC, and the way leadership is distributed in the school.
Student data used to focus on student achievement	Talley & Keedy (2006)	Tell of a time when information on student achievement has been shared and how it influenced the decision- making process.
Mechanisms for collecting and communicating information well established	Briggs & Wohlstetter (2003)	Tell me how you have learned about the implementation of the plan and the impact it is having.
Adequate resources	Johnson & Pajares (1996)	Please share with me a time when you felt the resources provided were adequate to accomplish what the SCC planned to do.
Collective accountability of entire staff for student achievement.	Talley & Keedy (2006)	What evidence do you have that would demonstrate that the entire staff accepts responsibility for student achievement?

questions focus on instances of success, peak experiences, values, and wishes, they tend to look and feel very different from non-AI questions” (Preskill & Catsambus, 2006, p. 79).

To illustrate the difference, one characteristic that related to improved student

achievement identified in the literature was the level of confidence members had that the work of the SCC influenced student achievement. A traditional interview question may ask, “How confident are you that the work of the SCC will influence student achievement?” or “What are some examples of SCC practices that have built your confidence in the program?” In contrast, the appreciative prompt used was, “Can you tell me about an instance when you felt great confidence that the work of the SCC would make a positive difference in student achievement in this school?” The appreciative prompt is then followed with an invitation to the participant to express his or her wishes for the program. Although the difference between the traditional and appreciative questions may be subtle, the appreciative questions prompt more detailed examinations of both successes and desires for improvement (Preskill & Catsambus, 2006).

The third instrument was unique for each school. As each SCC had the freedom and the responsibility to develop a plan that meets the needs of its school, each school required different protocols of data collection to help determine plan implementation and perceived impact. This is in keeping with the emergent nature of qualitative designs (Patton, 2002). The following paragraphs will describe the rationale for each protocol.

M1’s school improvement and school LAND trust plans identified several different strategies to improve student achievement. Three primary strategies identified in the plan included implementing (a) the International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle Years Programme (MYP) schoolwide, (b) an after school tutoring program called the Homework Club, and (c) curriculum mapping in all subjects to enhance the curriculum. Based on the three strategies identified, a few open-ended questions were developed

(Appendix C).

M2's school improvement and school LAND trust plans identified several different strategies to improve student achievement. The two primary activities were a student content mastery program and the purchase of technology. The content mastery program and specific technology purchased will be described in detail in Chapters IV, V, and VI. Based on the two primary activities and the supporting strategies, open-ended questions were developed (Appendix D).

The SCC did not develop the school LAND trust plan or the school improvement plan at M3. The piano program funded by the school LAND trust plan was viewed as supportive of the school improvement plan, but the school improvement plan did not include the piano program anywhere in its goals or strategies. To gather information regarding implementation and perceived impact of the piano program open-ended questions were developed (Appendix E).

Interview timeframe. Interviews were conducted in person or by telephone. Interview guides were emailed to SCC members prior to the interviews, so each member could think about their experiences and be prepared to provide the most meaningful responses. Each SCC member was interviewed one time for 30 to 45 minutes using the interview guide. The principal interviews lasted another 15 to 30 minutes to accommodate the time required for principals to describe the legal compliance issues from the checklist. The interviews related to the school LAND trust plan implementation and impact lasted 15 to 25 minutes. Most of the interviews were conducted by telephone. Whether the interview occurred in person or over the telephone, each interview was

recorded and transcribed.

Transcriptions. The transcriptions were read while listening to the audio recording to verify accuracy. Transcriptions were emailed to interviewees who responded with any corrections or clarifications. The typical response was, “I read over the interview and I don’t think any changes need to be made.” A few participants made minor corrections to the transcription. For example, one transcription read “that is my design” and the participant corrected it to read “that is by design.” One participant took the time to go through the document using the editing tool in Word and provided clarification of pronouns used in the interview transcript. The following is a sample of the way she added clarification in square brackets. “If that [No Child Left Behind consideration] was taken out of the equation I think SCCs in general all over...would possibly come up with some more creative things [for their improvement plans].” There were some participants who did not respond to the request for a review of the transcript. When quotations came from transcripts that were not verified by the participant, the audiotape was reviewed again to verify the accuracy and context of the quotation.

Observations. Observations of SCC meetings took place at each site. Observation notes were taken at each meeting, and the audio of meetings was recorded and transcribed. Descriptive and reflective notes were taken directly on the agendas provided during the observations. Additional reflective notes were added to the recording immediately following the observations. These notes were transcribed along with the transcription of the meeting.

Documents. The documents collected at each site varied depending on SCC

activities and document availability. For all schools the School LAND Trust program plans for the past three years were obtained. For M1 the SCC bylaws, the literature provided to parents concerning the MYP and Homework Club, and results of a school community survey were obtained. For M2 SCC meeting minutes from the past four years and teacher survey results concerning use of writing software were obtained. For M3 the minutes from December 2007 through May 2008 SCC meetings and the school improvement plan proposed for 2008-2009 were obtained.

Evaluation Data Analysis

For data analysis, an inductive approach was utilized. Creswell (2002) outlined the steps for analyzing qualitative data: (a) organize data, (b) explore data, (c) identify themes, (d) represent and report findings, (e) interpret findings, and (f) validate findings. Although these are listed as steps, the analysis process is both “simultaneous and iterative” (p. 257). The processes overlapped, and cycled back and forth through the entire analysis. The following sections will describe the procedures used for each step of this process.

Organize Data

The raw data for the evaluation consisted of (a) audio cassette recordings of interviews, (b) written or audio notes from and audio cassette recordings of observed meetings, (c) documents such as agendas or handouts provided at meetings, (d) School Trust LAND Program plans available on the internet, and (e) SCC provided documents such as SCC meeting minutes and school improvement plans. If not already in a digital

format, the raw data were all digitized either through transcriptions of audio-recordings or scanned to convert to portable document format (pdf).

The digital files were organized on the computer, and a backup copy was printed and organized in a 4-inch binder. The digital data were organized by individual site. An analysis folder was created for each evaluation question relative to each site. Figure 2 shows the file structure of the data organization. Each question folder contained the complete data set relative to the specific site.

Explore Data

The data were read through in their entirety to get a sense of each case (Creswell, 2002). Data were then explored relative to each evaluation question independently. For each question, the entire data set was read and memos were written to identify data relevant to the SCC law, the effective practices identified in the literature, and the

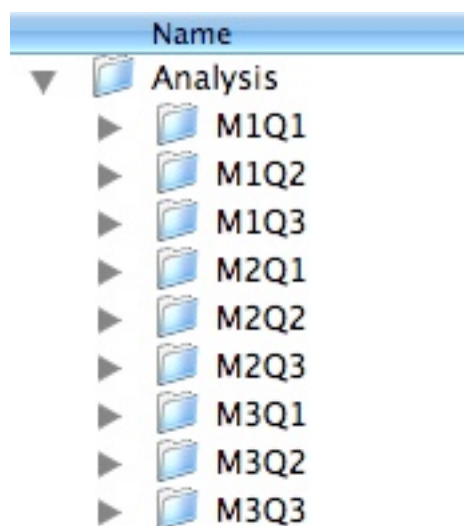


Figure 2. Data organization file structure.

implementation and perceived impact of the developed plans. Each memo consisted of a marginal note summarizing a piece of bracketed text along with a code identifying the memo to a particular category. The memo writing was conducted using the reviewing tools in Microsoft Word and Adobe Acrobat. A sample from the M3 principal interview transcript with memos related legal compliance issues is provided in Figure 3.

Identify Themes

Although Creswell (2002) acknowledges there is not a definite procedure for identifying themes, he does outline some steps that were followed for the evaluation analysis. The steps followed for each site and each question independently included: (a) rereading the bracketed text relative to each memo in conjunction with the memo, (b) reevaluating the code assigned to each text segment, (c) organizing codes with corresponding memos into a table, (d) comparing codes and memos and clustering similar codes together, (e) comparing the clustered list back to the original data, (f) reducing the codes to a number of themes, and (g) constructing a narrative description of the findings.

Due to the nature of the evaluation questions and protocols used, some initial categories were predetermined while others were emergent. With regard to legal

Then the application to be considered to be put on the ballot is on our web page and they can print it out and then they can either send it in with their student or mail or hand deliver it themselves. Now what the down side to this is it still is trying to find enough parents that are really desirous to be part of that SCC. So out of the four years we've been running I've had an actual number of two candidates running against each other in a district three times. Other than that it is the one parent that have submitted their names. No one else showed an interest. I had at least one parent show an interest so they were put on. That's how we've been doing it]

J; You have been doing this ever since the school opened?

Jackie Nygaard 7/1/08 6:24 PM
 Comment: Very little parent interest in participating on SCC (E8)

Figure 3. Sample memo from M3 principal transcript showing bracketed text, memo, and code identifying the memo as the eighth memo in the *elections and membership* category.

compliance, several categories were being sought, but they were not named until the category emerged in the data with at least three occurrences. For example, elections are an important component of the legal requirements, but the election category was not identified until data regarding elections appeared three times. Once the category was named, other data related to elections were placed in the election category.

With regard to the second question, concerning characteristics and strategies identified in the literature, the predetermined categories were (a) stakeholder confidence, (b) professional learning community, (c) principal support, (d) data use, (e) resource adequacy, and (f) staff accepting responsibility for student achievement. Evidence was sought within the data that related to each category. In the case of the third question concerning implementation and perceived impact of the SCC plans, memos were originally categorized in each school by different components of each respective SCC plan.

Once the memos were initially coded, the memos were organized into a table by code with a hyperlink back to the digital source data. When the same memo and corresponding source data fit into multiple categories, a duplicate of the table entry was made and the entry was coded into the different categories. For example, at M1 with regard to legal compliance, two of the categories that emerged were related to data and continual review of the school improvement plan. One memo reads, “Continually using data in the redevelopment of the school improvement plan.” The memo fit into both the data and the review of school improvement plan categories, so it was placed in both categories and coded separately as it related to other data in each category.

A table was created for each site and each question, so there were a total of nine different tables of categories and memos. Figure 4 shows a sample of the table created to analyze question two at M3. The sample shows a portion of the table related to SCC member confidence. Initially the table had the category code and the memo. Each memo within each category was given a subcategory code description, and similarly coded memos were compared and adjusted to capture the essence of how the different memos

Categories and Themes	Code	Member Code	Memo
Hiring new principal	SC1	M3P2	Involvement in doing things builds confidence like being a part of the hiring process for the new principal.
Hiring new principal	SC3	M3P1	Involvement with the selection of the new principal built confidence.
Hiring New Principal	SC9	M3P3	Involvement in the process of hiring a new principal built confidence.
Hiring New Principal	SC12	MinMar	Forming committee to hire new principal built confidence
Parent involvement	SC10	M3PR	A parents input has caused the school to stretch their ELP program. Seeing parents contribute increases confidence.
Parent involvement	SC11	M3PR	More parents involved would increase the level of confidence.
Parent involvement	SC2	M3P2	Parent suggests more parent involvement would increase the confidence.
Parent Involvement	SC7	M3TM	Having more parents take an interest and be involved builds confidence.
Parent Involvement	SC8	M3TM	Getting more parents involved and trained builds confidence.
Improvement	SC6	M3P1	Learning about how the reading levels are improving has built confidence in what is happening at the school.
Fulfilling responsibility	SC4	M3P1	Being involved in the areas that the SCC should be involved in would build confidence.

Figure 4. Sample analysis table organized initially by codes, which serve as hyperlinks back to the source data, then by categories and themes.

related to one another in subcategories. In the sample shown the subcategory descriptions of *hiring new principal* and *parent involvement* emerged as common subcategories codes. All the memos within each category were compared to the emerging codes, reorganized to bring similarly coded memos together into meaningful clusters, and recoded to establish themes within each category.

Throughout this constant comparative process, a reflexive journal was kept to record thoughts and insights related to the emerging themes. A journal entry related to the sample in Figure 4 says, “It is interesting that the sources of confidence at M3 are very clear cut. The parent members were very quick to site the process of hiring the new principal. That was an especially powerful experience for the parent members.” Once the data were organized through the constant comparative analysis described, the analysis continued as a narrative was constructed that allowed the evaluation participants to tell the story of the three SCCs.

Represent and Report Findings

The purpose of the evaluation was to provide stakeholders with a picture of compliance, processes, and perceived impact. With the stated purpose, it was determined in consultation with the stakeholders that the most useful presentation would organize the results and analysis narrative by evaluation question. Chapters IV, V, and VI each provide a narrative of each school site relative to the evaluation question addressed in the given chapter. Throughout the writing process, to best capture the participants’ experience, I went back to the audio recordings and again verified both the statements and the context of quotational material to provide a thick description of each SCC.

Interpret Findings

Throughout the analysis process, the findings were compared and contrasted between cases and with the identified literature. The cross-case comparison and contrast was conducted throughout the process to identify the themes that emerged at all sites as the characteristics that are common among the middle school SCCs. As the final reduction of themes was conducted, several data characteristics influenced the interpretation of findings. As a result of the variation in sites a theme was strengthened as the data at all three sites concurred with multiple data points. For example, the strong role of the professional control was a concern in the literature, yet the principals served as a source of confidence to SCC members at all three sites.

Another data characteristic of emergent themes occurred when what served as a strength at the exemplary sites was expressed as a desire at the new SCC. For example, there was a strong contrast between the way data were used in the SCCs at M1 and M2 compared to M3.

Validate Findings

Creswell (1998) identified eight procedures for verifying results and recommends that qualitative researchers engage in at least two of them in any given study. Four forms of verification were employed to ensure trustworthy results. Triangulation was used to corroborate information between multiple sources of data (Creswell, 1998; Stake, 2000; Weiss, 1998). A peer reviewer provided an external check. Thick description was provided, and member checking was used as findings were verified with multiple participants.

Triangulation. Triangulation took place in three different ways throughout the analysis process. First, triangulation took place among the data provided by three different participants such as principals, school personnel, and parents. For example, at M1, to verify the perceived impact of the Homework Club, perceptive data from three different parents, four different teachers, and the principal corroborated the positive perceived impact.

Second, corroboration between forms of data were also utilized (Creswell, 2002). For example, at M2 the confidence built through the involvement in the decision to continue funding for a writing program was triangulated between the SCC meeting minutes, participant interviews, and the observation of an SCC meeting. The three different sources of data all revealed the process and the participant perceptions of the process.

Third, triangulation occurred as the three middle school SCCs were compared and contrasted to one another. For example, a key issue with regard to compliance was proper elections. By comparing and contrasting the practices of the three SCCs it became clear that the SCCs identified as exemplary have well-established procedures for the election of parent SCC members. The new SCC provided a contrasting example to strengthen the establishment of the election procedures as a characteristic of an exemplary SCC.

Peer review. A fellow doctoral student, Cari Buckner, served as a peer reviewer for this evaluation. Cari is trained in qualitative research and is also engaged in a qualitative case study of her own. I provided her with digital files containing my

transcripts with memos, documents, journal entries, tables containing themes and codes, and multiple drafts of Chapters IV, V, VI, and VII. Cari and I exchanged almost daily emails for 2 months discussing the categories and emergent themes. In addition to the emails, we had phone calls to clarify themes and follow the audit trail. Cari and I discussed the research process as well as my analysis of the data. The rigor was improved as a result of her input. For example, she questioned the characterization of the elements that built confidence and helped me get at the essence of what built confidence in SCC members. Cari was an independent and objective reviewer as she looked at my narrative and findings to ensure it was representative of the raw data. Cari asked hard questions, listened to explanations, and assisted greatly in creating a meaningful and trustworthy presentation of the data (Creswell, 1998).

Thick description. Thick description and rich quotations were used throughout the results and analysis narrative. Dialogue from the SCC meetings in conjunction with the participant quotations allow the participants to tell the story. “Thick evaluation descriptions take those who need to use the evaluation findings into the experience and outcomes of the program” (Patton, 2002, p. 438).

Member checking. Once the themes were established, participants were contacted for verification. Participants were presented with the themes and descriptions in an interview and asked for opinions on accuracy and fairness. During this member checking, disagreement with themes and descriptions was negligible. The comment of one participant was, “It is amazing how accurate you can be with just Polaroid shots of the process.”

Ethical Issues

Ethical issues were addressed by adhering to the propriety standards of the program evaluation standards (American Evaluation Association, 2007). The ethical criteria were satisfied through a thorough explanation of purpose provided to each participant. Participants were assured of confidentiality through the informed consent process. Further, names of school districts, schools, and individuals have not been used in the evaluation. The IRB informed consent is included as Appendix F. The approved interview questions in the standardized open-ended protocol were followed, and probing questions focused on revealing the nature of SCCs and their influence on student achievement. As observations and interviews were conducted during the third stage of the data collection, the questions and observations recorded were limited to those directly related to implementation and impact of the proposed plan. Following these ethical standards resulted in an evaluation protected human dignity and was complete and fair in its examination and recording of strengths and weaknesses of the program.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF SCC LEGAL COMPLIANCE

As stated in Chapter III, the results and analysis narrative is organized into three chapters by evaluation question. This chapter will address question one: Are Utah middle SCCs identified as exemplary implementing the law as prescribed? Specific aspects of the law received heavier emphasis in the data than other aspects of the law. With the nature of question one being based in the legal requirements, qualitative evidence was identified while analyzing how each school's SCC implemented the legal requirements. The evidence was gathered to provide a narrative view of procedures used by each school as they relate to legal compliance.

This chapter is organized under the headings of the major legal requirements. The two major headings are: (a) elections and membership and (b) plan development and U-PASS data. A third heading is communication. I include communication as an additional heading because of the increase in specific requirements in the latest legislation (Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1A-108). Each section will begin with a description of the legal requirements related to the general heading. Then a narrative for each middle school SCC will be presented relative to the legal requirements. To protect the anonymity of each participant, I will not use any names. All participants will be referred to by their general position in the school or on the SCC rather than by name. SCC members will not be distinguished from one another except for the designations such as parent, teacher, or principal.

Elections and Membership

The legal requirements governing SCC membership place a heavy emphasis on elections, terms of office, and representation on the SCC. The legal requirements for elections and membership have been expanded since this evaluation began. The legislature has added details that were not included in previous versions of the law. The core legal requirements have not changed, but specific procedures have been added. The core legal requirements are: (a) Membership on the SCC must include at least two school employees and the number of parent or guardian members must exceed the number of school employee members. (b) School employee members and parent members shall be elected for a two-year term by the majority of voters in their respective groups with the principal serving as a permanent ex officio member. (c) If a position goes unfilled, a two-year appointment may be made by the respective members. (Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1A-108) The procedures used by each middle school SCC to satisfy the legal requirements relative to membership and elections will be described in the following sections.

M1

One of the primary requirements of an SCC is that the number of parents exceeds the number of school personnel. M1 satisfies this requirement as members are listed on the M1 SCC bylaws and the School LAND Trust website. There are six parents, four teachers, and the principal who are full voting members on the council. M1 also has a counselor sit in on the SCC meetings, but the counselor does not vote. The bylaws also list the student body president as a nonvoting member of the SCC, but the student body

president was not present at any observed meetings nor was the student body president mentioned in any interviews.

As an ex officio member of the SCC, the principal is not elected to the SCC. The other school employee members are to be elected by school employees and serve a two-year term. Over the past several years the election process for school employees has not taken place. One teacher member described the process of becoming a member as taking place in a faculty meeting, “There was a need for a couple of people and if we were interested we pretty much just raised our hands. I don’t think we had enough interested to vote for it.”

Another teacher said, “Well, the principal approached me and asked me if I would be interested in this and mentioned that it might be something I would be interested in. I’m always looking for ways to be more involved with the rest of the building.” When asked if there was a faculty vote, the teacher replied, “You know, I’m not really certain.” Given the indication of a lack of interest by faculty members, an appointment to the position is a valid avenue for becoming a member under circumstances outlined by the law. Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1A-108 (2008) states that if there is a vacancy in a school employee position, then the other school employees shall fill the position by appointment. The principal said the process for a faculty member to become an SCC member is much less formal than the process for a parent to become an SCC member.

The parents of current students elect parent members for 2-year terms (Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1A-108). All parent or guardian candidates and individuals voting in the election must have children attending the school during the elected term of service. The

M1 SCC bylaws provide a very general description of the election process. “The ratio of teacher:parent representation and the formal election process will be maintained as per Utah and [school district] guidelines.” For parent representatives the bylaws specify, “Parent vacancies and School Community Council seat elections will be announced through the PTO newsletter, the school website, and the Powerschool Daily Bulletin.” In an interview the principal outlined the procedure used for past parent member elections.

Principal: We reach out to the—I will probably cover a bunch of stuff. In the spring as part of the registration process, we also concurrently shape up the balloting process for rising sixth grade families.

Jackie: How is that done?

Principal: Somebody on the council—I think we advertise through PTO newsletters that we have an election and that we are seeking nominations. And then they [candidates] either self-nominate or someone in the school nominates them, and we get those names in the spring of the kids’ fifth grade year. And on that we get a school community council member to do a telephone interview, and they get a brief bio [biography]. So we form our ballot, which looks like a brief bio with a slate of candidates. And then we run the elections for a period of time at that school. And then I also have some parent orientations, and I think we say that you can cast ballots that night as well. We’ve gone back and forth on that. So we either run it at the school and/or at some rising sixth grade parent assemblies that we do.... That’s how we get them, and then they roll over the second year. We shape it up as an expectation of a two-year service and generally they serve out that two-year term.

Jackie: Okay, so you start them [parent SCC members] as a parent of a sixth grader, and then they carry over when they’re seventh graders?

Principal: Exactly, and that all begins in the spring of the kids’ fifth-grade year.

Parent members confirmed the election process described by the principal as they described their experiences of becoming SCC members. One parent member shared:

First off, I heard about it at orientation night for my then fifth grader, and they were just running us through all the different ways to be involved at the school and different things. It was just, “Drop your name into this box if you are

interested in being on the school community council.” So I thought that in addition to the PTO, it was one of the only volunteer opportunities of the school, and I like to have the kind of hands on look at my kids’ life during the day, so that was my motivation for putting my name in the box. And then I found out that it was an election, and you had to run for district [school] wide election. I said, “Oh well, never mind. I don’t want to do that.” But the lady said, “Really, it’s no big deal. Just give me a short bio, and I’ll send it out.” So, I thought, “Okay”. It was really just simple. I emailed her my little bio. Every fifth grader got the ballot in the [school] and you checked who you would like and somehow, I got voted. It wasn’t too hard.

Other parent members shared very similar stories. One other parent member said:

It was a self-nomination process. I nominated myself and as part of that we then wrote a little bio—50 to 75 words on ourselves, why we wanted to be on the School Community Council. And an election was held among all the parents of incoming sixth graders from the four elementary schools in...[city and district name] school district. I won.... It’s a reasonably casual election process that we have. Also, I may have won because not a lot of people ran from the school where I was from, and I hate to say it, but I think people just vote for people from their own neighborhoods for this sort of thing.

At M1 the parents or guardians of the incoming sixth graders have been the only ones solicited to declare candidacy and vote in the election. Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1a-108 states, “Only parents or guardians of students attending the school may vote at the election.” The principal indicated in a follow-up interview that there had been concern expressed that the incoming students are not yet attending the school, but the law defines a parent or guardian member as “a parent or guardian of a student who is attending the school or who will be enrolled at the school at any time during the parent’s or guardian’s initial term of office.” Having the incoming sixth-grade parents or guardians declare candidacy is in keeping with the law. The principal feels that because the students are only in the school for a 2-year period, and SCC membership is a 2-year term that the incoming sixth grade parents should be the ones who run and are voted for, so the parent

or guardian can serve for the 2 years the student is at the school. However, Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1a-108 also stated, “Any parent or guardian of a student who meets the qualifications of this section may file or declare himself as a candidate for election to a school community council.” By only soliciting membership from incoming sixth grade parents it is possible that interested parents or guardians could be excluded from candidacy, which would be out of compliance with the legal requirements.

The M1 SCC pays close attention to the election requirements. During the SCC meeting in March following the conclusion of the state legislative session, the SCC members had a lengthy discussion concerning the election for the next year’s SCC parent member elections and the additional election requirements. A small segment of the dialogue demonstrates how the SCC responded to new requirements of providing a 14-day notice and using a secure ballot box in conjunction with the established procedures.

Parent 1: But it sounds like the only thing we’re not doing is the secret ballot—like a box. Isn’t that the only thing we’re not doing that it says? I read the thing that you sent out.

Parent 2: Well, the 14 days in advance—“Provide notice of the council election fourteen days in advance of the vote.” Now when do the kids register? That’s when the vote is taking place.

Principal: Monday and Tuesday.

Parent 2: At these orientation meetings, they register?

Principal: They get their registration forms on Monday and Tuesday and then they are due back to their teachers on Thursday. What I’m seeing on Monday and Tuesday is a place where we are not necessarily voting, but we are soliciting for interest.

Parent 2: Can we put it on the school web site too?

Principal: MmHm.

Parent 2: Let's do that and then have the voting two-weeks hence.

Parent 1: Two weeks later.

In the same meeting SCC members also discussed whether candidates should be representatives of geographical areas.

Parent 3: Last fall we talked about how it would be good to have a parent representative from each school. With these new rules we don't have to aim for that resolve?

Parent 2: No. As I recall reading the rules last fall when they had that discussion, the rules basically say it's an at-large election. And if you get three parents from [feeder elementary school area] that get the largest number of votes then those are the three people that serve. But when you fill vacancies, the parents can fill the vacancy any way they darn well please, and we have in filling—if someone resigns during the year—and this year two people resigned. We have attempted to sort of spread it out through filling vacancies. That's where we get that opportunity.

SCC member vacancies can occur as a parent position goes unfilled in the elections or if something happens to a parent member (Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1A-108). When a parent position needs to be filled, the parent SCC members make the appointment. The M1 SCC determined that they would try to obtain parent members from particular locations to achieve a representative balance of the entire school area. This is a procedure that has been used in the past.

One parent discussed the process she went through to become a member of the SCC.

The school that I come from, the elementary school is very small, so it doesn't have as many kids feeding into M1 as some of the other schools have, so when we had an election, I didn't get picked. I was like the next person who would have been picked if there had been one more spot open. So what happened was a couple of months after the school year had begun, one of the SCC members decided it was too much extra work, so she resigned, and they bumped me up onto the council.

The principal described how parent SCC members were currently filling a position of a member who had moved from the area. The principal went on to explain that even though the policy does not state that parent members should come from specific neighborhoods or areas, the M1 SCC will try to fill a parent member vacancy with candidates from areas that are not represented.

The law did not mention anything about maintaining election results until the recent 2008 legislative session (Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1a-108), but the principal commented:

The [election] results sometimes, well, there always seems to be some snafu whenever you do a vote. Whether it's kids or adults and so hanging onto that stuff was a lesson I learned. So I try and keep my hands on it or make sure the president [SCC chairman] has their hands on the actual ballots. I want to be able to go back and revisit it. And every year, there has been something that has come up. Whether it's a question on the number of votes or whether we have somebody decline or somebody move. We always need to see that stuff.

M2

The membership published on the Utah School LAND Trust Program website of M2 consists of six parent members, three school employees, and the principal, which satisfies the legal requirements. The members were active members as evidenced by attendance recorded in meeting minutes. Two school employee members is the minimum legal requirement, which is satisfied, and the parent membership exceeds the minimum requirement for a middle school. M2 SCC has also chosen to obtain representative membership from the different areas within the school boundaries, which is not required nor mentioned in the law.

To obtain the required parent membership M2 has an annual election. The

minutes for the January 2005 SCC meeting establish the pattern of soliciting candidates at the beginning of the year and holding an election along with parent teacher conferences.

To hold School/Community Council elections in conjunction with Spring Parent/Teacher Conference, April 13th...will have the council in place for next school year. A table with information available for Parent/Teacher Conference on February 9th will start the ball rolling. A member available for questions and answers would help create interest.

A similar entry is recorded in the January or February SCC meeting minutes each year. In 2008 the January minutes record how the process has continued to evolve to include a specific timeline for the election process.

On January 31, 2008, there will be a phone message go out, letting all parents know elections are being held and we are accepting applications for the spots that are available. At our next SCC meeting on January 11, 2008, those applications will be reviewed and a ballot will be made for the general public to vote during Parent/Teacher Conferences on February 21, 2008.

Applications for SCC candidacy are available on the schools web site or at the office. The application (see Appendix G) is a one-page introduction to SCCs including time commitments and available positions. The application simply asks for candidates to submit their name if they are interested. The current members contact the interested parents and provide more information and submit their name on the ballot. The application provides all the information required by the law except the date and time of elections.

In spite of the invitation going to every parent, very few parents express an interest in participating in the SCC at M2. As a parent SCC member explained, "I think it's a really good opportunity, and I think very few people realize what impact they can

have on their kids' schools." The parent member was serving on her third consecutive term on the SCC and indicated, "For me, there hasn't been anyone else in my area that has been interested." Another parent explained:

Parent: So as they were last year getting ready for elections and trying to get people—sometimes you have to recruit, if people don't hear about it. So they called me and asked me if I would be interested....

Jackie: So they actually called you and said, "Could you help us out?"

Parent: "Would you be interested in having your name on the ballot?" Anyway, they still went through the process of the voting and all that.

Jackie: Was there another name on the ballot that was representing the same area as you?

Parent: I don't think so.

The third parent interviewed had served on an SCC at the elementary school, and as her child moved to M2 she was encouraged to submit her name as a candidate.

One of my neighbors was on the School Community Council at [M2]. When she was done with her term she wanted to know if I would like to continue because I had already been involved with School Community Councils and knew about them. So I submitted my name. I don't know if we had an application back then—I just know I submitted my name at one of the parent teacher conferences. And that's how I was brought on. There wasn't anyone else that wanted to—they just aren't very well known yet.

The principal described the parent election process at M2 and then said:

Now what the down side to this is—it still is trying to find enough parents that are really desirous to be part of that School Community Council. So out of the four years we've been running, I've had an actual number of two candidates running against each other in a district [a represented geographical area within the school's boundaries] three times. Other than that it is the one parent that has submitted their names. No one else showed an interest. I had at least one parent show an interest, so they were put on.

The faculty members do not show any more interest in being a part of the SCC

than the parents do. The principal said he is surprised he cannot get more interest because he encourages teachers every year, “The decisions they get to make and the voice they get to have in the building is unbelievable.” In spite of the encouragement, there remains little interest. One faculty SCC member shared the experience of becoming a member.

[The principal] suggested that I be a part of the School Community Council and he brought it up in our first faculty meeting and told the faculty that this is who he would like. “Is there anybody else that would like to run?” Nobody else wanted to run, so I was elected. It was kind of a democracy but kind of an appointment to an extent. Everyone supported me. And we have had elections since then, and nobody else really wanted it, so I was elected again for it.

The other faculty member told a similar story. “I was chosen and then voted in by the faculty. My principal came and approached me and asked if I would be interested in being on the SCC.” The two faculty members have been the faculty representatives for four years and the faculty did vote for them, but there were no additional volunteers to be a part of the SCC.

M3

M3 is in a lower socioeconomic area, which was cited by several SCC members as the reason for not having a functional SCC before this year. The principal said:

I understand the law wanting to get parents involved especially on the shared government and decision-making on the school level because that community council is where all the stakeholders are present and that is a very vital function. But most of my parents are so engrossed in the day-to-day survival mode that it’s difficult for them to get here. Just getting people here and that are willing to serve and help me organize everything—I think I have finally found the right combination of parents that will help me spring board this.

The principal expressed excitement that there are a couple of parent SCC members who are committed to making the SCC work. The principal said that in the past he would just

get anyone willing to serve, and meetings had never been held regularly. This year there are two parents committed to making the SCC work. One parent member of the SCC had previous experience being a member of an SCC at another school and was moving her son from private to public school and enrolled at M3 for the 2007-2008 school year.

When we got to [M3], I right away wanted to know when the SCC meetings were and what was going on. Just so that I would have a feel for what was going on at [M3] because I have older kids that had been there ten years earlier. Right away, when I started asking about meetings and when do they meet and where is it? There was none. Immediately everybody that I spoke to said, “We don’t have an SCC—do you want to do it?” I said, “No. No, no, no, I really don’t. I just want to know what’s going on.” As time, it was probably the third month of school maybe, then I had started asking about PTA, SCC all of it, and [M3] decided to kind of roll it up into one. They had a meeting. They actually scheduled a real meeting, which the school hadn’t had one in years. I went to the meeting and that night, [the other active parent member] was there, and I was there, and it was just kind of sixes at the time. They [others at the meeting] said, “Who wants to be the chair?” And at that time, I didn’t really know if I was staying at [M3] because my son had been there a few months and wasn’t really being challenged.... I wasn’t real happy with what was going on and at the time, I wasn’t sure I was staying. So I kept saying, “Boy, I don’t want to chair. I don’t want any of that because I don’t know when I’m going to be here.” So really quickly elected [the other active parent] and we went from there.

The other parent member who was elected SCC chairman in the meeting had concerns of his own that led to his participation in the SCC.

My daughter came home with stories from school about things going on in class that I was not impressed with at all, and it caused me great concern. So I came to school and met with the vice-principal, and he directed me to a meeting. I attended that meeting...and then I was elected chair of the council.

It was reported in the meeting minutes that the others present at the meeting where the chair was elected consisted of the principal, three teachers, someone from a University outreach program, and a representative of the Utah PTA, who is working to help get the PTA and SCC functioning at M3.

The PTA representative does not live in the local community, nor does she have a student at M3. She referred to herself as a “community partner” and does serve as a parent SCC member and will remain a member until there are enough parents that she would not be needed. The community partner explained:

It’s not that they [M3] don’t have parent involvement because they have a lot of parents come to teacher conferences, and they bring their kids to school and all that stuff. But when it comes to the leadership part of it, that’s the part that is really lacking. Trying to figure out how to do some leadership development is basically what I was looking at. So that I could back off in a year and then let them kind of keep going and just remain as a support.

The community partner said, “State PTA and national PTA are aware of what I am doing and support it, and basically if we can come up with some sort of process or frame work then maybe we can duplicate it in the other Title I schools.” The community partner serves as the PTA president and as a secretary to the SCC. She prepares agendas and keeps minutes for the meetings. She has also served to provide the SCC chairman with direction on what he needs to do as the SCC chairman. Speaking of the influence of the Community partner SCC member, a teacher SCC member said:

The reason...we’ve had a more functioning SCC is because we have a PTA president who is here also as the state board PTA to support parents, and I think it takes a lot of outreach to get parents here involved.

The law required each school to have an SCC, but because of the lack of interest or availability, the parent involvement in leadership at M3 has not been sufficient to have a fully functioning SCC. The teacher SCC member reported:

I think that [the principal] has gone out of his way to try and get parents involved. I know that he has done hat tricks and taken parents out to dinner, and I think there is certainly a motivation or effort to try and get it functioning, but I also think that when you have such a non-functioning body, it’s very difficult to go through the steps and procedures when there’s not a body in place to go through

the process.

The current situation with two involved parents has provided a committee that, according to an SCC teacher member, was more functional in the 2007-2008 school year than it had ever been.

One parent member expressed a sincere desire to satisfy all the legal requirements for SCCs and wants to get other parents more involved. At one point the parent member gave some ideas for getting more parents involved such as setting up a booth at parent teacher conferences or making specific invitations to people, but he expressed apprehension by saying, “I am still uncomfortable in the role that I hold with the council. I want to be able to answer questions that might be posed to me, [but] if I can’t answer them, I’ll feel uncomfortable.” As chairman, the parent had received some training, but he commented that he needed more experience in addition to the knowledge because he had never done anything like chairing an SCC before.

Between the school’s desire, the support from the PTA representative, and the two interested parents, the SCC at M3 is beginning to function. A parent member explained, “There are a ton of things not happening that should be happening through the SCC, but it’s finally feeling like it’s an entity.” Analyzing the data in relationship to the legal requirements of SCCs, the parent’s assessment is verified.

Membership and elections are a significant component of legal compliance. The first requirement related to membership is that the parents must be in the majority (Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1A-108). As reported in the school LAND trust program plan, membership includes six parent members and five school employees including the

principal. However, in reviewing the attendance in all the meetings, five of the eleven members attended the meetings regularly and two parent members listed never attended a meeting. A couple of the school employees attended only one meeting. The PTA community partner is included as a parent member, which is not supported in the law. Although membership in M3 is growing, and the number of listed parent members did exceed the number of school employees, the compliance with the membership requirement is primarily administrative. In practice, relative to the total membership, few parents and school employees were involved in the meetings.

Elections as described in Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1A-108 have not taken place at M3. A parent member described the process of becoming a member as simply attending the meeting. The community partner reported that all parents had been invited, but only two parents actually attended. The only type of election that took place was a nomination for one of the parents to be the SCC chairman, and everyone present at the meeting approved the nomination. One parent said, “The school had operated so long with no parental input and no real SCC; they were just lucky to have meetings and have people show up – let alone worry about having enough people to establish it correctly.” The principal explained that the SCC is announced every year, but this is the first year there has been any interest, but interest is still so minimal that anybody who wants to serve can be a part of the SCC.

Faculty representation on the SCC was handled by taking members from the School Improvement Committee (SIC). Both the principal and teacher member interviewed said there had never been an election process for SCC teacher members.

Plan Development and U-PASS Data

Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1a-108.5 stated that the SCC will evaluate the U-PASS test results in conjunction with the development of the school improvement plan (SIP). During the evaluation process, the SCC may not have access to data revealing student identity. The law outlines that the SIP should be focused on increasing student achievement and be closely related to the school LAND trust program plan and associated funds. In addition to the SIP and the school LAND trust program plan, Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1a-108 outlined the SCC involvement in the development of the professional development plan, and child access routing plan.

A key word used in the law is *develop*. The most applicable definitions of the word *develop* in this context are “to bring from latency to or toward fulfillment ... to expand or enlarge...to aid in the growth of; strengthen...to improve the quality of; refine...add detail and fullness to; elaborate” (Pickett et al., 2000, p. 496). Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1a-108 does provide the SCC the option of delegating the development process to a subcommittee, but the SCC must approve the developed plans. The following sections will outline general processes and some specific examples of what the development process looks like at each of the three middle schools.

M1

At each M1 SCC meeting, chart paper containing a summary of U-PASS test data from the past 5 years was tacked on the walls. The principal explained how the U-PASS data are presented. “We chart them [U-PASS results] too. We kind of stuck with the old

paper chart, and we keep them on the wall in there, so they are always there as a backdrop. And we've been tracking it since 2000." A teacher SCC member confirmed the use of charting to present data by saying, "It was all put down in paper and the principal made a graph." In an interview a parent SCC member said, "You've been in the room and know that there are just charts and charts all over the walls, test scores, and all sorts of data we use to influence our goal making strategies."

The data presentation is not limited to the charts on the walls. Another parent member said:

We get the data broken down by all the breakdowns that they have. And we get it early. I think we probably get stuff that the public doesn't get to help us understand better how the situation is. I think that helps a lot. There is no shortage, whatsoever, of data that we get. We occasionally don't know exactly what something means.... But we tend to find out later.

A third parent confirmed the use of data.

It's [data] shared every time it becomes available. I don't know how the rest of the world can get it. I know it's public information because there are no names on this stuff. You only get percentages.... We get it in the meetings, and we look at it every time.

The use of data at M1 is closely associated with the development of the SIP. In one observed meeting, the M1 SCC went back to a discussion that had occurred in a previous meeting concerning the goals of the SIP, and how the SCC can develop the SIP to help them identify the impact the plan implementation is having.

Principal: We were playing around with some pretty exciting things, but I haven't looked at this since. Maybe we could talk about these goals a little bit....
[Principal projects the goals discussed in a previous meeting onto the screen.]

Parent 1: [Looking at the document projected on the screen] I would add to A that sees where they are at, at the end of the academic year and then see where they are at in the ensuing academic year. Do we get two shots at them [non proficient

students]?

Principal: Yeah, [reading from goals from previous meeting] “Identify population non-proficient students in math, language arts, and science in May. Track that non-proficient group during the school year. See where they are at the end of the academic year.”

Parent 2: You’re going to do that with the incoming sixth graders?

Parent 1: [Talking over the other parent] But then hang on to whoever you get in that non-proficient group for the following year, and take it another year.

Principal: Yes, up until this year, I couldn’t have said that with much confidence, but the reporting and the online testing has come along to where we think we can actually identify them earlier and earlier. Why do we have two here [referring to two different goals that had been discussed in the previous meeting]? We’ve got an A and a B? Maybe we had a little debate going on.

Parent 1: Yeah, B was [names a parent SCC member who was not present at the current meeting] wanted us to get the level two kids to level three and the level three kids to level four, and the debate had to do with whether this was an achievement level test or a proficiency level test. The whole idea of this program, frankly, is to get kids to where they’ll be capable to work in our industrialized workers’ society that we no longer have in America.

The dialogue from the SCC meeting demonstrates the involvement of SCC members in the development process as they discuss not only how best to set goals that are going to have the greatest impact on student achievement, but what data will help them determine whether the implemented plans are having the desired impact.

In an interview, the principal discussed how he has worked with the SCC in setting goals that are based on data, and some of the challenges encountered.

We’re now playing around making the goal [improving student achievement] even more specific and providing feedback on certain sets of kids that we have identified. I think that’s been pretty powerful. My role was to just try to get the data out. How do you just make it work?... We would know who we were talking about down to the individual name, but we couldn’t use that kind of report with the school community council. So I think the main thing was just trying to find ways to get the information that was in an acceptable fashion so the School

Community Council members could understand a bit of what we were trying to do. From outside the SCC that involved district office personnel, the testing people, the human resource director that does the testing and how do we get that information and it's still a challenge. [With] the online testing, we're going to have more immediate results from the CRTs, and then hopefully we can move past just the CRT reliance and can start getting some curriculum based measure that tells us on a day-to-day basis and a week-to-week basis on how they're doing.

When I asked the principal what he thought would help the council make more effective use of data, he responded:

The timeliness of it, and at some point, I think schools are going to get away from the autopsy, and we'll start having some formative data.... I think it's timeliness. Then it's always difficult, we want to know names, and we name names,... but I can't have that level of detailed discussion with the council. Level of detail; timeliness.

As the principal and parents discussed the use of data they revealed compliance with the law restricting the level of detail that can be legally discussed with the SCC. There were several indicators that revealed compliance to the student confidentiality component of the law. When discussing how the SCC reviews test results, the principal indicated that they could not get into any details that might jeopardize student confidentiality. One teacher questioned this requirement because it was often a single student or subgroup that skewed the results. She questioned the effectiveness of the discussion if individual students could not be identified. "How can we help the one that skewed the results, if the one can't be identified?" A few parents mentioned specifically that names were not included in the data they saw. When other parent members discussed the data that were available to them, they referred to subject scores like math or science or categories of students like Hispanic or special education. Not referring to individual student names served as an indicator that names were not shared while reviewing test

information.

Utah Code Ann. § 53A-16-101.5 stated that the school may develop a multiyear School LAND trust program plan, but the plan shall be reviewed annually. M1 has taken a multiyear approach to their SIP that includes the school LAND trust program plan. They have also chosen to take each of the required plans and create one single plan that meets the needs of each of the different plans (i.e., SIP, school LAND trust program plan, professional development plan, literacy plan). The purposes of the various plans are so closely related that combining them into one consolidated SIP is well within the legal parameters. As the principal said, “We’ve been able to make the school improvement plan fit all these other templates as they’ve come up over the years.”

The M1 SCC does not merely review the multiyear plan on an annual basis, but it is under continual review, and each meeting throughout the year is dedicated to developing the SIP. As one parent member said, “We put our signatures on it once a year, and then the very next day it goes under review again. It’s constantly being reviewed and changed.” Another parent member described the plan development process, “It was created from scratch a long time ago, and it’s a dynamic document that changes as needed.”

The development process does not always look the same. A teacher member described one discussion in an SCC meeting.

We were evaluating one of the top goals.... Everyone was bringing ideas to the table. Does this 3% really mean anything? Parents, teachers, and the administrator were all sharing their perspective. Everyone [was] contributing, and...we started to find a different way to phrase the goal.

Several other strategies were used by the SCC that demonstrate SCC involvement in the

development of the school improvement plan and will be discussed in detail in Chapter V.

One statement in Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1A-108 is that the SCC may create subcommittees for the purpose of advising or for development of plans on the condition that subcommittee work be subject to SCC approval. When asked about the use of subcommittees, the M1 principal described several individual assignments but could not cite any subcommittees involving parents. From his reaction, I received the impression that there were no formal subcommittees at M1. However, when I read the bylaws, I discovered there was a formalized list of final decision authority for all the administrative duties of the school. In the opening statement the bylaws state the SCC has “allocated final decision authority on those issues designated to the school as follows.” The bylaws then go on to provide a list of responsibilities and persons responsible for the final decisions. This list serves effectively as a formal declaration of subcommittees for the school. In the list all the responsibilities of the SCC are assigned to the “SC Council with Faculty.” This arrangement is in compliance with the legal requirements.

M2

The M2 SCC uses U-PASS data frequently in meetings. SCC meeting minutes report that the principal began one of the first meetings of the school year with a report on the previous year’s end-of-level test results. He reported that the school had passed the national and state requirements. A parent member stated:

Anytime he gets any state testing or school testing or anything like that, we are given the feedback on that. We are given the statistics either on the board or a power point. We are then able to not only see if what you did is working, but then

from that look for ways to see if you can improve it more, or what you did wrong and then fix it.

The data provide crucial information that assists the M2 SCC to make important decisions for further school progress. The principal stated:

Everything we have been doing and every decision we make is data driven. I am always feeding them the data, so to say that there was a time when it swung their decision or not, I don't know that I can answer that because I believe that all of our decisions are based off of the data.

Statements by parent and teacher SCC members supported the principal's statement. A teacher member said, "The main concern with us is the overall test scores and overall student achievement with their grades." Sharing how data inform the decision-making process a parent member said, "We have purchased these mobile labs.... Here are our CRT scores.... They've gone up. It could be having those labs and access to those resources [has influenced the increase]." The parent member went on to say that the goals in the SIP were a direct result of the data presented. "That's how we decided how to use the trust land money. That's how we chose to increase by this many percentage points next year—let's make that our school improvement plan because of the data that we all are privy to."

Although the U-PASS data were used frequently, U-PASS was not the only source of data used by M2. The U-PASS data were referred to several times by the principal and SCC members as an autopsy (i.e., a metaphor demonstrating that the U-PASS results simply state whether the school passed or failed and the causes for the failure but do not diagnose a problem that can be treated because the U-PASS tests occur at the end of the year). M2 developed additional forms of assessment, which provided

ongoing data to inform decisions.

M2 has developed an elaborate system of assessment to help identify strengths and weaknesses in students that can then be targeted for improvement throughout the year. A system of practice CRTs has been developed and is used quarterly to measure progress throughout the school year. The school has also developed a system of assessments called *Walkaways*. Walkaways are grounded in the state core curriculum for each subject taught. A Walkaway must be passed by each student with 80% mastery. The system of testing is designed to ensure that every student has a minimum level of mastery of the core objectives required to pass the class. If the student doesn't reach the required level of mastery by the end of the term, they receive a grade *In Progress (I)*. An I grade means the student has the opportunity to continue working with the teacher until the student can demonstrate mastery of the concepts. The M2 principal provides data documenting Walkaways, practice CRT assessments, or U-PASS data at meetings.

The SIP and school LAND trust program plan are developed through ongoing discussion at each meeting through the year. SCC members or M2 faculty members investigate programs that could be implemented, continued, or discontinued to improve student achievement. For example, an SCC decision to continue funding a writing software program will be discussed in detail in Chapter V. The discussion and subsequent decision to continue funding the writing program demonstrated how the SCC is involved in shared decision-making.

A teacher SCC member provided another example of SCC involvement in the development of the plan. She explained:

He [the principal] wanted a mobile cart lab because there are so many teachers and kids that computers are hard to come by, but the SCC put the money on the Read 180 program. So he shorted on the mobile lab. But he was like, “If that’s what you guys want to do, that’s fine with me.” I have never ever felt like—when we are in the meetings—this is what I really want and then tried to persuade us. He’s been willing to say, “This is what’s on the table, and what do you guys want to do?” It’s been really nice.

The meeting minutes from the time period do not mention the proposal of the computer lab, but through a series of meetings the SCC meeting minutes showed the discussion concerning the reading software continued. In the March 2005 meeting the SCC received a report from the English department head, who had visited other schools using the program. In the May 2005 SCC meeting, the minutes show that the SCC approved the reading program. The reading program was included in the 2005-2006 School LAND Trust plan.

The principal makes most plan proposals, but parents and teachers are also encouraged to contribute. The counselor member explained that the principal usually has specific ideas for the plans, “but then parents or teachers or whoever can question that.” In different SCC meeting minutes, it was reported that the principal specifically asked parents to come to the next meeting prepared with ideas for the school LAND trust budget. The January 2008 minutes report, “[The principal] has asked the council to come with ideas of how to spend the 2008-09 Trustland monies.”

Although it is rare, parents do occasionally bring proposals to the table. The principal cited one instance.

They [parent SCC members] have pushed this right from the very moment we opened the building—is to run a late bus run. Where we are 100% bussed and a lot of them live 30 to 40 minutes away, if those students miss the bus, they can’t get home. They’re not getting home, so they really pushed...to use some of our

money out of the Trust LANDs to help run a late bus run on one day a week. And that was something they were passionate about. They had to convince me more—I wasn't big on that one to start with. But they really believe in that, and it's finally happening.

Meeting minutes verify the late bus proposal. The principal was reluctant to spend funds on busses, not being convinced it would be beneficial. Through the process of discussion and investigation, concerns were addressed and district funds were secured to ensure that teachers would be available after school to help students who stayed late. As a result, the late busses were included in the SIP, the budget was adjusted, and the school LAND trust program for the 2007-2008 school year funded the late busses. The funding sources for making teachers available after school were not available to continue the program for the next school year, but as a result of the program's perceived success, the SCC determined to dedicate a large portion of the school LAND trust program budget to fund the busses and the teachers for the after school program for another year.

Parents were appreciative of being included in the school improvement process. One parent expressed sincere appreciation as she shared:

[The principal] presented the Walkaway program and asked for our input, and what did we feel about it, and he explained the program and made me feel like a part of—should we do it, or should we not. Would this help our students achieve?

Another parent talked about being a part of the process and appreciated when the principal would comment to the SCC that certain things could not go forward without SCC approval and said, "They do value our input." Comparing current experience to a previous experience as an SCC member a parent said, "The comments seem to be taken more seriously." During an SCC meeting, observation the principal made a comment illustrating how the development process works in practice at M2. While discussing

proposed items for the next year's school LAND trust program plan, the principal said, "The proposals are still up for discussion. I'm just showing you my proposal. I am willing to look at other things—it's about all of us on the community council, it's not just me."

Although there is significant evidence of SCC involvement in the development of the SIP and the school LAND trust program plan, there was little evidence of involvement in helping with the development of the professional development plan.

The focus on student achievement is also a legal compliance issue as the law outlines the use of U-PASS test results to identify the most critical academic needs and that funds be used to improve academic excellence (Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1a-108.5; Utah Code Ann. § 53A-16-101.5). In the meeting observed the principal said, "The school improvement plan is that we are going to raise our CRT scores by 2%. It does not sound like a big jump, but it is. That is our goal." The focus on increasing the test scores as a measure of student achievement is evident in interviews, meetings, and document review. The goal of raised test scores is repeated often in meetings, and the preparation status of students for the tests is a common topic of discussion. The Walkaway program is based in the core curriculum and helping students achieve objectives measured by the CRTs. In an interview the principal explained that the focus on improving test scores is not limited to core subject teachers.

Even though you are using the CRT data [limited to science, math, and language arts] as one of your reporting mechanisms, as a whole school if you will raise the academic level in the history classes, in the shop classes, in the fine arts classes that failure is not an option, that you just can't sit and fail here gracefully, and we're not going to bother you. If you raise that expectation that there's [a] standard in all those subject areas to be met, it will raise your math scores along

with it, okay. If it is only math, English, and science fighting the battle, it's not going to work. It's got to be a school driven, so those elective teachers are every bit as important in reaching those academic goals as any of the others because a lot of times it is in those elective classes where they put to practice the theory that is being talked in those core classes.

In support of what occurs in the classes, the SCC focus on student achievement has motivated support for the after school program, the Walkaway program, and the investment in computers and calculators, which are all focused on the objective of increasing student achievement as measured by state end of level CRTs.

M3

The evaluation data related to how the M3 SCC learns of and uses U-PASS data are not totally clear. There is evidence that the data are shared with the SCC, but the sharing of data does not appear to inform any SCC decision-making related to the development of the school plans. Although the principal said SCC members were given a draft copy of next year's SIP, which contains a report of U-PASS data, there was no evidence that the SCC members had provided input on the plan. When I asked one parent SCC member to share an experience of developing the school improvement or School LAND Trust plan, the parent member responded, "Yea, we haven't really done that yet."

Although there hasn't been an involvement of the SCC in the development process of the school plans, student data are shared with the SCC. A teacher reported, "Student achievement is shared on a regular basis at SIC [school improvement council] and SCC. It really has been a constant discussion about programming and plans and student achievement and that certainly has never been a lack of discussion." The SCC meeting minutes from December 2007 show the principal presented reading levels, which

are a school level assessment and not part of U-PASS. A parent member reported:

The counselors that have shown up several times to let us know about school wide testing, and where our scores are coming in versus where they've been in years past. But I think most of the information has been presented mostly to orient and to let the council know what is going on, but not so much to do with any sort of decisions.

M3s school district has an annual SIP process that outlines specifically the steps for developing the SIP. In the outline, one step is to determine whether the SCC or another site team will write the SIP. The law provides the option for subcommittees to develop the required plans. A teacher SCC member described the process:

I remember speaking about the trust lands [and the SIP] a couple of times...in a meeting—not just signing off on it...but I don't recall having meetings where [we] were really working on those plans in SCC and not even in SIC. There might have been a subcommittee that gave input on the SIP and then it was put together.

The parent members were unaware of the development process, but during an interview the principal said, "They [the SCC] are looking at the draft [of the SIP] right now, and as the year winds down, I'm going to be asking for support and input." The meeting minutes also show that the SIP was introduced in the February 2008 SCC meeting as the minutes read, "School Improvement Plan has 4 goals: a. School Improvement b. Literacy c. Math d. ELL e. Optional Goal?????" The principal described the development of the school improvement plan as involving everyone.

The three main goals that the district wants us to really focus on are a math goal, a literacy goal, and an ESL goal. And then you have the fourth one, which is optional. We have opted to redesign our Special Ed program. And this is all part of the school improvement plan. The math goal came from the math department; the literacy goal came from my language arts team. I've given all those graphs to the entire faculty so they can all provide input.

One result of this approach was expressed when a teacher SCC member said:

I guess I don't see it as a school improvement plan, although I might be off. I see it as, like, individual goals that we have and that probably are in the school improvement plan, but I guess that's how I see it. For example if we have a CRT goal or a bubble group of kids that we need to get up or we're trying to get reading scores up, I see those as individual reports. We might address those particular goals—if that makes sense. It's just not my recollection that we did it in the sense that this is our school improvement plan.

The SIP that was given to the SCC did contain 2 years of historical U-PASS data for the core subjects of math and language arts broken down into subcategories of regular or special education or English and Non English language learners, and an action plan for each of the four SIP goals. The SCC did approve the SIP, but did not actively serve in the development process.

Communication

Communication is a characteristic of SCCs that will be discussed in more detail in Chapter V, but it will be discussed in this section as it relates to the legal requirements. Data emerged related to legal issues of communication for both M1 and M2. As a result of the stage of development of M3s SCC, there were not a significant amount of data related to law compliance issues of communication beyond those discussed related to membership. The SCC is required by law to communicate information to the parents related to SCC activities. The core requirement for parent notification includes a summary of the school LAND trust program report, time and location of elections and meetings, and posting of agendas and minutes. These requirements have been made more specific in the most recent version of the law Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1a-108.

M1

A theme emerged at M1 that is related to this issue of communication. M1 SCC had a keen awareness of legal requirements coupled with a desire to comply with those requirements. The SCC chairman was a parent member of the SCC who closely monitored the progression of the legislature relative to the SCC law. During the SCC meetings observed, the legal requirements were a common topic of discussion. One discussion related to the new requirement to post information to the website.

Parent 2: We have to make notice of our meetings available to the public 14 days in advance. We have to do minutes a week after our meetings or before our next meeting, whichever is later.

Parent 3: So where do we put these minutes?

Teacher 1: On the website.

Parent 2: We can put them on the website. They probably don't need to be very detailed. You know, one sheet I'm sure would do it.

The discussion went on about several different requirements but went back to the new requirements in the law for using the website.

Teacher 1: Ooh, scroll down some more. [An email containing the legal requirements is posted on the screen.] What is that we got to provide?

Parent 2: That's the school improvement plan and the mid-year summary and meetings schedule. It has to go out with each kid.

Principal: It's doable. It's just getting it done.

Parent 3: What a total waste of paper.

Teacher 1: No, it's the website.

Parent 3: So we can just post it on the website or email it to everybody? And like you said, how many don't have emails. So then do we have to send it out by paper, or do we go, "Well, we did the best we could"?

Teacher 1: It just says the website.

M2

M2 primarily uses their website to keep the parents informed concerning SCC activities. The website is updated continually. The school's home page advertises the date and time of the next meeting and states that the public is welcome. The SCC minutes are posted on the website promptly after the meeting, and anyone can access the minutes for every SCC meeting held at M2. The minutes of the meetings include hyperlinks to data or programs referred to in the meetings. When U-PASS data were shared in a meeting a link to the school data was provided in the minutes. In another meeting a letter was referred to, and a link was provided in the minutes where the letter could be read. The website is updated by the secretary and is used as a primary source of communication with parents and the community. The latest version of the law states, "The school community council shall provide the information...[on SIP and use of School LAND Trust funds] by: (i) posting information on the school's website."

Conclusion

Question one is: Are Utah middle SCCs identified as exemplary implementing the law as prescribed? The evidence was presented to provide a narrative view of procedures used by each school as they relate to legal compliance. Each school demonstrated conscientiousness towards legal compliance. The data analysis demonstrates that, though not perfect, M1 and M2 are compliant with the law. An election process for parent members is well established and routinely followed at both M1 and M2. Both M1 and M2

SCCs make strong use of U-PASS data, which always excludes student names. Both M1 and M2 SCCs are also heavily involved in the development of the school improvement and school LAND trust program plans. Although M3 is not compliant with the law in many respects, M3 demonstrated an increasing capacity for legal compliance.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF SCC STRATEGIES AND PROCESSES

Question two moves on from the legal requirements and into an examination of the actual strategies and processes of the SCC. As the strategies and processes for each middle school evaluated are discussed, overlap between legal requirements and practical processes will be evident. Question two asks: Do Utah middle schools community councils identified as exemplary utilize the strategies of effective site-based management and shared decision-making identified in the literature? Which strategies do SCC members report using, and how are these strategies implemented?

The observations, interviews, and documents were examined seeking evidence of the strategies and processes identified in the literature. The strategies and processes are (a) building stakeholder confidence, (b) using multiple levels of leadership and working together in the context of a professional learning community, (c) having strong principal support of the process, (d) using data to focus on student achievement, (e) collecting and communicating information effectively, (f) possessing adequate resources, and (g) accepting responsibility for student achievement evident in the entire staff.

Chapter V is organized by providing a full description of each middle school. The strategies and processes used by each middle school will be presented as they relate to the strategies identified in the literature. As the processes are presented for each school, it is difficult to separate the entire SCC process into the discreet strategies because there is overlap between the implementation of the different processes and strategies. The overlap is particularly evident for M2.

M1

At M1, each of the identified strategies was evident in some way. Although the strategies implemented in the M1 SCC are not purely discreet, the data will be presented by category designated in the literature.

Build Stakeholder Confidence

When asking whether a member was confident that the SCC was making a difference, a common response was, “I wouldn’t choose to be involved if I wasn’t confident it would be meaningful.” Yet, when asked to give specific examples of experiences that have helped build that confidence, members struggled to share a personal example. When pressed, members cited three main types of experiences that serve as sources for their confidence.

The opportunity to spend money. A first-year SCC member commented:

I’m just now getting to the point where I really understand and recognize what it is we are doing and our purpose. ... Sometimes it’s rather intangible what the community council does, but when we have been able to vote and purchase tools that will help be in place and help next year’s kids, I would say that made—the more hands on experience there—probably is what gave me more confidence that we were helping the kids.”

Another parent member was reluctant to admit that the money made a difference when she commented, “I almost hate to have this be my confidence thing, but this is the times that I have felt like, ‘Yeah, we’re going to make an impact.’ It truly is when we have spent some of the Trust land money.” The comments demonstrate that taking action builds the most confidence in the process.

When I asked a third parent member to name an instance when she felt great confidence that the work of the SCC would make a positive difference in student achievement, she responded, “What we spend the bulk of our Trust LAND money on is an after school Homework Club.” A teacher member also spoke of the process of deciding to devote a large portion of the available funds to an after-school tutoring program called the “Homework Club”. In response to the same question a fourth parent said, “We devote a lot of our SCC funds to what we call the Homework Club and that’s an after-school club monitored by a couple of teachers.”

As an instance that built confidence, a teacher member described how the Homework Club got started.

Teacher: There was a couple of teachers that—we had a Homework Club started, and it was pretty much through volunteer. A little bit of money behind it from the district, but it just wasn’t working it—how we wanted it to work, and some of the teachers came to a couple of our meetings and asked if this would be something that the council would want to take on or could take on with some of the Trust LAND’s money. That went through, and it has been a great success. So I feel like that was a positive.

Jackie: How long has the School Community Council been funded through the Trust LANDs?

Teacher: Probably just a year, I think.

Jackie: Is this the second or the first year that it has been funded by the Trust LAND?

Teacher: The second. I can’t remember if the school is fully funding it or just contributing. I can’t remember.

Jackie: ...I appreciate knowing that it was something that was started and sounds like it was started, but was kind of floundering before it got the support of the School Community Council.

Teacher: Yes. Well, and then I think we were able to entice teachers more—you

know, good teachers to stay after school.

Jackie: Before was it kind of voluntary?

Teacher: Pretty Much.

Jackie: They were donating their time?

Teacher: They were donating their time. It was, you know, something else would come up, and then they wouldn't have Homework Club for that night. Just different things like that. It was supported with a bus from the school district. A late bus and that was about it, so I think teachers were pretty much just really stretched.

At one SCC meeting, the assistant principal, not an SCC member, proposed that the SCC purchase a reading software program. The software would be utilized primarily in the Homework Club but would also be used in language arts classrooms to help struggling readers. At one point during the presentation, one member was convinced that it would be helpful and said, "Do we have the money?" The presentation was important, but the confidence came from being able to take a proposal and provide the funding necessary for it to become a reality. In an interview, a parent member referred to the assistant principal's presentation and said confidence was gained as "we viewed a demo and could see exactly what they would be doing with these tools."

In addition to responding to questions about what experiences have built confidence, SCC members were also asked what they thought would increase their confidence further. The suggestions included funding issues. One member stated, "I would like to see us use our LAND Trust money in a way that hits a broader cross section of the kids." Another member discussed how programs could be developed beyond the core academic subjects that would still have a meaningful and important impact on

student achievement if more funding were available.

Investing time and energy. A second contributing factor to building confidence is investing time and energy in the process. One parent SCC member talked about the process of developing the school improvement plan.

That's one of the more tedious parts about the Community Council. It's really slow work, and we do this continually. We always have the school improvement plan in front of us, and we all turn in our copies at the end, and we get back a different copy each meeting time, and they're chuck full of notes, and sometimes we only do so much as we only make one word. You know like, "Oh, the wording of that would just be a little different." But sometimes too, [the principal] will say or maybe the vice principal, [vice principals name] will come in and they'll say, "This is really an issue." And we'll say, "Okay, that is something we could implement in goal number three." Or, "That would fall under this." At first, I was feeling like—very tedious, slow work. Now, I can see it is a really great base of guidelines for all of us to work around. When a parent comes in with a request or a complaint or something we can go, "Oh, we have that in our works. That's one of our goals."

As this parent explained, the actual work the SCC conducts might often seem tedious and time consuming, but at the same time the process actually builds confidence that the work is meaningful. There is the observed evidence that these SCC members work extremely hard discussing goals, reviewing survey results, and listening to proposals to inform their decisions. For example, the SCC spent 45 minutes of an observed meeting reviewing the results of a survey of students, parents, and faculty. During this time, the members were actively engaged in the discussion of survey results. A teacher SCC member cited another discussion that built confidence.

We examined test scores and spent a lot of time talking about the achievement gap between our ELL students, low-income and the rest of the student population. At some point, we said, "Okay, we are doing almost everything we can to help these students and close the gap a little bit. What else are we doing to reach all students?" And that was very encouraging to me that we could have that shift in the conversation where it just wasn't doom and gloom while looking at these

numbers but also saying, “Hey, things are actually going well in all these other brackets.”

The same teacher member cited an open and honest dialogue that took place in an SCC meeting as building his confidence in the process. The teacher wanted to know what evidence existed that the decisions being made by the SCC had any impact on improving student performance.

“Do all of these programs that we are investing so much time and money in really effect student achievement directly or is it just something that is a stamp on our letterhead and makes us feel better about ourselves?” It was at that point that [the principal] started to bring up research and showed us that all these programs and things that we are doing do actually tie to student achievement. At that point there was a little more buy in from me. At that point I was ready to think, “Let’s support this”. Because in the past, I just felt like, “This is a waste of time and money.”

Through open and honest dialogue, confidence in the process was built. Another parent member looked at this type of dialogue and concluded, “The principal has a very good command of how the students are achieving. His knowledge has instilled great confidence in the process.” The SCC members gained a great appreciation and respect for the principal’s knowledge as they spent time in the long meetings.

Other evidence that the investment of time and energy in the process builds confidence comes from the suggestions the members made for building confidence.

Several members cited the need for training. A teacher member said:

I think it would have been nice to have maybe an initial meeting that was kind of a training session and said, “This is the purpose. This is what we are doing. This is what we have done in the past. This is possibly your role on the council.” I think that would have kick-started everybody and everyone would have been a little bit more confident to share ideas.

A parent member explained:

If I had come in here a little bit more knowledgeable about the community council and the school LAND Trust funds, maybe I would have started off feeling a little bit more empowered with ideas and where to go and what we are doing instead of spending this year learning what it is we do.

Several times members would say that it took half of their first year to figure out the SCCs purpose and procedures. They not only need the video presentation provided by the state (Utah State Office of Education, 2007b), but they also would like to be oriented on the local purpose, what has been done in the past, and future hopes and expectations. One teacher member added that not only is training needed, but members coming to the meetings prepared would also build confidence. It was suggested that having an agenda several days ahead, so members could be prepared would really boost confidence that they were as productive as possible. "I want an agenda and hard facts and information. I just want to be prepared to come to the meeting with ideas and opinions and information."

Seeing program impact. A third category that builds SCC member confidence comes from seeing the impact of the SCC decisions. In the third category, SCC members commented on how seeing decisions impact students had built confidence, and several members suggested that seeing more evidence of how SCC decisions were impacting students would build more confidence.

The principal talked about how the confidence has come in making decisions that show great promise for impacting student learning. One of the programs included in the school improvement plan is the IB MYP. The principal said:

The SCC saw the value of the IB MYP...and that's an approach and philosophy that over time is going to make a lot of difference for a lot of kids.... They are all going to be taught once we get these things truly engrained in mindset and

practices. They will all be taught with that philosophy and framework, and I think that's going to be a really good thing.

The members expressed a strong desire to know if the plans they are implementing are having an impact. "We can't track individual students but are hoping to start tracking groups of students over the next few years. I think that would help a lot to see if what we are doing has any effect." Several talked about the need to track a group of low achieving students over time and see if the programs being implemented at M1 are having an impact on student achievement.

One parent member indicated that the evidence of impact needed to go beyond the numbers on a report. She first indicated that she wanted to know how particular programs were helping students. She also expressed a need to see the impact in a more personal way by actually seeing programs and tools implemented in the classroom or talking with teachers and students and hearing how their teaching and learning were personally affected. She said, "It's all numbers and paper, and it just seems a little hands off. I feel more productive if I'm more involved."

There were various incidents cited as building confidence, but spending money to implement programs, investing time and energy in the process, and learning the impact of the programs are the general themes that brought the specific instances together.

Working as a Professional Learning Community

The second strategy employed in effective site-based management relates to how the SCC works together to effect positive change for students. The common language used in the schools studied is professional learning community. Dufour (2004) explained

that the term professional learning community is used to describe groups of individuals with a common interest in education. Professional learning communities can consist of a school committee, teacher teams, departmental teams, a school district, state office of education, or professional organization. According to Dufour, the core principles of professional learning communities are (a) holding student learning as the top priority, (b) fostering a collaborative culture, and (c) using results to judge effectiveness. All three of these principles were evident in the M1 data. One theme is the focus on student learning, and another is the way the SCC and faculty work together to create the school improvement plan. Using results to judge effectiveness will be discussed later as it relates to the use of data.

Focus on student learning. Student achievement is a primary focus of the SCC (Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1A-108). The faculty and SCC at M1 are committed to helping students falling short on CRTs. The principal indicated that the commitment of the faculty and SCC to raise student achievement is significant. The principal, speaking of community member attitudes towards less proficient students, said:

They're not necessarily as egalitarian as the faculty will be, so when we had a group of parents say, "Yes, this [raising achievement levels for lower achieving students] is going to be one of our priorities, and we're going to set that as a goal" and then that goal has stayed in place for five years.... We're now playing around making the goal even more specific and providing feedback on certain sets of kids that we have identified. I think that's been pretty powerful.

Although these goals are focused on the students with low achievement, the principal indicated that many of the strategies chosen for implementation are selected because they will not only benefit the low achieving students but will raise the learning level of all students. In the principal's words:

When I look at all the strategies that we've adopted, though we have a goal of identifying and supporting struggling students, kids that are ones and twos [proficiency levels on state core CRTs]. When I also look at the strategies that are underneath that, whether it be six traits or differentiated instruction or the MYP, those are rising tide type of approaches that are meant to be good and helpful for all the students. Whether you are low ability or the middle of the pack or a high achieving kid, we have strategies that are at the level that are going to be helpful for all of the students.

The focus on learning was evident in several instances related to the strategy outlined in the school improvement plan to use technology to raise student achievement. On several occasions, a number of SCC members discussed the possibility of investing in a high computer access program that would provide one computer for every two students. The program was going to be implemented at the fifth grade throughout the school district the next year, and the district was looking at possibly implementing the program in the middle school the following year. In one observed meeting the following dialogue took place, which emphasizes the concern that learning be the focus.

Principal: The backside to all this hardware is a 190 hours of professional development. And that's just not on computers and scanners. That's teaching and learning strategies.... They'll get going once every two weeks four hours after school. That carries over for two school years, so it is a huge professional development commitment for the teachers. We don't want to roll these in and have them turn into big huge expensive paperweights.

Parent 1: So you are talking about here possibly a year from this fall.

Principal: Yes.

Parent 2: What do the teachers think about doing another 180 hours of instructional learning?

Principal: This is tough. That is part of why....

Teacher 1: I would get paid for it.

Principal: There is a stipend, and dinner, and goodies. A tablet [a laptop

computer].

Parent 2: What we heard at the first part of the year was we have these great ideas but the poor teachers are bombarded with implementing all of these things. There is just only so many hours in the day, and they have things to do with their lives.

Principal: It's another one of those that you hope to see as we start to progress and whatever twenty-first century school is that instead of it turning into one more thing, we start to find ways that we are doing things differently and they start to see some outcomes that are different and better outcomes, so that they feel better about it.

The members expressed a genuine interest in the program because of the way it focuses on using the computer as a learning tool. SCC members have been involved as they have made site visits to other schools and investigated Internet resources about the program. There were no decisions made relative to the program at the meeting cited in the dialogue above. The dialogue demonstrates the process the SCC engages in to maintain a focus on learning as they inform their decisions. The questioning of how the program would be implemented to have the greatest impact on student learning was an important consideration before the investment is made in the program.

Foster collaborative culture. The second significant theme relates to the way the SCC members work together to develop plans and set goals. M1 has created one plan to satisfy all the legal demands. The M1 school improvement plan is used as a driving document for the decisions made by the SCC. To introduce the discussion about the high computer access program, the principal commented, "We have a strategy in there [the school improvement plan] about instructional technology." At another point the SCC was introduced to the concept of digital portfolios and as the discussion began, the principal referred back to the MYP to show how it would enhance the program, "Let's go back to

the octagon.” An issue with the advisory program was introduced in a meeting by saying, “When we read goal two, there is left over evidence that the SCC put advisory into the school improvement plan, but there is a lot of upheaval with the teachers right now with the advisory program.” During a discussion related to advisory, the implications of eliminating advisory were considered as they relate to the school improvement plan. “If that [advisory] is pulled out of part of the program, there are pieces of the MYP that are built on top of that. There are pieces of this kind of school attitude pulled on top of that.” Each time a new proposal was introduced in an observed meeting, the discussion led back to the goals and how the particular proposal would serve to accomplish the plan.

Making proposals and reviewing the plan is not an annual event but occurs each time the SCC meets. The school improvement plan continually evolves until it is approved annually. This type of continual discussion was carried out in meetings with relation to specific goals as well as procedures for elections as discussed in chapter IV.

Although the M1 SCC members are heavily involved and are continually making recommendations and discussing goals and making adjustments to plans, there is still a desire to learn more and function more effectively as a professional learning community.

A parent member emphasized the importance of early training.

One thing they could do to make [developing the school improvement plan] a more functional process would be to educate those people [new SCC members] as early as you can and as quickly as you can as to what the school plan is about and indeed what the SCC is about.... It took me a while to figure out what it was.

The discussions related to the school plan are evidence of the commitment to professional learning community characteristics. There were several instances when SCC members participated beyond meeting attendance. Members attended conferences, made

site visits to other schools, participated in the MYP review, and reviewed legislative changes to the requirements. The members are actively engaged in seeking ways to improve the school program for all students. Through this entire process there is an immense respect for the professional educators, but the parents' input is still considered very valuable. One parent described the relationship.

You do have these two groups with a lot of mutual respect, and the school is basically the retailer, and we're basically the customers, and we're telling them what we think will work. They are genuinely looking for new insights, new approaches to the problems that have been there in education for quite a while, and they are very responsive when we come up with a respectable idea.

Principal Support

At M1, the principal is committed to supporting the SCC and principles of shared decision-making. The M1 SCC bylaws state, "[M1] is committed to shared decision-making." The bylaws also outline that while the final decision rests with the principal, it is always in consultation with faculty. In this context of shared decision-making at M1 a parent member commented, "I don't think that the principal ever makes a dictated decision. He always gets input and then makes his decisions based upon the input. I really, really appreciate that and admire it." The principal is highly respected and there was no evidence of his leadership being questioned. One teacher member commented on the way leadership is shared in the school, "I believe it is a 'shared decision making' model. However, as one who studied leadership, the ultimate decision, whether pre-sharing or post-sharing, lies in the hands of the principal." With this understanding, parents and both new and veteran teachers are involved in important decision-making opportunities through different processes of the SCC and other faculty responsibilities.

Invests time. One of the most significant indicators of the principal's support of the SCC process is the way he invests time in the process. There were many references made, as well as evidence at the observed meetings, that the process takes time. One parent member commented, "Our meetings are three hours, which I believe should be the minimum amount of time." Information is freely shared with the SCC, and time is dedicated to discussion. A teacher member described an instance that resulted from a willingness to invest time.

Earlier in the year we talked about the SCC bylaws, we had four elementary schools in the district and do we want a representative from each of those four elementary school districts or neighborhoods. Or do we just want parent representation from wherever. Rather than stifling the conversation or saying, this is what we decided last year and this is what we are going to do, [the principal] allowed the conversation to happen, and, I think, created an environment where people felt free to disagree. Which is just as important as agreeing. If you are comfortable to disagree then that opens up something new.

Shares leadership and knowledge. In addition to investing time in the SCC process, the M1 principal also shares leadership and knowledge. The shared leadership is outlined in the bylaws. A teacher SCC member appreciated that "the environment at the school is such that new people are given a chance, but at the same time, the more established experienced educators, they also have their roles as well." Not only does the principal share leadership, he also shares his personal knowledge. One parent commented:

[The principal] is very knowledgeable and always helps guide us and answers any questions we may have. He really does seem to have a great grasp of all of it and has been able to answer all of our questions.

Another parent member praised the principal's knowledge as she spoke of the principal's role on the SCC.

I think he is crucial to the whole SCC. I always walk away in awe of how much that man knows... I really don't think we could have our meeting without him because he knows everything. He is just a walking bank of knowledge.

Use of Data

Another important strategy of effective site-based management and a professional learning community is that student data are used to focus efforts on student achievement. Data of some type are used in every SCC meeting at M1. SCCs are required to use UPASS data, which the M1 SCC uses as described in chapter four, but it also uses coursework data and data from surveys of students, parents, and faculty. Proposed programs were also heavily investigated and research data were presented prior to decisions as demonstrated by the assistant principal's presentation on the reading program. The SCC members looked to the principal as a major provider of the different forms of data. As one parent SCC member explained:

[The principal] is always flooding us with test results and survey responses and stuff like that. ... We always have more than adequate information... There are charts all over the walls, test scores and all sorts of data we use to influence our goal making strategies.

Communication

M1 has several mechanisms for collecting and communicating information. One important mechanism is to ensure that there is an SCC member who is connected with the school Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). Another mechanism is the process for how the whole faculty provides input to the development of the school improvement plans. As the principal described:

[The teachers] have a biannual review of the school improvement plan, and

they'll sit by either department or academic team, and we...spread out those who are on the council among the different groups or teams. They will annotate the copies of the current school improvement plan, and then we use those annotated copies in our school community council meetings.

Teachers and assistant principals provide periodic reports to the council. For example, one parent said, "We do get a report every year on the Homework Club." A newer parent member of the SCC said, "We had the reports that this year they [the Homework Club] are really getting a good record number of students attending." The principal explained:

Something that has worked with keeping them [the SCC] informed is, like having [assistant principal's name], the assistant principal come in and report. Or the Homework Club teachers come in and say, "Here are the problems we are facing or this is the success we are having." So having people who are implementing come in to the meetings and that's a tool that is useful with helping to build that consensus on the council.

The communication within the SCC at M1 is strong, but there were several areas for improvement cited by SCC members. There was a desire for agendas to be set and posted well in advance as well as minutes kept more consistently. Beyond the business type communication, however, there was a great desire for more information on the impact of the programs and decisions determined by the SCC. A system was established as a parent explained:

I wish I had a copy of the plan in front of me because for every goal there are always people who are just to follow up with that goal. Who would be in charge of maybe that particular item, and then there is an action step. To that action step we can see that happened and this happened as a consequence, so we can gage if that goal worked at all. I can't even think of one single goal right now, but there is a good plan, and we do see results to our goal or consequences to them. And we're able to tell whether or not they are working. Whether or not we need more people over this particular one. If they are influencing the kids. If they need to be amended. If some different kind of action step would help. So we are constantly discussing this kind of stuff. And I feel like it's a good way to tell. And [the

principal] keeps on top of all of that, every single one of them. And follows with all these different subcommittees on them.

Although an organized system of reporting results of school programs had been established, the same parent went on to say:

It would be nice if those subcommittees, the people in charge of those action steps, if they reported back to us, so in each meeting we had something to look at other than what [the principal] has gathered and what he provides us.”

Another parent member was asked about how he learned of the impact of the plans and he replied:

Well, that’s an interesting thought. We spell out the plan. We see it being implemented—it’s right there and in the school. So that’s not a problem. But as you’ve raised the data, I don’t think we’ve been given a whole lot of data on the results of the plan. And I’m not too sure why that is.

Several suggestions were made for improving the communication of the work of the SCC to the public. One parent member suggested, “I would like to see more information on SCC on back-to-school nights.” A teacher SCC member said concerning informing the public:

I think it could be online.... I want more parents to be aware of the kind of things that we are doing for the students.... I think we need more information out there. If that means more meetings or sending home a flyer in Spanish to get more of that population to come to those meetings or getting stuff on the Internet.... At least having the information out there, so they [parents] know how to support their kids.

The prevalent perception related to communication with the larger school community was expressed in the following comments. One parent member said, “I don’t think very many people know we [the SCC] exist.” Another parent member commented, “To be honest with you, I don’t think the average parent at any school knows about SCC.” A teacher SCC member said, “There is probably a lot of teachers that may not be

aware of it [the SCC] or community members.”

With regard to communication, one parent expressed a desire for not only providing the community with more information, but also obtaining feedback from the community.

I would be interested in, and we would appreciate some parent feedback and student feedback. Things like, it really means a lot to me that you have this item in a goal, or this is an action step, or this would be really important to us, so maybe a little more feedback and response from the community. There is a desire for feedback from parents and students on how they feel about the expenditure of funds as well as the general school program.

Adequate Resources

At M1 there was wide variability in opinion as to whether the resources were adequate. There were some who felt the resources were adequate, but others felt they were grossly inadequate. The resources were greatly appreciated and allowed the SCC to design and implement plans that would have an impact on student achievement. The principal expressed his perception:

Well, in [M1 school district], the challenge to me has never been whether there is enough money or staffing. It's been whether we have been doing a good job with what we have. Trust LAND for us is like icing on the cake.... An example of where the Trust LAND budget [helped was] the Rubicon Atlas for curriculum mapping. That was a nice little pot of money that we could say, "Yes, \$3,000 annually, we can roll that out of Trust LANDS." ... I didn't have to try and dedicate some of the regular software budget or fundraise or anything like that.

The common perception was that resources were in fact adequate to implement the plans as designed; however, the available resources were known during the design process, so the resources available served to limit the extent of the plans. When asked whether the funds were adequate to implement the developed plan, one parent SCC

member said:

Yes, and that is by design. We spend every dime of it [School LAND Trust funds], and if they gave us more we would spend every dime of that.... We make sure that the strategies that support our goals are within the limits of the money that we are given. And I don't want to say it's enough or more than enough. We will always take more, but we are very careful to budget.... We make sure we have the resources available to support our plan.

The availability of the funds enabled the SCC to make and implement plans, it also served as a limitation to how extensive and elaborate those plans could be. Another parent SCC member commented, "We would like to do a lot of stuff that we know there isn't enough money for."

Collective Responsibility for Student Achievement

M1 bylaws outline, "The School Council is responsible for the development of a long-range/strategic school improvement plan which encompasses three years and is focused primarily on setting, monitoring, and assessing goals to improve student achievement." The IB MYP program requires the staff to unitedly take responsibility for student achievement. As the principal said in the March 2008 meeting, "The IB philosophy is going to hit every kid in this school whether or not he gets the certificate, and he's going to get a much better education for it." An *Indicators of School Quality* survey of students, faculty and staff, and parents produced by the Center for the School of the Future at Utah State University was conducted at the beginning of the 2007-2008 school year; the survey results show that a "focus on academic achievement" is a top priority among 73% of parents and is believed to be something M1 does best by 61% of faculty.

A few specific teacher practices were identified that are particularly appreciated by SCC members. A teacher member reported, “Almost the whole staff is involved in either a special reading class or a study skills class.” The principal shared:

We have PE teachers that regularly assign writing, and they will utilize elements out of the six traits to assess the students writing. So right there, I would think, not that typical that you would find your PE department trying to get underneath and support student writing with an understood set of rubrics for assessing that writing.

In addition to the individual departments supporting other curricular areas, M1 has academic teams that work together in cross-curricular areas to support one another’s curriculum with common students. The way the faculty works together is both evident and appreciated by the SCC members. As one parent member said, “I am really impressed with [M1] and the majority of the staff there.... The teachers all work together as a team, and then they work as a grade, and then as a school.”

The faculty concerns appeared to cast a shadow on the commitment of the faculty to serving all students. M1 has a daily student advisory program where students meet with a teacher in a little smaller class size during the last half hour of the day. Advisory programs are highly variable from school to school, but middle level advisory programs are considered an important strategy to help adolescent students obtain individual direction in personal, social, and academic development (National Association of Secondary School Principals [NASSP], 2006). The assistant principal and principal reported at one SCC meeting:

Assistant principal: Advisory came up in our building leadership team [BLT] as being, there were some concerns with advisories with the time of day, the way it was being utilized, the consistency of advisory. So since it came up in BLT and seemed to linger at a couple of our meetings, we decided to take it to the whole

staff. We started a process with them the Friday before break. We met as a staff, and we gave everybody the chance to let us know what is working with advisory, what's not working, and then went into what do you need from advisory, what are your needs here? And went through that whole list. The next step is, another afternoon staff meeting and they are going to sit down and have it broken down into sixth grade team meeting, seventh grade team meeting. They are going to come up with a couple of options or possible solutions that meets people's needs for advisory. What they would like it to look like. Then we'll meet as a whole staff and kind of go through those and discuss them. And see if we can come up with some sort of consensus on what will work best for everybody. We had a little wrench thrown into it and that's kind of what we're working on now. We had kind of an impromptu poll taken about how people felt about advisory.

Principal: A faculty poll

Assistant Principal: A faculty poll. And so it kind of put a little kink in the process. I guess, so that's where we're at with advisory.

Principal: The last item on the poll—I think we had 27 respondents and there are 42-44 teachers. 27 respondents, and the last item was, “Would you prefer to have advisory or not to have advisory.” And 2 to 1 on this—not a vote—said “We don't want to have advisory.” So okay, what do we do with that now? And as far as the school improvement plan goes that has been a feature of some of those goals to climate—pieces that have been in the schools improvement plan.

One thing that SCC members expressed both appreciation and desire for was that teachers show concern for each student individually. Individual student advocacy is directly related to advisory (NASSP, 2006). A parent SCC member expressed appreciation and a desire for more teachers “just taking a little bit more time.”

When a teacher SCC member was asked what practice she would request all teachers adopt to benefit student achievement, she specifically mentioned advisory.

There is a group of teachers who use their advisory period every day.... They print up grades and then allow the students to use them as a resource to complete all their homework, all kinds, so during that period, the teachers are available as a team to help the students with extra time.... That would be nice if teachers thought that was real valuable as a faculty.

Although the advisory program was a significant SCC and faculty discussion item

in the January meeting, and was mentioned during several interviews, the resolution to the issue did not come up in the original M1 data. I followed-up with the principal during the process of verification and asked what had come of the advisory issue. He responded, “The school was questioning the length and the placement of the advisory period. It was moved from the end of the day to the beginning of the day, and shortened from 25 minutes, Monday through Thursday, to 15 minutes, Monday through Thursday.”

M2

M2 processes are very difficult to separate cleanly into the discreet strategies and processes. The presentation of findings in this section will follow a more fluid structure that demonstrates the interconnectedness of these strategies.

SCC Member Confidence

There are two broad yet interconnected sources of confidence expressed by members of the M2 SCC. The first is the principal’s leadership, and the second is the SCC members’ involvement in the entire process. SCC Members expressed great appreciation for the principal of M2 and for the privilege of making decisions based on data, seeing the programs implemented, witnessing the results, and being free to question the practices. The entire SCC process at M2 demonstrates how the principal’s support is closely tied to the use of data and working together in a professional learning community.

Principal support. A parent SCC member spoke of the principal, “We usually, I think, as a whole of the SCC have great confidence in his [the principal’s] ideas because he lets us know so much about what is going on in the school that we are all on the same

page.” Another parent member said, “I have to say, [the principal] is really good and what he brings to us and the freedom he lets us go with what we want to do or what we feel is best.” The counselor SCC member also spoke of the confidence that comes from the principal by comparing his experience with a previous SCC experience at a different school.

Well, let me do a comparison here. At [another middle school] they [school administrators] would present different options and different things like that, but it was more of a head nodding session of this is what the principal wanted to do. This is what they were interested in doing, and basically, this is what we are doing, and you’re here to give approval on it. There was no dissension, basically, allowed. Any time you dissented, it was not necessarily a favorable type of situation. Hence, one of the reasons why I came to [M2]. With [the M2 principal], one of the things that I have a lot of confidence in is that he is willing to put out there, “This is what I think, but you know what, you guys can vote me down on this.” And a few times the community council has said, “You know what, can we look at a different avenue? Can we look at different money that we can spend this money on for the trust LANDs money? Can we look at doing a different thing here?” Or they question, “Is this an effective program?”

As members discussed how the principal supported the SCC, they elaborated and identified several principal practices that resulted in confidence that the work they do as a SCC does make a positive difference to student achievement. Three principal practices that increased SCC member confidence are (a) the principal shared data, (b) the principal supported the SCC even when he did not initially agree, and (c) the principal respected the SCC members as leaders.

In a review of the minutes for the SCC meetings over the past 4 years, one can see that data were presented in nearly every meeting. Several tables are illustrated in most SCC meeting minutes. The data presented included U-PASS data, but the principal also shared other sources of data as well. Data shared by the principal include: (a) the number

of I grades issued as a result of students not passing their Walkaways, (b) practice CRT results and quarter grades, and (c) a historical perspective as current years are compared to previous years. Figures 5-7 are samples of data shared in SCC meetings taken from the SCC meeting minutes.

█ gave a report on 2006-07 CRT end of level testing. █ did much better than we have done in years past. In 2005-06, our pass rate was 89% with an average GPA of 2.9. In 2006-07, our pass rate increased to 93% with an average GPA of 3.2. The data is as follows:

	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
Math 7	32%	36%	48%
Pre Algebra	64%	69%	82%
Algebra	75%	65%	78%
Geometry	75%	77%	83%

	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
English 7	81%	80%	88%
English 8	80%	75%	85%
English 9	82%	83%	86%

	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
Science 7	44%	64%	79%
Science 8	55%	62%	68%
Earth Systems	47%	49%	72%
Biology	69%	71%	84%

Figure 5. CRT data from minutes of M2 SCC meeting August 2007.

██████████ also gave the data on the Practice CRT. This practice test is also administered in the fall. The data is as follows: We will give additional practice CRT tests in December and in February. Students will take the actual test at the end of April.

2006-07		2007-08	
English 7	49%	English 7	54%
English 8	55%	English 8	53%
English 9	48%	English 9	60%
Science 7	45%	Science 7	47%
Science 8	43%	Science 8	46%
Earth Systems	42%	Earth Systems	47%
Biology	39%	Biology	50%
Math 7	29%	Math 7	25%
Pre-Algebra	52%	Pre-Algebra	41%
Algebra	39%	Algebra	33%
Geometry	33%	Geometry	39%

Figure 6. Practice CRT data from minutes of M2 SCC meeting October 2007.

██████████ reported comparisons between first term grades in the 2006-07 and 200708 school year. Walkaway's are working.

2006-07	2007-08
79% end of term pass rate	92% end of term pass rate
898/1410 students had 1 or more I's	540/1663 students had 1 or more I's
End of May, 95% pass rate	3.7 Average GPA

Figure 7. Report of number of I grades from minutes of M2 SCC meeting November 2007.

The counselor SCC member described how the principal uses data.

Oh, we are huge on data in this school. I run weekly reports as far as the I [incomplete grades] list, and [the principal] will go back and he has shown this where he has several years of how our students have done, and he will present that very regularly to the community council. Talking about specifically these Walkaways, “This is what we did before we had Walkaways; this is what we did with Walkaways; this is what we have done this year with the addition of the advisory period and the late busses on Tuesday” and things like that. We are a huge data driven school. In fact, I never realized how useful the data can be until I was here, and I saw how effectively [the principal] used it because he will. He’ll go into the community council and he’ll say, “This is what we did.” I remember that first year we were open, he went to the community council and said, “Here’s where we are with our testing scores. We stunk. We are at the bottom of the district.” We were tied with the last place Junior high of the district. “Here’s where our numbers are.” And he didn’t pull any punches, and he said, “We need to do something about this. We need to change, and we need to make serious changes.” And that’s when we started looking at putting the Walkaway system in, that’s when we started looking at some of those changes that we’ve done. He presented it straight up and said, “Here’s where our data is.” And he didn’t sugar coat it at all.

Knowing the principal is giving the complete data pictures, the SCC members gain confidence in the principal. As a parent member put it:

We know that he isn’t going to lie to us how well they are doing. He puts the data up there, and this is what it is. This is what happened if a score went down. He’ll go to the teacher, “What happened here?” and get an explanation and reports it to us.

Several members pointed out that the principal never hides information. Whether the data show improvement or not, he shares the information. The use of data in the SCC leads to decisions concerning programs. One teacher member described an instance that demonstrates the process.

I would say after we saw that the Read 180 program had actually improved our student scores. The council then decided we needed to bring in the science labs, So that [the improved reading scores] was able to help influence that [the decision to purchase mobile computer labs for science]. So there was improvement in the English department, which is one of the major cores, so then we could work on

another core.

As a result of the data, The SCC determined to continue the Read 180 program but not expand it. A parent member confirmed the process.

I think that we know so much that is going on in the school that when it comes time to spend money on the Trust LANDs, we can say, “In all of this data you have given us, we still see that science is low and science isn’t coming up as fast as the other ones, so let’s get a mobile lab for the science classes.”

Another parent member explained, “As you see the improvements, you think, okay it’s working, so it leads you to take the next step.”

The way data shapes decisions is demonstrated in the implementation of the Walkaway program at M2, which will be described in detail in Chapter VI. At the beginning of the 2006-2007 school year, Walkaways were a brand new idea to the school, and the members of the SCC were unsure about the program. They had decided to implement it based on the philosophy that grades should reflect achievement of core content, but a great deal of uncertainty remained. As the Walkaway program was implemented, the principal shared how teachers were responding to the creation of Walkaway assessments. Initially it was not required of all teachers, but nearly 80% chose to participate. The principal shared data on how Walkaways were impacting students. When Walkaways were first implemented, over half the student body had I grades at one point. The data informed the decision to send a letter of notification to parents to clarify the program and clear up misunderstandings (Appendix H). The Walkaway data led to other decisions such as the addition of the advisory program to provide students the opportunity to work with teachers to remediate the Walkaways not yet achieved and to provide enrichment activities for students who had achieved their Walkaways. In addition

to the advisory program, the SCC funded a late bus one day a week so students could stay longer to work with teachers if needed. As the Walkaway program was implemented, various forms of data were continually shared and more decisions were made such as the decision to implement the advisory or late bus program.

The discussion in one meeting was focused on the advisory program and possible changes that need to be made to the current practice. An SCC parent member expressed her confidence by saying to the principal.

Parent: I really like that you are open to change and you are very open to when something is not working you are really open to fix it. You're not saying this is how I want to do it and I don't care what you say.

Principal: The one thing we are though. We are going to ride this broken train clear to the end of the track this year. We're not going to mess with any schedules. It's broke. We know it's broke. We are going to band-aid it, but we've got them trained at least right now.

Parent: That's smart.

Principal: Good, bad, or indifferent, we are going to ride the train this year.

Parent: You couldn't change it right now.

Principal: We could, but it wouldn't be wise.

The principal also builds confidence in the SCC members by supporting their decisions. The minutes demonstrate that the principal makes most of the recommendations for programs and purchases, but the principal makes it clear that the SCC has the liberty to make the final decision. The examples cited in Chapter IV with regard to the reading program and the late bus program are good examples of how the principal supports the SCC members in the decisions made. Providing this kind of support to a program initiated by the SCC increased the members' confidence that the

decisions they make can influence student achievement.

The third way the principal builds confidence at M2 is by respecting the SCC members as leaders. The minutes from the February 2007 SCC meeting read:

As we are beginning to look forward to the 2007-08 school year, [the principal] has asked for the council to start thinking of possibilities for the Trust LANDs money and how it should be spent. He has requested for the council to come with ideas to be presented at the next meeting in March.

The counselor SCC member explained:

Now with that money, [the principal] usually has some ideas, "This is what I would like to use it towards." And he's pretty specific with that, you know, "This is what I would like to use it for." But then parents or teachers or whoever can question that, "Well would it be better..."

A parent member said, "I have to say, [the principal] is really good and what he brings to us and the freedom. He lets us go with what we want to do or what we feel is best."

Parent members were able to express concerns and know that the principal takes their concerns very seriously. One parent SCC member noticed a difference from when she was on the SCC the first year the school opened.

I think [the principal] can be a little defensive sometimes, but he has gotten better, definitely, from the first year. He would bring up something and immediately leap to defend what they were doing, and I think he [the principal] has learned, and we've learned that we are all out there for the same reason. We are just trying to make sure that our kids are learning... I think he's really come a long way in that area and not as leaping to explain and to defend what they are doing... I think he's doing really well at supporting us.

The principal explained:

You have to have shared leadership. You are going to have the best results when you really do have shared leadership. On the council, I know and in some of the other schools...the principal set the agenda, the chair showed up and said, "That looks good," and they moved forward. Even though mine might be just phone call talk and message. It's important that that chair knows they have a voice. And if they don't like what is on the agenda as the parent chair, and I always want my

chair to be a parent, I don't want it to be the school person. And I know you can have it either or. But I believe that it is important that that chair is a parent. So when the agendas are set there is a parent perspective and a school perspective being looked at as we are setting the agenda. He listens to parent SCC member concerns understanding that they are the voice of the people they represent. The SCC members in turn have more confidence in the principal and the SCC process because of the mutual respect with the principal.

The principal plays an important role in the M2 SCC. He is the primary source of confidence as he is open and honest in providing data to inform decisions. The principal supported the process even when the SCC members led things in a different direction than he proposed, and he respected the SCC members as leaders.

Engaged in school improvement process. The process of school improvement in which the SCC engages is the second main source of confidence. This is closely related to the principal's support as he facilitates the way in which M2 works together as a professional learning community. The M2 process is best demonstrated through an instance described by SCC members in interviews and documented in meeting minutes and observations.

In the 2006-2007 school year, the SCC funded the *Go My Access* software program used to assist teachers in grading student writing at a cost of \$2500. The school LAND trust program designated funds to continue the program for the following year, but the state funded the program through other sources for the 2007-2008 school year at a cost of \$10,672. The state funded the program for only one year.

The February 2008 SCC meeting minutes include proposals for the 2008-2009 School LAND Trust plan including, "\$13,000 to continue the Go My Access software." At the conclusion of the proposals, the minutes continue, "Council members also

questioned the accuracy of the Go My Access program. A follow-up discussion with [names of teachers], two English teachers, concerning the Go My Access program will be reviewed at our next meeting in March.”

At the following meeting in March 2008, the English department chair and an English teacher visited the SCC meeting as representatives of teachers who use the writing program. The teacher representatives had surveyed the teachers who used the writing program and prepared a handout of teacher responses (Appendix I).

The potential for conflict was evident by the postures of parents sitting forward attentively even when quietly listening and the teachers coming prepared with a handout. As the teachers began their presentation, they passed around the survey results and as they did, the principal said, “You look a little nervous there. Breathe deep. [laughter] There will be no beatings here today, so you’ll be fine. Just share what you have.” The teachers began by describing what the program does and its value to the teachers. They explained that the program helps teachers by giving students immediate feedback; it helps students realize they must revise their writing; it gives the teacher more time to work with students one-on-one. Science and social studies teachers also use the program. As the teachers spoke, most parent members sat back a little in their chairs, and some nodded their heads as teachers explained how the program is used. A couple of parents had most of the questions, and the teachers provided most of the explanations with occasional comments from the principal.

One concern expressed by a parent member was how the teachers were involved in the grading process and what were the expectations.

English Teacher 1: What do we do with the scores? They are a starting point, we require that the students to reach a certain level. Once they reach that level, we review it, and if we find it acceptable, then we assign a grade for the essay. We review the scores and give it a grade based on that score, and we also adjust the grade if you don't agree with the score. For example, I'm doing an essay right now and one of my students, her score that was given was very border line with what we consider passing. I took her essay, read it, reviewed it, and I actually disagreed with what it said, so I overrode the score and said that her essay was acceptable.

Parent: Which means you have to read all the essays even if you're still having to read ...

Principal: Once you're saying it's an acceptable essay.

English Teacher 1: Yeah, once I see that they are acceptable, I go through them and make sure that they really are acceptable. So I don't just rely solely on the program. I still use my judgment.

English Teacher 2: But I think one of, third to the bottom bullet under positives kind of I think addresses your concern or your comment. That it just weeds out a lot of the mistakes so that we don't have to deal with those little picky things before they come in, so I think that is helpful.

At another point in the meeting a parent expressed another concern.

Parent 1: Yeah, and another question is, is it realistic to expect, if it's a six-point scale, to get a six?

English Teacher 1: Yeah, I have had students get sixes before.

Parent 1: To expect a six?

English Teacher 1: Not to expect a six.

Parent 2: To require a six? [talking over the top]

English Teacher 1: We don't require a six.

Parent 1: There are some.

English Teacher 1: But there are some who you probably should require a 6 because they are...

Parent 1: You mean there are some teachers?

Principal: They are saying that to show mastery you've got to get a six.

English Teacher 1: I haven't heard that in our department meeting.

Parent 1: Well it's the GT [gifted and talented].

English Teacher 1: Oh well, yeah. GT should be getting a six. They should be getting that high because they are completely capable of getting that high. So when we say mastery is 80% that is just basic just across the board. It's like what we are requiring for the Walkaways that students only have to get up to 80%. But a GT student is above that.

Parent 1: What would say, [another parent] and I were both talking about this. We both have GT seventh grade students and we're both college graduates, and we have a hard time. We went in just ourselves to do it. Because our students couldn't do it. And...

Parent 2: We couldn't get a six.

Parent 1: We couldn't get a six ourselves.

Parent 2: And we're not the only two, just so you know.

Parent 1: Yeah. We talked with the other parents. And so we just felt. We had a problem with it because we thought if we can't do it, how do we expect our students to do it.

English Teacher 1: Did you discuss it with the teacher?

Parent 2: I haven't talked to the teacher.

English Teacher 1: I would suggest that because I don't know—I am assuming it is a she because we only have she's. I don't know what she required, or what she set up or taught them.

The principal mainly stayed out of the discussion, but served somewhat as a referee to keep the discussion focused.

Parent 1: I also I have an older student too in high school who uses the Go My Access too, and I've just had other problems with the Go My Access with him too.

Principal: At the high school?

Parent 1: At the high school too—with just the program.

Principal: With that though, and I'm going to step in on that part. If the issue is here and how it's grading here that's something that I think is a fair discussion. To bring concerns on how it works in another building is an unfair look because they could be not spending the time to set it. So your problems could be that.

At another point in the discussion a parent who had come in late asked the English teachers if they were aware that different students typed in the exact same essay and received different scores.

Parent: Did we address that issue with the eighth graders that each typed in the exact same essay and each got different scores? Some passing and some not.

English Teacher 1: From what I understand through the district. I mean that doesn't happen. My kids. I'm not saying that at that time but generally it doesn't happen. My kids are all, 270 of them, typing in the exact same not the exact same essay, but they're typing to the same prompt and the scoring so far has been accurate on the ones that were scored. So that's not really a concern that I have with the overall program. Because I am not seeing that happen very often. This example that you are giving—from what I understand is it grades also off what the student has done previously.

Parent: Oh, so it knows.

English Teacher 2: It looks at what they've done in the past, so actually, it's almost forcing them to improve their writing as they go along. So it's like "You scored this. Well, you should have learned more writing skills and your score actually should be higher this next time."

Parents [talking at once]: Oh, I hadn't thought of that.

English Teacher 1: I'm pretty sure then that's why that happened.

The English teachers initially presented the data from the survey of teachers. Later in the discussion they presented the results of the Direct Writing Assessment (DWA) for M2 ninth grade students over the past three years. The first year M2 did not have the program. Since M2 implemented the use of the writing software, scores have

gone up one point each year since. When the DWA results were shared, several parent members nodded their heads.

A final concern was raised towards the conclusion of the discussion.

Parent: I just don't think it should be a final grade. I don't think it should carry a lot of weight. But I do think it's a great practice because I've seen great improvement in writing, and I think it can be a great tool practicing. I think it can be a great tool for practicing because like all the things you said. It can really improve their writing. It can really help them revising and everything. I just don't think it should carry a lot of weight on a grade. And when you have kids who are perfectionists or something, and they really try. And you have kids who don't care about it; I think it can really help them make them strive to get up there. I think it's a great program; I just think it could really hurt some kids if that's their grade and it's messing...

English Teacher 1: So let me clarify, when you say final weight you don't think it should be used as a Walkaway?

Parent: Yeah. I don't think so.

English Teacher 1: Okay.

Parent: I think it could be. I think it could be, you know, if there is flaws in the system I think it could really mess up some kids if they have written an essay and...

Principal: Or the ability for, if let's say, the student really felt they passed it and the system didn't say they did.

Parent: Yeah.

Principal: Then they request a reading at that point.

Parent: Yeah.

English Teacher 1: Okay. So. Yeah, that's what I wanted to clarify.

Parent: And it should be known that they—you know because maybe they don't know and maybe parents don't know that they can come in and talk about it. Like I didn't know. I thought it was just a generic program and that once the grade is there, there's no one to talk to. I didn't know you could actually go in and talk to somebody. I thought, you know, the teacher's going to get the score and that was

it.

English teacher 1: Okay.

Parent: And I should know. I communicate with the school all the time, for some reason it didn't click with me that I could actually come in and talk to somebody about it.

English teacher 1: Okay.

Although there were points of increased tension in the conversation, the discussion was mostly congenial and accompanied by frequent laughter. The next month at the April 2008 SCC meeting, the funding of the writing software was approved unanimously. The process of questioning the writing program, hearing the teachers' perspectives, reviewing the data, and then making an informed decision to continue the program was cited by several SCC members interviewed as a positive example of how the SCC and faculty work together as a professional learning community to improve student achievement. A parent member expressed appreciation that, "The teachers were able to give us as community and parents a view of this program, how it works and why we should keep it." Referring to the discussion on the writing software another parent said, "That, I think, was a good instance of us working together to find the best thing that we are going to spend this money on and is it worth it." The counselor member of the SCC described the whole process as building confidence.

I really liked that the community council two times ago, "We have some questions about the Go My Access program. We don't know if it's testing what we think it does. We don't know if it's helping our kids." So to be able to discuss that better, [the principal]...brought in the two teachers. So that they were able to discuss—"This is what we have seen from this program." That's when I have great confidence. If there are questions, [the principal] doesn't necessarily say, "Well, this is the best way. Instead he says, "Well, let's bring in some people who are experts here and see what is the best way here."

Other examples of the shared leadership and working together in a professional learning community include the invitation to attend and actual attendance of parent SCC members at teacher collaboration meetings. The principal has encouraged the parents to attend, and it has been reported in meeting minutes that parents have attended and provided reports of what they have learned. The process of developing and continuing programs while persistently reviewing data is also evident in the Walkaway, advisory, every day algebra, and late bus programs.

There were also isolated instances cited by SCC members that could interfere with the process of a professional learning community. The counselor SCC member said:

In the SCC, one of the biggest problems that we fall into is representing our own children as opposed to representing a group of citizens. I sit in the community council and a lot of times parents will say, "This is what my daughters experience was and this is what I would like for my daughter or my child." I think we need to move away from that. I think we need to realize that when we are sitting in that council, yes we are representing our student but we are also representing an entire area. I'm not representing a counseling department. I'm representing a faculty.

The discussion of the writing software also provided evidence of this tendency as parents gave isolated examples related to their children. In spite of potential weaknesses members indicated that the process of being involved in the SCC served to build their confidence. The teacher SCC member summarized how the respect everyone has for one another facilitates the work of the SCC. "And we all, it's really amazing; we all have a common interest and that common interest alone, which is the students being able to achieve, that common interest has really helped us all work together and get along."

Communication

A strategy that is closely related to the process of working together as a

professional learning community is the mechanisms for communicating information. The primary mechanism in place for the SCC members to receive information is through the school professionals. Other forms of communication used by M1 include the school website and an automated calling system.

As demonstrated in the process of continuing the funding for the writing software, teachers make presentations of programs. One parent SCC member expressed appreciation by saying, "It has been so nice to have the clarification, with a real person standing there and giving immediate feedback as to what the program is doing." Although teacher presentations were appreciated, it became apparent that teacher presentations did not occur with all the programs. One parent member expressed a desire to have a math teacher present. "We could have a teacher come in, the math teacher, and tell us how they are using those [graphing calculators]. What kind of a difference it makes if they have them." Another parent expressed similar sentiment, "I would love to have someone from the math and science department come in and tell us why they need these hugely expensive calculators for their classes."

In addition to the teacher presentations, the principal continually presented information at SCC meetings and also made visits to elementary schools to make presentations on the Walkaway program. SCC members were very satisfied with the communication within the SCC. However, a common concern was expressed that in spite of established communication practices, the larger community was not aware of the activities or even existence of the SCC. During an interview a parent SCC member expressed her concern.

Parent: I have people that know that I am on here because they are in my neighborhood. But I am over this entire city center area. And I don't know how many people know that and know how to reach me. So getting the word out to the public somehow. And then maybe I would have more contribution as I come to the meetings.

Jackie: Do you feel like as a representative of that area, do you feel like you know and understand what their concerns are?

Parent: Yes and no. Yes, for people that I talk to that I discuss issues with, but that is with people that I know well.

The SCC meeting agendas and minutes are posted in the school building and published on the website. Anyone can view them. The SCC has a prominent place on the school's website, which is updated regularly. There is an SCC link on the schools home page, which takes the user to a page that has a picture of the SCC and the published minutes for every SCC meeting the school has had in the past four years. The date and time of the next SCC meeting is announced on the webpage with a notice that the public is welcome. The application for membership is downloadable at the site. Although this information is readily available, several SCC members expressed a concern that the larger community did not know anything about the SCC. One parent member said, "I think very few people realize what an impact they can have on their kids' schools."

Another form of communication that has been tried lately is the automated phone calling system. The calling system was first reported as being used at M2 in a January 2007 SCC meeting. The automated phone messages have been used mainly for general school announcements, but the phone system was used this year to call every home to request potential candidates to fill out applications for the available SCC positions. One parent member said:

One of the things they did that—this will help—they did implement the calling system. They didn't do that before. They do a phone call to every household in the areas where they needed the elections.... They send out a phone message saying, "This is the spots that are open and this is when the elections are, so if you are interested contact the school. I think that is going to be helpful.

Adequate Resources

The resources granted through the School LAND Trust program facilitate the professional learning community that exists at M2. One parent SCC member said, "Is there ever adequate money to do everything you want? There could always be more." A teacher SCC member spoke of how the School LAND Trust funds were not sufficient to cover the cost of the student trackers. "He [the principal] has actually had to cover some of that money with our school budgets." Another parent described how the available funds influence the SCC process.

We have had the ability to look at the important things and weed out the ones that aren't as pressing, and then there have been a couple of times when our trust lands haven't covered everything, but [the principal] has made the decision that it's important enough that he'll take it out of other areas of the budget that he can allocate to that.

Speaking of the adequacy of resources the principal said, "You never feel like you have enough adequate resources, but I'm going to tell you, considering we're a fourth year building as you walk around—we're doing okay. You can always want more." The principal went on to talk about a few different things the School LAND Trust funds had provided such as computer labs and graphing calculators, "which we wouldn't have had otherwise." Although the general reaction to the question was that funds were not adequate, one parent summarized the consensus, "I think we've been able to do everything that we've needed to—even with it being a new school."

M3

The SCC at M3 is just beginning to function, so it is evident that the strategies identified in the literature are not fully developed at M3. Evidence regarding progress and process from M3 for each strategy will be presented individually.

During the evaluation period, the M3 principal accepted a position in another school district for the following year. The SCC participated in the hiring process for the new principal. The principal hired during the process of the evaluation was not a part of the evaluation. Each time *the principal* is mentioned, it is in reference to the principal at the time of the evaluation.

Stakeholder Confidence

There is relatively little experience among members, so when asked to identify what has built the most confidence, and what would build more confidence the responses were very similar among all members. There was one specific activity cited as having built confidence and one desire expressed for building confidence in the future.

The involvement in the hiring process of the new principal was the activity most mentioned as building SCC parent member confidence. The community partner SCC member explained:

At first, they [the school district] were just going to appoint a principal and not allow the parents and the community to go through the interview process. My role as the parent person was—because of the knowledge and the understanding of the process was able to work with the School Community Council chair to request the process be given to [M3] because all the other middle schools had been able to go through that process rather than have a principal appointed. So indirectly that impacts student achievement because if we can't find somebody to follow in [the

principal's] footsteps—because he has brought the school so far. Our achievements will go down because he has brought that school a long ways and the parents want the same type of principal coming in.

The SCC minutes for March 2008 show that the SCC formed a principal selection committee of 10 people including parents and school personnel. They also worked closely with the principal and district personnel to establish important criteria for hiring the new principal. A parent SCC member spoke of the confidence the hiring process built. “As that process [hiring new principal] started, and a committee needed to be formed—that was the moment when the SCC was recognized and was actually functioning and doing something.” Another parent member when asked about an instance that built confidence said:

Our principal is leaving, and we are having a new principal come in and the School Community Council being involved in the selection committee for the new principal is hugely important. I don't know what could have a bigger impact on the school than a new principal, and we're going to be a part of that. That is definitely the answer I would have for that.

When asked what would increase confidence, the most common response at M3 was more parent involvement. A teacher SCC member discussed the challenges to greater parent member involvement in the M3 SCC.

I think this year, and one of the reasons is that we've had a more functioning SCC is because we have a PTA president who is here also as the state board PTA as a liaison to help support parents, and I think it takes a lot of outreach to get parents here involved. I think we actually do have a couple of parents who are now at this time really willing to take on the responsibility and make it functional. I think it's—middle school in general is very difficult because it's just such a short period of time. The parents don't have a lot of vested interest in it. I think as far as the staff it's just been so hard to get it up and functioning that it's just kind of a process that is not being used because the process hasn't really been in place. I think there is certainly a willingness to allow that process to happen and encouragement of parental involvement. I think that we're just in a really stressed environment in our area and it takes a toll on people's personal time to be able to

commit to do that. And I also think that a lot of parents want to participate but they don't really know how, and I don't think a lot of them have the skills or the confidence to be able to take a role like this on and really know what their role would be and how to function in that role.

The principal confirmed the perception when he said:

I understand the law wanting to get parents involved, especially on the shared government and decision-making on the school level because that school community council is where all the stakeholders are present and that is a very vital function. But most of my parents are so engrossed in the day-to-day survival mode that it's difficult for them to get here. Just getting people here and that are willing to serve and help me organize everything.

With those challenges, when asked what he thought would build confidence, the principal said, "I think the numbers of our parents. I need probably about three or four more good parents. That is [the SCC chairman] and my goal and then I think we will be set and I think it's going to happen." The teacher SCC member who explained the challenges went on to say.

I think that if the parents come on board that the school—the school probably isn't 100% on board because there hasn't been, like I said, the environment for them to go through the process, but I think that having opportunities for parents—to know that this opportunity is available and to be able to support and train them and make leadership opportunity available for them would help the SCC.

When a parent SCC member was asked what she would like to see happen to build the confidence that the SCC was really helping students, she replied:

That's a tough one. Just more parent involvement. There are a thousand kids in that building, and right now the most involved parents in that school is maybe three. And that's not nearly enough representation. I would like to see more parents becoming involved and having a voice.

Professional Learning Community

At M3, the faculty has a well-established, professional learning community where

the principal reported, “All of our teachers teach in teams and they have common planning time.” The Common planning time provides time for teachers to work together focusing on student achievement. The SCC has not been involved with that aspect of the professional learning community as one parent member said in response to a question regarding working together as a professional learning community to develop the school plans, “Yeah, we haven’t really done that yet.” The evidence of how the SCC works together and with the school staff demonstrates that the M3 SCC does work together as a professional learning community in some regards, but the SCC collaboration is primarily laying a foundation for future involvement in the school improvement process.

An example of how the SCC worked together with the school was the selection process for the new principal, which was discussed as building confidence. Another example of how the SCC and school worked as a professional learning community was the decision to change the school uniform policy. The teacher member of the SCC described a triangular structure of decision-making for the school.

SIC is the School Improvement Council. We have SCC and SIC, and then the faculty and all is sort of a triangle that sort of goes around. Like an issue can start in any group, but it has to encompass all of those approvals before something can go through. So if you have a parent that brings something up in SCC, it would have to go to SIC to get approved and then to the faculty. The SIC is actually the schools governing council during the day, and then the SCC is very similar to that but it brings the parents into it.

The teacher member indicated that the SCC had not been involved except in the case of the uniform policy. There was a feeling among the faculty that the current policy needed to be strengthened to further prevent gang attire and immodesty. The teacher SCC member explained the process of changing the student uniform policy in an interview:

That particular issue was an issue that was brought up by faculty. Faculty put it on the SIC agenda. SIC went through the process of bringing it up and getting input and getting approval, and then that approval went to SCC to get its final approval with comments from that group and then it was passed there at SCC.

The SCC minutes from March 2008 show the policy was discussed in the SCC and approved. The revision of the uniform policy was not directly focused on student achievement, but it does demonstrate how the SCC can work with the school to unitedly work towards school improvement.

Personal agendas can serve as a detriment to the SCC working as a professional learning community. The two most active parent members of the SCC both became involved because of very personal agendas. Looking after the needs of their own children was the priority of each parent. One parent SCC member shared the process of becoming a member, “My daughter came home with stories from school about things going on in class that I was not impressed with at all, and it caused me great concern.” Another parent member said, “Personally, I think anyone that gets that involved has their own agenda, and I’m a mom and my agenda is my son.” Once the parents have become involved, attitudes have evolved. The community partner SCC member commented:

So basically my goal in working with the school has to do with a cultural awareness process—where our parents learn the public education culture and the school culture, so that they can really effect change versus just coming in and whining and ranting—that kind of stuff.

A teacher SCC member observed:

I think that you have faculty that have a clear agenda, and I think when parents first start out they have a very different agenda. At times it is very narrow-minded towards their own particular circumstances or children. I think that as the group grows together, and there is more of a trust then it really does become more of a cohesive collaborative effort for the benefit of all as a school.

One of the primary responsibilities of an SCC is the development of the different plans focused on school improvement (Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1A-108). The development of the school improvement plan at M3 was primarily accomplished by the faculty. The principal described the process as involving everyone. He said the departments responsible for accomplishing each goal write the different goals. The teachers work collaboratively during regularly scheduled time and focus on how to increase student achievement. The collaboration has not crossed over to the SCC, but confidence was expressed that the SCC will be involved in the future. The principal gave each SCC member a copy of the school improvement plan to review. The SCC has received training on how to be involved in the SIP process, but by the principal's admission, "it hasn't happened yet." A parent member expressed determination that next year the SCC would be more involved in the process. "Next year I think we will have more parents involved, and my sights are on that [developing the school improvement plan]"

Principal Support

The principal support of the SCC is evident in his enthusiasm as he expressed appreciation for having an SCC that is actually functioning. The principal's attitude was, "We're getting there. We're not there yet. The more dialogue we have with them [the SCC] the better." The teacher SCC member said:

I think that [the principal] has gone out of his way to try and get parents involved. I know that he has done hat tricks and taken parents out to dinner, and I think there is certainly a motivation or effort to try and get it [the SCC] functioning, but I also think that when you have such a non-functioning body, it's very difficult to go through the steps and procedures when there's not a body in place to go

through the process.

An SCC parent member recognized the principal's support when he received formal training from the district.

Basically, I realized that when they were showing us what we needed to do, I realized that the principal had already been laying the groundwork for all of these things ahead of time in a subtle way so not to seem overbearing. I just know that the principal was outlining the path and the goals—things that were needed to be reached and done by the SCC, and in his talking with me—our meetings of the PTA and prior to SCC meetings—that I was a little surprised that I remember what he said and how well it fit in with everything. I think our principal has been awesome in his support and his guidance.

The parent member described the principal's support using a metaphor, “stirring the pot without touching the spoon.” The metaphor provides a vivid way to describe how the principal provided information and training without the members realizing they were being trained.

Speaking of the SCC needing to find its way, the principal said:

[The SCC has] got to have focus and execution.... We are in the process right now, and this is where the SCC needs to play a vital role.... That's a big aspect of the SCC. Where do you want to be in five years? The execution of that is to have the discipline to do those things each and every day that will help get us there where we need to be.

The principal also strives to provide the SCC with access to the school and his own attention. The SCC members wanted a room to set-up an office for the SCC and PTSA to increase visibility and parent involvement. When asked to share a time when she had been impressed with the principal's support, a parent SCC member responded:

I couldn't tell you a time that I wasn't [impressed with the principal's support]. He has been so excited that there is one [SCC] finally, and that things are finally going. There hasn't been anything that he has not allotted us. Here at the end of the year, we are having discussions of office space for next year, so that we have a home and a place to land and a place to do things. He requisitioned a computer for

us. He really wants the SCC and the PTSA to be strong. I think he has been really frustrated that there hasn't been one. But yeah, he's been completely supportive.

The May 2008 minutes reported, "The committee has asked [the principal to] see if he can find space that is more visible for parents, rather than behind in the auditorium."

When the SCC discussed the visibility of the room that had been provided in the May meeting, the principal made several suggestions that would be explored.

Data

Without being involved in the development of the school improvement plan, the data shared did not serve the purpose of informing decisions, but it did serve to inform and orient the SCC members on what was happening at the school. As reported in Chapter IV, SCC members reported several instances of different types of data being shared. The December 2007 SCC meeting minutes report, "There is a survey being done. [The district evaluation director] is conducting it for M3. There are surveys for students, parents, and administration." At the next meeting in January, the principal "distributed and reviewed the results of the survey.... There is a need to find a way to get girls to better communicate with each other. There are a lot of fights. Need to have students respect each other."

The school improvement plan was also given to the SCC members to review, and the plan contained U-PASS student data for the past 2 years. The most prominent form of data shared with the SCC were related to the school's literacy program. Data on reading levels were reported in different SCC meetings and the data related to the reading program will be discussed in detail in Chapter VI.

Communicating Information

The M3 SCC is very new to the process and is working to figure out the best ways to approach the communication within the SCC to inform the decision-making process and to inform the parents and community. As the SCC is newly established at M3, several things have been done to increase the level of communication within the SCC. First, training has been provided. SCC meeting minutes for December and January indicate the district provided training during the school year specifically for M3 SCC. A parent SCC member explained in an interview what training had been done and her hopes for future training along with the new principal:

Parent: The school district is going to do a shared governance training, and the SCC members along with the new principal are going to attend that together as a team.... There has been some training for the SCC board, but I'm a big believer that there is never enough training. We have decided that we are going to all go and take part in that as a team.

Jackie: And that is put on by the school district?

Parent: The district does that, yes. They do it several times a year. They offer it, so it's open. Also as our SCC board was coming together, [SCC chairman] hadn't had any experience in the shared governance process, and we really needed to get some training, so they actually sent specialists out to do training with just our board on site. But the school district offers it a couple of times a year at the district.

When I asked the principal what he felt his role was in supporting the SCC, he explained that his role is:

To provide information and provide training in our shared governance model and process, which we have done. Be very accessible and not just accessible to the council but to be accessible by the community in addressing concerns of students, teachers and community and that type of thing. And I think being there and visible is so critical. Having an open door policy. You saw just a few seconds ago this mom came in and I didn't know what she needed—and that type of thing.

And honestly, rather than us continuing our dialogue, I took care of this Mom first, and that type of thing. Because and I didn't know what she wanted but I went to her first, "How can I help you?" Because obviously she was needing to speak with me and that type of thing. My parents know—I hope they know anyway—that they come in and they can see me unless I'm embroiled in some stuff like I was yesterday when I had to reschedule our meeting and that type of thing. But for the most part they can get in 24/7 usually and they'll be able to get access to the principal.

With the different trainings provided, there was still evidence that more training was necessary. The School LAND Trust report indicates that the SCC had not viewed the training video. A parent SCC member explained how he had learned about the School LAND Trust program.

Initially, I learned about the Trust LANDs from the PTA president. She explained to me that that was why the community council was set up to manage. I asked the principal directly how the trust LAND money had been allocated previously. ... I went on line and found the school trust LAND website and found information about how the funds had been allocated in years past. I pretty much did that on my own without any guidance. The only thing outside of handouts that I've received that led me to understand the trust lands. Well, I have this big handout here. The handout that I got from the meeting that I went to with the members of this school district showed some guidelines and timelines and I think I had seen some timelines on line as well on the website. Nobody really directed me to look into it. I understood that that was pretty much the most important role of the council. I didn't understand how to go about playing that role. The history of actions that would have taken place in other councils to make sure that that role was filled and how it played out. The history is not there. I really feel like I'm treading on an unbeaten path even though it's pretty much laid out in several different ways. It's laid out from several different areas they've shown me. Guidelines, but even with those guidelines it still seems to me—it's kind of a dark area. It's kind of gray [laughing]. So like I said, we're new, so I haven't been through all the processes. After having been through it once or twice, I'm sure it will seem like it was nothing.

It was documented in SCC meeting minutes that the principal and teachers provided reports at SCC meetings, for example: (a) "[The principal] talked about No Child Left Behind" (December 2007). (b) "[The principal] shared the reading levels at

[M3]” (December 2007). (c) “109 students achieved grade level from beginning of the year. We still have about 200 students left to reach that goal” (January 2008). (d) “Make up packets. They will be finished on Friday and will report at next SCC” (January 2008). (d) “Packets resulted in 75 less failures during the second quarter” (February 2008). (e) “School Improvement Plan has four goals: School improvement, literacy, math, ELL [English Language Learner], optional goal” (February 2008). (f) “CRTs were done online. [M3] was a pilot school for it. All CRTs will be done online next year” (April 2008). (g) “We have 60 kids registered for summer school. They are planning on 100 (May 2008).” At one meeting, the SCC received a report on the school response to a recent student suicide. The minutes report, “There was discussion on the suicide.... Kids were bringing money from their piggy banks to donate. All the donations were sold. [The principal] and some of the kids attended the funeral and presented the check. It allowed the students to move on” (Mar 2008). With each of these reports there was not an expectation that the SCC would make any decisions related to the information, but the SCC members were appreciative of the reports, and the reports helped increase member understanding. One parent member said:

The coordinator for the after-school program has been wonderful in letting us know about the packets that they have to do—kids that are failing.... She has been really good at giving us the percentages of kids that have actually completed the packages and fulfilled their contracts and have amended their grades. The counselors that have shown up several times to let us know about school-wide testing, and where our scores are coming in versus where they’ve been in years past. But I think most of the information has been presented mostly to orient and to let the council know what is going on, but not so much to do with any sort of decisions.

Although not directly related to student achievement, there were a few examples

of communication within the SCC that did inform decision-making. The April 2008 meeting minutes report:

Discussion on the need to address cell phones.

- a. [Teacher member] will check with [another school district] to determine how they addressed and report back at the next meeting.
- b. [The principal] sent email out to principals in district to get feedback on how they have addressed the issue. [The principal] will forward results to [SCC chairman].
- c. Had discussion on possibility purchasing lockers for cell phones and charging for use and/or upgrading existing lockers, so items cannot be stolen out of them.
- d. Input was received from [assistant principals].

Later in the minutes in bold and all upper case:

**CELL PHONES: MOTION MADE BY [PARENT MEMBER] AND
SECONDED BY [TEACHER MEMBER] THAT A POLICY BE DEVELOPED
THAT CELL PHONES ARE TO BE STORED DURING THE DAY AND NO
USE OF THE SAME UNTIL STUDENTS ARE OUTSIDE THE BUILDING,
AND THAT THIS BE IN PLACE BY REGISTRATION 2009.
MOTION PASSED**

In the December 2007 meeting, the minutes report an issue with the traffic flow in front of the school. The principal and SCC chair planned to attend a city meeting to discuss the issue. In the January 2008 meeting, the SCC chairman's report is recorded in the minutes. "[The principal] and [the SCC chairman] met with the engineer and they are making signs. Parents are starting to follow the recommended changes. Kids are being picked up by the buses out back." The cited discussions did lead to decisions, but the decisions were not related to the development of the school plans for which the SCC is responsible.

Communication with the larger parent population is required to encourage parent

involvement as well as simply informing the public concerning programs and progress.

When the teacher SCC member was asked how information is getting out to the public she replied:

I think that the only information that I am aware of that the public gets is probably the newspaper when they write who made the annual progress, but I don't think as far as to the community and to the public—I'm not aware of any efforts that we have made."

The principal said there was a public outreach every year to get parents involved in the SCC, but "it's been hard just getting parents to participate." The principal indicated the new school building has had a positive influence in the local community, which could influence more parents to take an interest. A parent SCC member wanted to generate more interest in the SCC by using, "parent-teacher conference night—excellent opportunity for me to get people to commit to showing up."

To improve communication with the public, several different uses of the Internet were suggested. When asked about informing the public about school programs being implemented the principal said, "We would like to post that on the web when I figure out how to do that." To help stimulate more involvement from the community the SCC chairman said, "I actually put together a blog to share what I could without releasing names and stuff like that." The January 2008 SCC meeting minutes reported. "[The SCC chairman] created a blog to determine if we can have a community dialogue center. He will continue to work on it. He will also attach resources and post our minutes to the website." During the May 2008 meeting, the SCC discussed collecting parent e-mails. Minutes from the meeting state, "Email addresses will be gathered during school registration." As previously discussed, the SCC and PTA have also asked the principal

for a permanent room that is visible to parents, and he has provided it. This room is to be a place where parents can go with concerns or to receive information.

Adequate Resources

The principal indicated that the resources provided through the school LAND trust program and the matching grant provided the piano program, which would not have been possible otherwise. The piano program will be discussed in detail in Chapter VI. In spite of that specific instance, the SCC members consider the resources inadequate. When asked about the adequacy of resources provided, the principal said:

It's terrible, and I've let my legislators know it is terrible. There is no way on God's green earth we should be fiftieth in the United States with respect to WPU. It's a shame what we do here in this state.

When asked if she felt the available resources were adequate, a teacher SCC member said, "I'm just going to be up front and no, it's not. We could use more resources and less district and more assistance at the buildings where the learning should be happening." The teacher is also responsible for the after-school and summer school programs and indicated that the programs were contingent upon funds that may or may not be available in the future.

Staff Support of Student Achievement

Parent members cited the interactions between teachers and students as demonstrative of their commitment to student achievement. The community partner SCC member talked about a particular teacher who had opportunities to move to other schools. "One of the teachers there has been asked to go to other schools, but he will not leave

because he loves that school, which says a lot for a hard school.” A parent member said, “I think the teachers are the ones the kids look up to the most and respect.” And another parent observed, “I have watched everybody from the teachers to the dean of students to the ladies that work in the office take . . . ownership with the kids—their successes and failures.”

When asked about evidence that the entire staff accepts responsibility for student achievement, the community partner member’s first response was, “I think that first class where they do all the literacy stuff together.” The principal indicated there had been a five-year program of literacy development at M3. Every teacher teaches a full period of reading each morning and “that’s been a good unifying catalyst for our school.” The teacher member said the focus on literacy is not limited to that class in the morning. “There is a good cohesiveness and a fairly good plan for . . . teachers to come together. . . . For example, how reading could be improved not just in reading but also in science and other activities.”

Conclusion

The information gathered through observations, interviews, and documents reveal the processes and strategies used by the SCCs at M1, M2, and M3. Although all the strategies identified in the literature are evident in some way at each school, there is variation in forms and implementation.

At M1 and M2 a primary source of confidence was the investment of time and energy to become fully involved in the school improvement process. With much more

limited experience the experience cited at M3 as building confidence was closely related as confidence was gained through participating in the hiring of the new principal. The desire for more parent involvement at M3 and the desire expressed to be involved in developing the school plans also emphasizes that confidence is developed through full engagement in the process.

All the schools had functioning professional learning communities that focused on student learning, used data, and fostered a collaborative culture. The difference between the exemplary middle level SCCs and the fledgling SCC was the involvement of the SCC as an active participant in the development of the school plans. What the professional learning community looked like was unique to each school and was heavily influenced by the principal's support and leadership style in conjunction with the local communities' current and historical involvement. At M1 and M2, there was a strong historical relationship of trust with well-established patterns of collaboration. At M3, there was a desire to build support but without the historical participation, the SCC was primarily laying a foundation for full involvement in the future.

A few specific strategies were used by all three SCCs. All three principals openly and frequently shared data that went beyond U-PASS. Although the principal served as the primary source of data at all three schools, at M1 and M2, the data were used to inform the development of the school plans; but at M3, the data were used merely to orient SCC members rather than to inform decisions regarding the school improvement plans. All three SCCs expressed appreciation for teachers who came and provided reports on programs being implemented at the school, but all three SCCs had a desire for

more reporting of information directly from the teachers involved in implementation. All three schools had developed programs unique to the needs of their school. At M1 and M2, the SCCs were fully involved in the decisions to implement those programs such as the MYP and homework club at M1 and the Walkaway program at M2. At M3, the SCC was not involved in the development of the piano or reading programs but trusted that the programs were valuable.

The evaluated schools each utilize the strategies identified in the literature at some level. The results and analysis has provided a narrative view of the strategies used and how they are implemented at each of the three middle schools.

CHAPTER VI

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF SCC IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT

The third question relates to the implementation and impact of the SCC plans. The question asks: To what degree are the plans developed by exemplary middle school community councils fully implemented, and are they perceived by council members and school personnel as having a positive impact on student achievement?

Each school evaluated had the same goal of improved student achievement in core subjects, but each school developed a very different plan. The general processes used by each SCC have been discussed. Chapter VI presents the data that demonstrate whether the plans have been implemented and the perceived impact.

M1

M1 combined all the plans the SCC is responsible for into one school improvement plan with two main goals. The first goal is to improve student achievement in core subjects, and the second goal is to foster and promote healthy and respectful relationships among school, family, and community. To accomplish the goal of increased student achievement the SIP specifies six strategies:

1. Strategy: Implement Full School International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme....
2. Strategy: Identify and provide academic support for all students who do not score 3 (sufficient) or 4 (substantially proficient) on Utah CRTs, and for students who are failing core academic classes....
3. Strategy: Emphasize the Six Traits of Effective Writing in all subject areas....
4. Strategy: Utilize dynamic (online) curriculum mapping process to enhance 6th – 9th grade curriculum....

5. Strategy: Differentiate classroom instruction to meet the needs of all students....
6. Strategy: Utilize instructional technology to increase student learning.

The impact of each of these will be discussed in turn.

Middle Years Programme

To become an IB MYP world school M1 has to go through a process of authorization that includes a demonstrated commitment to the MYP and authorizing site visits from the international organization (International Baccalaureate, 2008). M1 had an IB authorization visit in March 2008, and the principal reported:

They [the visiting authorization team] left us a verbal report of commendations, recommendations.... None of the matters to be addressed or the recommendations were anything new or surprising. We have been working toward this in a way for eight years, specifically the whole school model for 24-28 months.

The MYP program in M1's school district spans two schools, as one school works with sixth and seventh grades then students move to another school for eighth and ninth grades [M89]. A non-SCC teacher interviewed had spent time at both schools and described the implementation process:

I think a fair number of teachers feel that it was forced upon them, and they didn't have a choice—as happens sometimes, this is what you are going to do. That has made it much more difficult than if there had been more buy-in at the beginning. So it was implemented completely incorrectly from the beginning. Its vision was different. It was to be a school within a school. Not a bad vision, but not an MYP vision. There was some misunderstanding about what the MYP program is. It was decided by a group of teachers as well as administration. They went and visited the schools, IB schools, but they visited DP schools—so the IB has a PYP program—it's a primary school program. It's meant for kindergarten through fifth or sixth grade then they had the MYP program, which is meant for six through tenth grade with some flexibility; then they have a DP, which is not flexible and it would be the closest thing that came with a set curriculum—AP program is the closest thing that America understands. It's almost always a school within a

school for a very select group of students. So my understanding is that the teachers went and visited a DP school, so they saw this one program, but decided to implement a different one without really having a good understanding of what they were doing. For the program they were implementing it was fine, but it wasn't an MYP program. So I think once that realization occurred, the administration saw that it wasn't a real MYP program. MYP is about getting all students to become good...learners not just a select few, and it should be a school wide thing.... I think we have come so far in the last two years. I see a huge difference in just these two years. I look around at what teachers are doing and their understanding of the concept of MYP. The change in two years has really been great.

When I asked this teacher about what had created the change she responded:

[The principal] had a lot to do with that. He reads a huge amount and has bought into it and has done some really good training and has been willing to go to whatever levels necessary, so he looks and says, "Okay, this is what they need. If they need basic understanding, we'll do basic understanding," and he's been really trying hard to make connections. All the little connections help our school become what we want to become.

I went on to ask if she felt the vision of the MYP was clear to all the teachers to which she responded:

No, but it's like teaching a classroom of students. I can be the best teacher in the entire world, and at any one point a student could not be getting what I'm saying because you just have too big of an audience, and you don't have enough time to spend with each individual person. That's a problem in the classroom, and that's a problem in professional development. It's lack of money, and in Utah it's worse. It's a lot worse than in previous places I've been. It's better in [M1's city] than elsewhere. Given the amount of resources that we've had to put into it, and the issues we've had to deal with, I think we have come really, really far, and I'm positive about the benefits. I think we already have benefits. I think I've seen them. I think we are getting teachers who are seeing it. But like any organizational change people would like it to go away tomorrow, and they'd be happy because people are afraid of change.

A second non-SCC teacher described the MYP implementation at M1 this way:

The MYP is a philosophy about student learning. It's not a curriculum. And so we are wanting our students to be independent thinkers and problem solvers. Just good educational practices basically. To get the title that goes with international MYP, there is just a lot of little steps that that program [is] looking for so that they

have uniformity across all their programs. So we are in the process of becoming authorized. As far as teaching practice, it's not a lot different, and the teacher impact I guess is labeling things. I am already doing this, but now I need to look at what the MYP philosophy is, and I'm already doing assessments because I wanted to know where my students are before I teach them something and where they are after I teach them something, and I want to prepare them for the state assessments. They [MYP] also have expectations and assessments, so what I need to do is look at those assessments that I'm already using as part of my practice and see how that fits with the MYP expectation assessment, and put new labels on what I do because what I do I call formative and summative but maybe they call it something else. So that would be one example of how it impacts me as a teacher. Of course there will be teaching practices and other things as well. I am going to be looking at the value of what I am teaching for the students and labeling that with their [MYP] terminology. But it doesn't really change what I do. I just need to give it a little more thought and say, "How does what I'm doing tie into the terminology?" I think it's a really valuable thing because I think we as teachers get caught up in our day to day. So when something causes us to look at it—identify it and label it we improve it too.

When asked what kind of training she had received, the teacher replied:

I have been to a three-day training on the principles and philosophies and basic background of what MYP is. I have read all the material that pertains to first language and second language instruction that they put out and try to put that in my head as I am teaching since I'm teaching English to non-English speakers.

A third non-SCC teacher interviewed described her perspective on the implementation of the MYP:

Implementation goes back a couple of years, and the district said that we would be an MYP school, so implementation-wise, maybe not the best reception. But now that it's here—because I will say I was not one that received that news very well. Now that it's here, it's actually the best teaching practices. For me personally, I like it because it allows me or gives me the justification to do some of the things that I have always done with my students that I felt were important for them to have, in order for them to have a good understanding of things but wasn't necessarily in the core from the state, and with the MYP they want those things talked about and discussed and understood. Bias would be an example. I think it's very important that if the kids are going to become critical readers—as a reading teacher that's an issue for me—it's important for them to understand what bias is; so that as they read a newspaper or a magazine or even reading their novels, if they understand bias they can be better informed because they can pick out the biases and go straight for the facts. That's in the case of newspapers. In the

case of novels, they can understand why some characters act the way they do, and what the motivation is. So to me something like bias is hugely important, but it's not mentioned in the core but is part of the MYP wants discussed in terms of literature. So for me it's been kind of liberating in that way. As I've said it is the best teaching practices. One of the misconceptions some of us had was that it was a set curriculum—so...I've got this curriculum and this curriculum and now what do I do? It's more a concept. Here are the types of things the students should understand and reflect upon it rather than you will teach this and this. So I have found in my part of the world—the language arts reading side—I found it to be actually a big help to me in terms of adding depth and getting the kids to think about things that they might not think about otherwise. So for me it has been a wonderful addition in the end. Implementation not great but the actual piece is good.

When I asked what kind of training the teacher received to help her through this process, she responded:

For me, it's been mostly reading and talking to people who have been to trainings. I have yet to go to a formal training. That is something I will do in the next year, but I'm fortunate that the team I am on—there is a person who has been experienced in the MYP, so she has been wonderfully helpful. And I'm just the kind of person—okay, this is what my job's requiring me to do, so I will do it the best I can. So I do a lot of reading and try to figure things out.

A fourth teacher who serves as an SCC member spoke of her perceptions of the MYP.

The MYP, I think we have had some rocky spots here. I was on the community council way back when—“Should we? Should we not?” I was definitely, “We should.” Coming from a huge school district and looking at it more of a school within a school model because I felt, with an endorsement in the gifted and talented, that a lot of these higher achieving students—not necessarily gifted but higher achieving—I didn't see all their needs being met all the time. And sure, we could try and separate the differences, but when you have kids all over the spectrum, I felt the little group at the top maybe that this would be something different. I was on that committee in the beginning and for it. A lot of people like it better now that it's working. I think the best way to make that feel like it truly works and flows can be with mapping, but ... also we have to be able to sit down with our peers over at [M89] and granted, I don't even have a chance to sit down with my peers upstairs—but when you are talking about that philosophy with the caring and engaging, we could use these terms all we want, but until we are mapping, and we see it vertically and horizontally across our team as well, I think

we are still going to feel jumbled. I feel jumbled.

I asked the teacher about the training she had received to which she responded:

My MYP training, I really don't have any. It's listening to what's going on and the school philosophy, and what we've done in faculty meetings. I have not had a formal training. Some of the teachers have gone to other schools to see how it works, but I have not.... [The principal] has put together trainings, and we have our little books, but to me that is small, and we don't get the big picture if all you have is a puzzle piece here and there. I am one that is very visual, and so I need to see the whole picture, so I know where I am supposed to go.

When asked about the implementation of the MYP, a fifth teacher who is also an SCC member said:

We've had a lot of professional development and learned a lot about the program, but a lot of us are still in the dark about what exactly the standards and practices of IB are and [what] is the difference between an IB school and a regular middle school down the block. Aren't teachers supposed to relate student learning back to real life and the environment anyway? So that's another situation where more time to plan together and maybe more time to plan with community members .

The principal's assessment of the MYP implementation is that:

[The MYP is] bringing another facet to [the students'] education that wouldn't have necessarily been there before, because it would have been individual acts from a classroom teacher rather than a school wide culture of community service, health and social education, and environment. Before it was just neat when we had the director of Recycle Utah come, now it's part of the package.

As I spoke with different teachers it appeared that teacher attitude towards MYP varied in relation to the training received. Faculty trainings designed by the principal were described, but that has not been sufficient for some teachers. The more training a teacher had in the MYP, the more positive and appreciative they were of the program. Even with the variability in training, the initial resistance to the program, and the confusion that remains, none of the teachers I spoke with were negative towards the MYP.

In one SCC meeting there was a lengthy discussion about the MYP certificate. The certificate is awarded to students who choose to participate in and successfully complete the program by taking specified classes and completing projects related to areas of interaction. The different areas of interaction specified in the MYP are (a) approaches to learning, (b) community and service, (c) human ingenuity, (d) environment, and (e) health and social education (International Baccalaureate, 2008).

Parent 1: In reference to the IB program my son would be able to complete it, but he doesn't really fit in. There are a fair number of kids like him because for him band is everything. We made a decision as a family to not have him do the IB program,...

Principal: Okay.

Parent 1: ...so he could take jazz band and concert band and a foreign language at [M89]. But because he is not taking technology, he doesn't get the IB certificate. It's not a big deal. I am more interested in the honors program in high school, but I do think it makes a missing link. If he's not eligible for that because his interests take him elsewhere, and he's not the only one who falls into that.

Parent 2: Well there are a lot of them, but that's just the way it works.

Parent 1: Well, no, no, I'm not saying...

Parent 2: I think we are way too hung up on the IB certificate and not enough involved in the IB philosophy. The IB philosophy is going to hit every kid in this school whether or not he gets the certificate, and he's going to get a much better education for it.

Parent 1: Yes, but what I am saying is, I agree, but...

Parent 2: The whole idea is—go ahead.

Parent 1: ...just because we don't fit into it, doesn't mean we shouldn't look for other things. If he's looking for suggestions. That's what I am saying that there is a group of kids that are being left out.

Parent 2: They're not being left out. They're just not getting the certificate because they don't fit all...

Parent 1: Let me finish. I'm the expert on what I'm going to say next [room fills with laughter]. Regardless of what we think personally of the IB program, it's something that is promoted, and it is something the kids get kudos for if he or she completes. But if he or she doesn't complete it because they're not able to, maybe we should look for other opportunities for them.

Parent 2: The program disallows...

Parent 1: Yes, exactly. All I'm saying is I'm not saying the IB program is everything. Like I said, personally, I don't care, and I had to convince my son because he is a good student here, and he has been taught that the IB program is a big deal. I kept telling him, "No, it's not a big deal". And because of it, we did run into a little snafu during registration, which I ended up emailing [the principal], or at least copying to him when he was out of town, which was resolved before he got back. But basically what happened with my son in a nutshell—[M89] looked at him and said, "Oh, I know this kid. He needs to be in the IB program." So they took him out of jazz band. I was livid. Without calling me or telling me. He came home in tears. That whole idea that there isn't a place for a kid like that in an academic achievement program ended up being a bit of a problem.

Principal: Do you think that in his freshman year that [SCC member's son] will do a personal project? That's another kind of milestone for the certificate?

Parent 1: I could put him in something like that.

Principal: We're not going to get International Baccalaureate Organization ink on our certificate.

Parent 1: No, we're not West High or – yeah.

Principal: If that makes any sense. It's a Middle Years Program. We are not going for moderation or monitoring, which allows you to put IB ink on your certificate. In other words our stamp is going to be a Park City School District stamp....

Parent 1: That actually supports my point even more. If the IB isn't going to get the official stamp of approval, we can do whatever we want then.

Principal: Within a certain framework, yes....

Parent 3: I'm going to ask probably a really dumb question—I have a sixth grader this year, I haven't heard anything about this. Are they told about this?

Principal: By enrolling in the school you get enrolled in a Middle Years Program

school and some of that should be invisible and some of that should be more visible, like community and service. Hopefully a Community and Service packet came home.

The conversation in the SCC meeting among parents who are actively involved in the school serves as an indication that some confusion about the MYP will exist among the school community. The teacher interviews gave a picture of how teachers are beginning to use the MYP as a framework for the curriculum, instruction, and assessment, but the implementation is somewhat fragmented. Later in the SCC meeting there was a discussion of digital portfolios, and at one point the MYP framework was displayed again on the projector, and the discussion focused on how the digital portfolio would work to enhance both the instruction and assessment of the curriculum within the framework of the MYP. The principal explained:

Let's go back to that octagon. When we talk about representing students' work, and we look at again the complete curriculum and with all due respect to teachers...schools, unfortunately, are very good at fragmenting the learning experience for them in "Now I'm in social studies; now I'm in science; now I'm in—." But when we look at that model there, the idea is that the kid is at the center, and notice how the colors change as we move toward that center. They are distinct at the edges. Each subject area has its own distinctions and have to be recognized but as we move toward the center through those areas and the interaction it's "what sense is all of this making for [the student]." And then we ask what would happen if his progress and process was reflected in a portfolio of work that is available from any computer that is created along with his teachers by him. You start to see the engagement that comes with the technology.

As the implementation process for the MYP makes forward progress, what type of impact is the program currently having on students? One teacher explained:

[Students are] not used to finding their own answers and then explaining how they got there...I have had the realization that as much as I was doing that with my kids before the MYP, I wasn't doing it near as well as I should have been. We tend to enable kids—we don't get an answer; we then start spoon-feeding them. It's like when you learn a new language, and if someone is constantly telling you

the word and not making you figure it out, you're not doing anything to figure it out. So if we aren't challenging their thinking skills they're not going to think. And that's the change that I have seen. Not all but a number of the students start to find that out—"Oh, I can think this out. I can be in control." So they are starting to have more of a buy-in to their learning.

A second teacher explained that, "taking the MYP principles and bringing that in, I get a deeper understanding of the students and it does a better job of teaching." A third teacher explained the impact by saying:

The MYP is great at giving you labels and organizing thoughts and information and middle school students need that and love that. They like it when you say, "Okay, I want you to be an inquirer right now." They like the visual and the words; they like to be labeled positive. The learner profiler...I see that as something that the kids can really connect to. They like to use the words and label themselves with those positive characteristics. I see that a lot in the classroom.

MYP principles help teachers challenge students to think and develop deeper understanding. Not every teacher sees the impacts as readily. When asked whether he made connections between the class activities and the MYP, one teacher responded. "I haven't. I guess I would just have to explicitly just go out and say it. I guess it's something I could do. I just haven't thought of it yet." The principal pointed out that the teacher perspective is right up close and is accompanied by the individual interactions and potential frustrations that go with the close relationships teachers have with students. The principal's perspective is just slightly removed, so he sees the results, and his perception is very positive. "I'm the guy that gets to see it all from 15 feet back.... When you step back you start to see a little more is happening there for these guys [students] in terms of their overall education."

Academic Support

The second strategy listed by the SCC is to identify and provide academic support

for all students who do not score at least at the proficient level on the Utah CRTs, and for students failing core academic classes.

Mechanisms are in place to identify students in need of academic assistance, and there are many strategies used by teachers and staff within the classrooms to meet their needs. In some cases students take a special academic support class. All students get additional support by taking a reading class each day. In addition to the academic support within classes, the SCC has funded, through the School LAND Trust program, an after-school Homework Club. SCC members commonly cited the implementation and impact of the Homework Club.

The Homework Club meets after school in the library for one hour on Mondays through Thursdays. Two certified teachers and a bilingual teacher's aid work with students and provide homework assistance. Teachers initiated the Homework Club, but when it became too burdensome to do on a volunteer basis, the teachers took a proposal to the SCC, and the SCC decided to support it under their goal to provide academic support to struggling students. This is the second year it has been funded through the SCC and perceptions of impact are quite consistent.

A parent member of the SCC said:

What we spend the bulk of our Trust LAND money on is an after school Homework Club.... My son uses it occasionally. He goes there to study for tests when he needs to. That is one instance that I know of personally that I feel his school achievement is directly connected to that Homework Club.... What I like seeing is more and more of our Hispanic population is utilizing the Homework Club instead of going home and being alone after school, because a lot of them come from families with two working parents that don't get home until six or seven p.m., so if they go home from school, they're home for a couple of hours by themselves probably not doing homework—if they go home at all. What we do in the SCC is look at who signs in for Homework Club, and [the principal] knows

which of these kids really need this extra tutoring and which ones are probably going to be okay even if they didn't come. We have identified that the word is getting out among our school population that Homework Club is a good place to go after school, and the teachers there that staff it make sure that it isn't a free-for-all... Our roll taken shows us that attendance is increasing across the entire school population not just with the Hispanic population.

A second parent SCC member cited the Homework Club when he was asked to name an instance when he felt great confidence that the work of the SCC would truly make a positive difference in student achievement.

We devote a lot of our SCC funds to what we call the Homework Club and that's an after-school club monitored by a couple of teachers. I know the math gal is very sharp; they use two or three of the sharp teachers. On a daily basis or a Monday through Thursday basis for kids who need help with school, or frankly in some cases, just don't have any other place to go after school, and I think in some cases don't want to go home right after school and would like to be there for another hour. And I think these are the kids that we really need to help in the SCC, and I'm very pleased that we are investing a fair bit of our resources into that, and I think it's working. I have a son who is pretty bright and has been to Homework [Club]. He is an excellent student, and he's a very bright kid. But he tells me he knows kids that do go and get a lot out of it.

Teachers also shared their perceptions of the Homework Club. I asked a non-SCC teacher "Have you recommended students to the Homework Club? And what kind of effects have you seen from it?"

I think the Homework Club is fabulous. My son used it when he was in sixth grade. He would go, and he loved it. Sometimes it was a social thing, but it was about homework as well. It's really great for the kids that don't have support at home. I think it would be a huge loss if we ever lost Homework Club. I don't think it's always what it can be, but I have very high expectations. I don't think anything is what it can be—but the teachers seem to do it because they care. They don't get paid enough to do it for the money, and it makes your day really long, and I think the kids do get a lot of help from it. So I think it's a very positive thing, and I have recommended a lot of students to it. And having that bus at the end of the day, it really helps. I have a couple of girls who normally come on Tuesday, and I had to leave earlier today, so they didn't come, and they do community service with me, and they take that bus home, so it allows students who don't necessarily have the support at home to do their community service,

which is part of the MYP concept, to do it within the school system; and one of them wants to be a teacher, so she loves to do the teacher thing. So that whole letting the kids stay at school longer in a safe and supervised environment is a really nice thing.

The teachers who run the Homework Club were also interviewed and shared their perceptions concerning the impact the Homework Club was having.

I have been doing it [supervising the Homework Club] two years now and you know for the kids that take advantage of it, I think it is fabulous. I wish we had more kids taking advantage of it. I wish we had 70 kids here every night. But for the ones that come on a regular basis, I think they get a lot.

I asked the math teacher that works in the Homework Club, “What do you feel this provides?”

They’ve got the support of the three of us going around; they have a quiet place to do their work if they want to—even if they don’t want to.... And some of those kids need their hands held and to push them on. If we didn’t have this [the Homework Club], those kids [points to two students working at a table] would never open a book I think.... Those kids are doing much better because of Homework Club.

The Homework Club is continually seeking ways to improve and more effectively serve the students who attend. One area that needed a greater level of support was reading instruction for those below grade level. The assistant principal did some research and presented in the January SCC meeting. A teacher who serves as the technology specialist for the school accompanied the assistant principal. The assistant principal made the presentation.

[Speaking of students who were just below grade level in reading] I was noticing how many of those kids were almost there. They were almost reading on grade level. And I knew that we had the Homework Club structure already in place. It would be great if we could figure out some way to incorporate literacy things into Homework Club. Part of it became a staffing issue and how do you get these kids one-on-one help with reading, so I started exploring some computer based programs for them to work on. That’s a way to get them one-on-one and with the

technology that keeps them interested. I did a lot of research and found a program called Read Naturally. And everything I read about this program. Everything I've read about this program it is kind of. –it had the best reviews all around. It deals with fluency; it deals with comprehension; it deals with vocabulary; and I think [the principal] has got the sample that we can go through and look at.

The SCC went through the demonstration of the software on the projector with audio. As the presentation was winding down:

Assistant Principal: My hope is that it will be prescribed for students who are struggling in reading right now. That they would get a phone call home saying, “Your child is reading below grade level. It has been suggested that they stay after school with Homework Club and work on it.” They wouldn't need to spend a whole hour on this. They could spend part of their time working on this and part of their time working on regular homework.

Parent SCC Member: How many would be available?

Assistant Principal: We would probably want to do it in one of the labs.

Technology Specialist: The software package can work on any computer in the school.

Assistant Principal: It's a server package, so it can work with any computer in the school. It could also be available during school. All of the language arts teachers, when I showed them this, said they would use it in their class.

The process demonstrated that the Homework Club is continually evolving to meet the needs of the students. The Homework Club teachers also make adjustments in the structure and organization of the Homework Club to improve the effectiveness and enhance the experience of the students who attend. For example, they found last year that Homework Club was becoming increasingly social. The Homework Club math teacher explained:

This year we decided to buckle down on the noise level and the kids just coming up here to socialize—So many up here doing nothing, and it was causing problems. It took four people out here to try and keep things under control, and I was in there [points to another room] doing math.

They adjusted some rules and procedures and as a result, according to the math teacher, “Now, everyone is on task.” As one SCC teacher member said, “If something in Homework Club isn’t working, we change it.” They are continually looking at ways it can be improved and meet the needs of more students. For example, a parent SCC member suggested:

I would like to see some—and this is again in a perfect world, and I realize we can’t pay everybody we would like to do what we wanted—but I would like to see, possibly, and I’ve brought this up, some special stuff done in Homework Club where, if all the seventh graders knew they were having a science test, maybe that seventh grade science teacher comes the week before or whenever, if Homework Club could actually be used, and the science teacher could take those groups of kids and go over in a corner, our library is pretty big, and then he can go over stuff. Not teach the test but to answer questions or lead discussion groups about how the kids could study better.

The Homework Club serves a variety of students. Because it is an after-school program, those attending must have parent permission to be enrolled in the Homework Club. Over one fourth of the student body is enrolled, and on any given day there are between 10 and 45 students in attendance. It serves students who are struggling and teachers, parents, or counselors may request that particular students attend, but it is not limited to students struggling academically. Several parent SCC members’ and teachers’ children attended the Homework Club. Speaking as parents each one was very appreciative of the Homework Club. As I observed the Homework Club there were students who would come in and do their homework on their own, as well as those needing assistance. There were also English and Spanish speakers in attendance. Even though the Homework Club was established under the goal of academic support for non-proficient students, there are no limitations on who can be served.

The Homework Club provides students with several services that would not be available to many of the students otherwise. The Homework Club provides students with certified teachers to help them, a quiet place to work, computer access, a safe environment, and transportation home. It provides teachers and parents a place to refer a student for extra help. It provides students a work environment where an adult will supervise and refocus their attention when they lose focus. Grades of students attending or direct impact on end of level tests have not been measured, but the services provided by the Homework Club are perceived by the teachers and SCC members as having a positive impact on student achievement for those who attend. The teachers and SCC members expressed a desire to see more students attend but were very grateful to provide the service for those who did attend.

Curriculum Mapping

The third primary focus of the SIP that is also supported by the School LAND Trust program funds is curriculum mapping. The SCC funds a subscription to an Internet service for teachers to create, update, and coordinate their curriculum maps. These curriculum maps are all on-line, and they were shared and discussed in SCC meetings. One teacher expressed her understanding of curriculum mapping as having a three-part purpose.

The simplest version is that the curriculum maps benefit students because we don't all teach them the same thing year after year. This is a middle school, so in seventh grade we're not doing a papier-maché globe of the earth and learning the continents, and then in eighth grade doing a papier-maché globe and talking about indigenous people. So we're not doing the same kinds of activities. We're looking at "Okay, we want to do something in geography, but not repeat ourselves", so that's one aspect. Another really great thing is when we hire new staff, and

they're coming into a team that already exists, they have some documentation—not lesson to lesson, but big picture ideas—of what those students have gone through in the past. So when they come in, they have a map that is going to help them decide what they are going to teach. And of course we have the core curriculum, and the map is how to get through that core curriculum.

As with the MYP, there is large variation between teachers' understanding and use of curriculum maps. Curriculum mapping has been a part of the program at M1 since the school's inception; however, the new tools provided by the SCC have taken curriculum mapping to a new level. During an SCC meeting, the principal logged onto the web site where all teacher maps are located. He then showed different curriculum maps developed by M1 teachers. Stipends have been offered to teachers to work during the summer to develop curriculum maps. The principal discussed the impact he has seen from curriculum mapping relative to the literature he has read on curriculum mapping.

I [the principal] have had teachers inherit maps and new teachers coming in and being able to pick up a map that they are able to use. I have had collaborative maps start to happen after individual mapping has happened. I have had parents read over and view maps and guide their summer vacation to certain places because they knew there was going to be a course of study that would involve the Civil War, so they decided to take a trip to Gettysburg. You hear about all these things, read about it, or see it in videos you watch, and then boom, boom, boom, over the years they've all come up.

As for the MYP, the enthusiasm for the curriculum mapping seems to vary with the amount of training teachers have had. All the teachers have received some form of training in faculty meetings. One teacher said:

My mapping training was, "Hey, you need to work on your map, and here's the website," and I started looking at other teachers' stuff, and after spending hours trying to look at it [the curriculum mapping program] and how the program works, I got something up there.

A group of teachers went to a national training on curriculum mapping in New

Orleans, and they returned very motivated about the impact curriculum mapping can have on their students. One SCC teacher member reported the impact the training had on her.

I had heard the term mapping before, and I knew a little bit about it. I sat there at one point in time a couple of years ago and tried to map but with no real direction. I really didn't understand it to do it at a level that was expected. Yes, you could go to others and ask for help, but without common planning time, I couldn't really run to teammates and other things occur during lunch. But it wasn't until I went to New Orleans, where I saw exactly why we need to be doing it and gained a deeper understanding of it, how it could be used as a good tool as just opposed to one more thing for the teachers to do. That was my perception at the beginning.... I think it's a good thing and it's because I went to New Orleans and saw what it's supposed to do and how it could impact students and the other teachers that I'm working with. It's more of working together and collaborating. It's easier to work with my peers on my team if I have their maps to look at as well. It also lets me see what the other teams are doing.

One teacher talked about how her perception had changed as a result of the training. "We didn't have the whole vision of how this was supposed to work, and now that more of us have been trained in other areas, like for me it's a terrific tool."

Teachers who had not received the same training did not have the same attitude.

One teacher explained:

First of all on the curriculum mapping, we feel a little bit in math, we just spend hours and hours of mapping this whole curriculum for the whole year and checking the state standards to make sure. But in math things are so uniformed in the book that we think it's not the best use of our time for math. Now I've heard Spanish teachers say and social studies teachers say to make sure they don't leave anything out. Where as in math you've got those chapters in the textbook, and we check off which are in the standards. If there is a question mark or if we are short on time we are able to leave off. Now curriculum mapping in math we sit with the math teachers, sixth, seventh and pre-algebra. I find mapping frustrating in sixth grade because I have the Special Ed. kids. And for seventh and pre-algebra I don't have those students, and we are right on the schedule. Now again with the other teachers, so many have said they have really appreciated the curriculum mapping because it does make sure they don't skip anything.

As teachers have developed their own curriculum maps, there have been several

different approaches. Some teachers have used the core curriculum as their guide, while others have chosen to follow a textbook. Some completed a curriculum map because they were required to do so, while others saw it as a great tool for planning. In some cases, teachers were using the maps to coordinate curriculum with other teachers.

The primary complaint against curriculum mapping is lack of time. As one SCC teacher member said:

I think it's all fine and great, but what we really need is more shared prep time. Because practically speaking I am not going to go in during my prep time and look at some math teacher's assignments on the curriculum mapping software and say, "Oh, they're doing fractions, so I'm going to tie that in." Because I don't know if I would be doing it alone—if the math teacher would really care. But if I could have a face-to-face meeting with the math teacher and the science teacher and work on the unit together, then I would be all for that. It just takes face-to-face time and that's something we don't have enough of in this school.

Those few who went to the national training are very motivated, but others still do not have the full vision of curriculum mapping. The national training made a huge difference to those who attended. Nearly all of the teachers also expressed concerns about time. It was not a complaint that it took them time to create the maps, but that there was no common preparation time to work with other teachers to develop and coordinate curriculum further. These elements combine to create the overall perception that, although this program has been implemented for some time, the impact on teaching is still in development, and perceived impact on student achievement was not discernable.

Healthy and Respectful Relationships

The second goal of the SIP is to encourage the development of healthy and respectful relationships. The goal is designed to be monitored through survey data coming from parents, students, and teachers. Several members made reference to surveys in their interviews and nearly an hour of one SCC meeting was dedicated to discussion of results of the Indicators of School Quality Survey. One of the indicators that scored a little lower was related to school leadership. The principal read the item and said, “We’ve got a need to improve with students on accessibility.” The principal’s comment began a dialogue.

Parent 1: I have to make the comment on about that because my daughter who is in seventh grade, and she gets great grades, and she’s an outstanding student and never has any problems. She was like that too. She said that. It happened to be right after I think we got those surveys right after the last meeting I attended. Her and I were reading it together and so, I think was [counselor] who had just told me about those little forms that you can fill our confidentially. I didn’t know about those before. She commented to me, “Yeah mom, there’s no one you can go to.” And I said, “Hold on. There are these cool little forms that you can fill out. She’s like, “Yeah, but.” She never has an issue, and I think that might just be teenage hormones talking.

Teacher 1: They don’t want to be outstanding and filling out forms and things like that.

Principal: But the student response was compared to responses from other schools. And in this indicator column they said, “Yes, we need to improve on that.” So we can do what we can do and just that blue sheet dialog. I have assemblies coming up Wednesday and Thursday, and I want to throw that up there and say, “Hey, what’s going on with this, guys?” And maybe revisit that. We think we’re doing a lot, and we think we have taught them how to report things that aren’t right, whether it’s academic or not.

Parent 1: I would be curious what they would think what would make it better, approachable or comfortable, whatever, and I asked her that too. She said, she

didn't know. And that's when I thought, "Okay."

They went on to look at other questions but came back to the issue of administrative accessibility.

Teacher 2: We're still getting the accessibility on that.

Principal: The boys say we could be more accessible, we could improve that. So do the girls, the Latinos say that and so do the Caucasians. So we are going to work on it. We notice that. I guess we start by taking it on and saying, "This survey says you don't know how to get to us—let's talk about this a little bit." We can use the assembly format for that and lunches too.

Teacher 1: Yeah

Principal: Student council and other places.

Teacher 2: Maybe we can come up with something constructive. [ten second pause as members look through survey results]

Principal: And [an M1 teacher] probed that a little bit and it was the day after [the counselor] had visited the classrooms and I think [the assistant principal] was with her, and I think they were doing, this "Here is how you report things." When [the teacher] then explained that to their kids they went, "Oh, that's what it means." In other words there was some confusion on the students part on what was being asked.

Teacher 2: It almost has to be; I have found that if it's in an assembly setting, kids are out somewhere.

Principal: Yeah

Teacher 2: It almost has to be individual classrooms.

Principal: Break it down by classroom?

Teacher 2: Yeah

Principal: I'll put that down on my calendar. [Principal writes something in his planner.]

The significant amount of time taken with the survey results and the willingness

to take action to make improvements was a demonstration of a responsive nature to issues related to promoting healthy and respectful relationships.

With regard to the SIP, several parent members expressed appreciation for the reports they had received concerning the implementation of the plan, but would also like to hear more from the people directly involved with implementation. Some SCC parent members expressed that they are able to see the implementation of the plan but would also like to see exactly how implementation is impacting students. One SCC parent member expressed a desire to see the measurable results, which are difficult to attach directly to the strategies implemented. This difficulty is illustrated in the comment by one SCC teacher member, “I see the plan working all the time.... Everything is part of everything. The plan [directs] how our school runs.”

Although the six strategies for improving academic achievement were all identified in the SIP, they were not all equally emphasized in the evaluation data. For example, the six traits of writing have been in the plan for several years now. During one conversation with the principal prior to an SCC meeting, he commented that it was now so ingrained in the culture that it no longer needs to be specified. The utilization of instructional technology came up often in relation to how it was being used to support the goal of providing academic support for nonproficient students. Differentiated instruction was only mentioned once in relation to training provided to teachers. As demonstrated in the presentation of data, the areas that were emphasized the most in the M1 meetings and consequently in the interviews were the strategies related to MYP implementation, academic support, and curriculum mapping.

M2

The SIP for M2 includes the single goal to increase student achievement in Mathematics, Science, and Language Arts by five percent over the school years from 2006 to 2008. Several different programs and purchases were planned and implemented at M2 to accomplish this goal. The most prominent program to improve student achievement is the Walkaway program.

Walkaways

The Walkaway program was designed to help the school determine how the teachers will know if the students have learned the desired objectives. The teachers use state core standards to design assessments that will measure how well students have mastered academic objectives. Students are required to pass the Walkaway with a score of 80% to achieve a level of mastery. If a student does not achieve 80%, he is required to take an equivalent form of the Walkaway until mastery is achieved. The class will not move beyond a given topic until 80% of the class has achieved mastery of the content as measured by the Walkaway.

A teacher member of the SCC explained:

The big thing in our program right now, and you have probably heard about it, is the Walkaway program. Basically what that has done for our school staff is a lot of them have had to go through and rethink how they are teaching. And it is related to the standards that the state has expected us to cover.... I think a lot of our teachers were surprised that what they were teaching wasn't always or what they were spending a lot of time with wasn't an emphasis the state preferred us to have. So it has been interesting to see how teachers react. At first they were hate it, and now it's a good program. Now that they have been able to get all of their Walkaways in place, and the students are now trained on it and everything, It's now a pretty good model as to what is going on.

The principal reported in an SCC meeting that with the Walkaways:

Textbooks are becoming such a thing of the past. And as my staff *really* digs into their core and *really* believes in what they are doing in the work they're giving them [the students]—the textbook is becoming less and less of a tool because they are not using it to drive their curriculum (emphasis added).

During an interview the counselor member of the SCC explained:

Another cool thing about Walkaways is that it helps teachers know who is struggling in their class. “This student has an I. What can I do to be able to help them?” [The principal] gives them statistics saying this is how many Is you have—“What are you doing to be able to help those kids?” ...The teachers, they used to hate it when they did that and now they are, “Okay, let me see that list so that I can find out which kids really need to take care of stuff from first term. How can I help them?” The teachers have really bought in...when I started in school it was said that, “It’s every students right to fail. If they want to fail that’s their choice”. Teachers have stopped saying that here. They are saying, “What am I going to do to help this kid succeed? The kids can refuse to do the work, but how can I help them find some success?” and teachers have really bought into that a lot.

Parents have also perceived a change in teachers. One parent was impressed with how willingly the teachers adopted the Walkaway program. Speaking of the changes teachers had to make to implement the Walkaway program, the parent said:

[Teachers used to say] “I want to make sure my kids get their homework in, and I want to make sure the kids are participating in class, and that’s the basis for their grade.” [The teachers would] give [students] a test just to make sure, for the most part, they understood what’s going on.... [Teachers have] shifted completely, “I have to make sure all of these students are showing mastery—I’ll give them homework, and I’ll hope that they are participating in class, but my main focus is making sure these students understand.” That is a big shift for an entire staff to come on board with that in a short period of time.

The implementation of the Walkaway program has not been without challenges.

The counselor reported that the initial results of Walkaway implementation were not what had been expected.

When we first started it, it was, well I’m not going to say it was a disaster,

because it was good, but we did not get the results we expected. We had a ton of kids that had incompletes because they hadn't passed some of these Walkaways. Two-thirds of our kids had Is in different areas. So [the principal] went before the community council, and one good thing about [the principal is] he doesn't hide anything. He said, "This is what our problem is. Here's some suggestions that we would like to look at with this and what do you think of it?" The discussion took place about Walkaways and are they a positive thing and are they worth keeping? Are they good for kids, and what can we do to be able to help these kids get back on track? And that first term going into the second term—it was not necessarily a great thing for the school. We were in shock a little bit but the SCC with [the principal] helped—worked together saying, "You know what, these are some things we need to do as parents, and these are some things that need to happen at the school." I felt that that was a very positive process for our school to help make those Walkaways a good thing here at [M2]. We are having huge success, but that first term it was scary for a while, but he [the principal] used the SCC to help get that information.

One thing the school needed to do was train parents and students in exactly how the Walkaway program worked. The counselor explained that conferences were held with parents and students in the fall for Student Education and Occupation Plan (SEOP) and that time was also used to teach parents and students about the Walkaway program. The principal and SCC members also made the visits to the SCC and PTA meetings at the elementary schools to explain the program.

Several parents expressed concern, during SCC meetings and interviews, that the Walkaways may not be sufficiently rigorous. During an interview, one parent shared an experience she had.

I brought up a concern that I have—wondering if the teachers were dumbing down their tests just so that they could get that 80% pass so that they can move on. I brought that up and there was a teacher that was asked about that in the SCC, and she gave her opinion that there might be some of that going on. So [the principal] immediately said, "We are going to address that and make sure that's not happening." And since then he has brought that up several times. "We are going to make sure an A is an A." I know that is going to be one of their focuses next year also. To make sure that they are going deeper and not just covering the top level, the surface level of things but going deeper. So just the one comment I

brought up. I have seen how it's resonated, and that they are still following through on that.

The SCC meeting minutes from September 2007 record:

Items/concerns from the council: Walkaway's—are students just memorizing the test and are they really learning the material? This year teachers were asked to have multiple versions of the same tests they use and encourage students to pass the Walkaway the first time. This is a work in progress and will continue to work these things out as time goes on.

In an interview the principal confirmed the concerns when he stated, "I think as we continue to work with our Walkaways we need to make sure we are just not assessing for basic knowledge." To address concerns, the principal indicated that professional development would be focused on making high quality assessments at a deeper level.

One parent said that at the beginning of the 2007-2008 school year, the SCC wanted to know whether the Walkaway program was working.

Well, at the beginning of the year, last year as the first year they implemented the Walkaway program, and so it was pretty important at the beginning of the year to see what that did and was it working? And there was a feeling that if it's not working we won't do it. So he shared that data with us at the beginning of the year, and we were all excited to see the program really was working. There was that feeling that we would have fixed it if it wasn't working. And there still is. There are things we are always tweaking with that and other programs.

Another parent SCC member said, "I can see where there are some spots that still need—it's still a work in progress. It will continually change and improve. But I have great confidence in the program." Using student grades as a measure of the impact of Walkaways, a parent reported, "They [teachers] can see in their classrooms the difference between the grades improving with the Walkaways from before." The principal also noted in a meeting that course pass rates were increasing with the Walkaway program. The November 2007 meeting minutes read, "[The principal] reported comparisons

between first term grades in the 2006-07 and 2007-08 school year. Walkaways are working.” The perception among the SCC members was that the Walkaway program was having a profound impact on student achievement.

Although the parents on the SCC perceive the Walkaways are having a positive impact on student achievement, the larger parent community was not united. At a Walkaway presentation at one of the elementary meetings, a parent on the elementary SCC made the comment that she had never heard anything positive about the Walkaway program. In an interview the M2 SCC parent member that attended that meeting said, “That one lady that said she heard nothing positive about the Walkaways. Well, I had never heard anything negative.” The principal saw the comment by the elementary parent as an issue of communication rather than an issue of program effectiveness.

Although the Walkaway program is not a part of the School LAND Trust program, it is a strong component of the SIP. The program is fully implemented, as the principal required all teachers to develop Walkaways for their classes. With the implementation of the program there is a strong perception among teachers and SCC members that the Walkaway program has had a positive impact on student achievement.

To support the Walkaways, other programs have also been developed such as the advisory program, late bus program, and the student “tracker” program.

Advisory

The advisory and late bus programs were implemented to support the Walkaway program. Both programs have been fully implemented but there was less confidence in what impact the advisory and late bus programs were having. Both programs provided

evidence concerning implementation, but neither program yielded substantial evidence on perceived impact.

The advisory program was implemented in the 2007-2008 school year for 2 days a week. In the September 2007 SCC meeting the minutes report:

[The principal] gave the council an overview on how the Advisory Tuesday's and Wednesday's will work. Every Tuesday and Wednesday, students have an advisory period. It will run from 1:15-2:15. The first 20 minutes, students will have SSR or Silent Sustained Reading. During this time, teachers will pull the report for the students to know who needs to make up I's or F's and who is current. For the students who are current, they have the opportunity to attend enrichment classes or activities. Once the report is generated on Tuesday, that is what the student must do both Tuesday and Wednesday of that week. There is a schedule of the activities posted in the office. Teachers are asked to update all grades before they go home on Friday afternoon.

At the November 2007 SCC meeting the minutes report "Items/concerns from members—There is mixed feedback concerning Advisory Period. [The principal] would like to talk to those parents who need clarification on Advisory." A parent SCC member reported in an interview that "I believe it was just in our last meeting saying, 'We are having two days of this advisory maybe too much. Maybe we need to bring it down to one.'" The April 2007 SCC meeting minutes report, "The proposed plan for 2008-09 is to have advisory run on Tuesday's only. As of right now, the general feedback is positive for this to happen."

Late Bus

As stated in Chapter V, the late bus was provided 1 day a week, so students could stay after school and work with teachers on Walkaways. The late bus program was made possible by a pilot program from the school district to pay teachers to stay for two extra

hours once each quarter. A schedule of what teachers would be available each Tuesday was posted; students could stay after school and work with the teacher on Walkaways and then ride the late bus home. The counselor SCC member expressed appreciation for the late bus when he said, "I like [that] the SCC, through the trust LANDs, has given us... a late bus.... It takes away an excuse for the students." The October 2007 M2 SCC minutes say, "Both students and parents seem to be liking the fact that late busses will bring their students home after they have had the chance to make work up." During the February 2008 SCC meeting, SCC members questioned whether the late busses were worth the cost. The minutes report that the discussion concluded, "If we continue to offer a specific time for remediation, this will allow consistency for parents, students, and teachers, and in return improve student achievement." The late bus program and funding for teachers to stay late on Tuesdays was funded through the School LAND Trust program for 2008-2009.

The perception is that generally, the advisory and late bus programs do impact student achievement, but the programs are continually being reevaluated and adjusted. Although M2 uses data in driving their decisions, there was no evidence that student achievement data were analyzed relative to the advisory or late bus programs. The decisions to continue or adjust the program were based on teacher and SCC member perceptions more than on student data.

Tracker

A tracker is a guided study hall aide, who meets with students for one 70 to 83 minute block every other day. In an interview, the counselor SCC member described the

tracking program.

Actually what they do, our trackers here in the school, they are broken down by grades, and we actually assign students that are really struggling into a guidance study hall. They have, instead of the elective study hall, they have a study class of about eight students, and so those trackers work with those eight students that period. They [the trackers] look at powerschool and see what they [the students] are missing. “Where is it? Go to this teacher get that and come back. Take this test and here it is. You sit down and take this test right now.” So they [the trackers] are actually working with a smaller group of students. They have six classes of about eight students each, So 48 students. They are usually our highest at-risk kids. Now they also—because they only do that for six periods and they’re here for eight periods—they also have a period where they can go around and collect homework.

Counselors identify students in need, or parents and teachers can make recommendations. As one tracker stated:

Basically what the tracking system does is help those kids that don’t have someone else to look after them...letting them know that they have somebody that is going to be watching out for them and somebody that they report to, someone that cares about them and is counting on them to pull through.

A teacher said she sees the tracker push her students to do as much as they possibly can and has saved the teacher hours of time. Several anecdotal stories were shared to demonstrate the perceived impact. One story came from a math teacher.

I had three kids come in today to do make-up work. I wouldn’t have had that if there wasn’t somebody on their back here at school in a class saying, “Go get that work done.” They came in during my prep period and they sat there the whole time, and she [the tracker] came in and checked up on them to make sure they were doing what they were supposed to be doing and made sure I knew why they were there.... It’s hard as a teacher to keep track of each and every one.

Another teacher described how another student has been more successful because of the tracking program.

[He] has focus problems and so if they can help him focus and say, “you didn’t do this”—because he participates great in class—I just have to make sure he is with us. But getting the assignment back to me...is a problem, so they [the trackers]

tell him to go and walk and put it in my basket right now, so that provides a great aspect that that student wouldn't have had otherwise.

The common perception among SCC members and teachers interviewed was that the individual attention provided to the students served by the trackers did have a positive impact on student achievement. To demonstrate the impact of the tracking program a tracker shared the following story:

I have one boy that when I first got here he wasn't interested in anything. He didn't care about his grades; he just didn't care about anything. I'd be lucky to see him once a week. I have gotten close to him and gotten to know him really well. He is one of those ones that the teachers send down to my room; I have him everyday almost every period. For some teachers he has made extra effort to be good in their class now, and so he stays in their class and actually does work, and the teacher is very impressed by that. He is now pulling As and Bs where before he was straight Fs. We have made up everything. He had all four terms as Fs but he is now going to graduate.

He lives with his dad; his dad goes to work at 5:30 a.m., so he doesn't have a lot of parental support at home to get him up. So when he doesn't make it to school, he'll call me and say, Mrs. ... I'm on my way and just wanted to check in and let you know this is what happened, and I'm walking to school, or sometimes I'll send the police officer out to get him. Before, he could care less. He just wouldn't show up. Now he's calling in and writing reports. He's learning to talk to the teachers in a respectful way and not so mouthy with them. I've had a lot of teachers say thank you for that.

It changes their lives and not just with grades. It's with everything—how they are treated and how they treat others. To me it's everything—it changes a lot in their lives. You get a big picture of how their lives are, so you know how to handle them and how to teach them and how to interact with them. It's more than just a classroom—kind of a mom that they don't have.

Two concerns were expressed about the tracking program. While discussing the impact of the student trackers, one of the math teachers said:

The down side is they don't have the math background to really help, so kids will come in and say I don't know how to do this, but I'm teaching, and I can't help them right then. But at least they are getting it. And sometimes we can get the kid started and tell them and they can get it done. That is the only down side is that

the trackers don't have a strong enough math background to be able to be helpful and tutor.

Another math teacher said, "They weren't hired to teach math, and as much as some of the teachers would like to have them be able to teach math, that is not an option."

The tracker expressed the concern that some students were still not responsive to the program.

I can't do everything for them, and I'm not going to, and I'll try as hard as I can, and I'll do as much as I can for them as long as they're doing it back in return. But when they're coming [to school] every nine days. You know they're basically wasting my time and taking up a spot in this class that somebody else could use and would use.

The tracker expressed a desire that something else needed to be done for the few non-responsive students.

The SCC was very appreciative of receiving regular reports on how the tracking program is working and as a result perceive the program as having an impact on student learning. The tracker said that some of the students she has worked with are now prepared to move on to high school and have a much higher chance of being successful, but some of the students will still need the special assistance to achieve in high school. The tracker expressed concern that some students are just starting down a successful path but would not make it without similar support in high school. The tracking program has been fully implemented this year and was partially funded through the School LAND Trust funds. The program will be fully funded out of regular school funds for 2008-2009.

Purchases

In addition to the school wide programs for intervention, the school LAND trust

program plan designated the following purchases for 2007-2008: (a) a mobile computer lab for the math department, (b) a classroom set of graphing calculators for the math department, and (c) writing software licenses for all students to be used in classes requiring writing. Although designated to be purchased through the School LAND Trust program, the writing software licenses were purchased through other state funds. The money that had been designated for the writing software was then used to (a) hire a tracker to assist students struggling in math, language arts, and science, and (b) fund the late bus once a week to transport students home after staying late to work with teachers.

Mobile computer lab. Three mobile computer labs have been purchased at M2 since the school opened in 2004-2005. In 2007-2008, the most recently purchased computer lab was acquired for the math department using School LAND Trust funds. The math department was selected to receive the mobile computer lab because improvement of math scores was one of the primary goals of the SIP, and the math department had very little access to the other computer labs that were used primarily by language arts and science classes.

Five different math teachers were interviewed concerning the use and impact of the mobile computer lab purchased in 2007-2008. Two of the five math teachers used the mobile computer labs. One math teacher, in reply to the question concerning what she appreciated most about the computer lab, responded, "Having it accessible for one thing and being able to use it for some of the internet activity with the kids, so they can go to a site and they can practice and drill and look at different things." When I asked the teacher how much she used it, she replied, "I would say maybe once a quarter." The other math

teacher that reported using the computer lab said the mobile computer lab was used most often for her geometry classes.

We have access especially for our geometry students to do visual—not just constructions but they can take objects and make hypothesis or more than one and then test it out using that. It gives them an idea—they find the counter example real fast or gives them an idea that it might be true, and then we lead into more of a formal proof later.... It allows me to have the students do more discoveries.

The other three math teachers indicated they had never used the mobile computer lab.

One math teacher said, “I appreciate the fact that I could if I chose to, but I haven’t used it.” The teachers who never used the labs also said they were not consulted on the purchase of the labs. When I asked a group of three math teachers if they had made any contribution in asking for the computers, one teacher replied as the other two teachers nodded their heads. “No, I had no idea. Just one day they announced it.”

The math teachers reported several challenges to using the mobile computer lab.

The teacher who used the lab quarterly said:

The disadvantage is that in order to get all of the computers into the actual hands of the kids, it takes enough out of my class time to get them logged in and logged out and checking to make sure that they’re not on inappropriate sites and checking that they are always on task. So it takes enough time out of my teaching where it’s hard to make sure that they are on-task and getting what they need to in exchange for the time that I could spend quickly going through the material.

A math teacher who has not used the mobile computer lab said, “We don’t have time to do extra stuff that we could on those computers. There just isn’t time.” To the teachers who did not use the computer lab, the common perception was “with the students not having any contact with [the geometer’s sketchpad] at all, you have to teach them how to use geometer’s sketchpad, which is a long process, so it’s not worth the time really.” One teacher referred to the computer lab as “fluff” that could be left out of the curriculum.

The implementation and impact of the mobile computer lab varied greatly from teacher to teacher. The two prominent factors determining teacher use and impact of the computer lab were availability and teacher training. If the teachers understood how the computer could be used to help facilitate learning, they were enthusiastic about using them, perceived them as having an impact on student learning, and felt the availability of the computer labs was too limited. Math teachers who did not use the computer labs did not have a vision for how they would really benefit student achievement.

Graphing calculators. Parent SCC members expressed concern that they had never received any report from math teachers about the implementation or impact of the graphing calculators. Several classroom sets of graphing calculators had been purchased over the years, and another two classroom sets of graphing calculators were designated to be purchased for the 2008-2009 school year, but the impact of these calculators is unclear to SCC members. When asked how the SCC learned about the implementation or impact of the plans developed by the SCC, one parent SCC member said, “Some parts of the plan I’m not sure we have heard too much about. Like we’ve spent money to buy graphing calculators. We haven’t heard too much about how that really helps.” This parent made a loose connection between math test scores as showing the impact of calculators when she said, “You look at the data and see their math scores are doing well.” The parent had little justification for making the connection between the calculators and the CRT scores, but the data she received did affect her perception.

The math teachers were interviewed concerning their perception of the use and impact of the graphing calculators. Each of the five teachers interviewed had a classroom

set of graphing calculators, and all of them reported using them daily. Two teachers indicated that they were not currently using the graphing calculators, “We both have taken them away from the students because they were destroying them or writing text messages on them and playing the games that come on them.” As with the computers, teachers require training to use graphing calculators most effectively. Concerning the two new classroom sets of graphing calculators, a geometry teacher reported, “We are going to an in-service this summer on how to use them, so they [the new graphing calculators] will go to us because of the training.”

When asked about the impact of having the graphing calculators the teachers discussed several different benefits the calculators provide. One teacher discussed how the calculator provides immediate feedback to the students on whether they have done things correctly.

[The calculator] is a really good way for [the students] to see. It's immediate positive feedback or negative, if they got it wrong. But it's feedback. As a student, I never had that option, so it's a really good asset for the kids.

Several teachers talked about how the graphing calculators allow the students to get into a much deeper understanding of the mathematics because the student is not burdened with many tedious hand calculations. One teacher said, “Some mathematics opens up for [the students] with the graphing calculator that would be too tedious to do by hand.” Students also used the graphing calculators to analyze data they had gathered from experiments conducted using different calculator based probes. The math teachers' perception was that the graphing calculators provided learning opportunities that would not have existed without the calculators. Comparing her use of the graphing calculators to the previous

year when she did not use them as much, a math teacher said, “I think it has been a more powerful experience.

Reading and writing software. The reading and writing software has now been used for three years. Teachers reported that science and social studies teachers as well as language arts teachers are using the writing program. One parent SCC member shared her perception concerning the impact. “Okay, we spent this much money from Trust LANDs on the Go My Access, the writing scores are coming up. So we relate the two together.” A teacher SCC member shared her perception of how the writing software impacts student achievement. “I think it has really made a big difference on our achievement of our school. I know our scores have gone up from that because the kids have been able to see what they need to work on and things like that.” Another parent commented about the reading software purchased years earlier, “We saw that the Read 180 program had actually improved out student scores.”

As discussed in Chapter V, SCC parent members questioned the writing program, and two language arts teachers came and presented data to the SCC. Afterwards the SCC was unanimously supportive of continuing the funding for the writing program. Although the reading and writing programs have both been questioned, the perceived impact on student achievement has caused continued support of the programs.

M3

At M3 the SCC has not been involved in the development of past School Improvement Plans or School LAND Trust plans. The current plans for 2008-2009 were

reviewed and approved by the SCC, but the SCC was not involved in the development of the plans. As a result of the lack of SCC involvement in the development of the plans, the third evaluation question does not apply to M3; however, an analysis of the data gathered related to the implementation of the 2007-2008 plans and perceived impact does provide a contrast to the other two middle schools.

At M3 the SIP includes the professional development plan, but it does not include the same strategies implemented by the School LAND Trust plans. In the data collection process three primary strategies of the SIP and School LAND Trust plan emerged as themes. There was evidence that secondary components of the SIP, such as teacher collaboration time and activities, had been implemented, but the data on perceived impact were so limited that the narrative excludes secondary components of the plan.

The three primary strategies outlined in the plans that emerged as themes in the data were (a) the school's reading program, (b) the remediation program, and (c) the piano program. The reading and remediation programs were included in the current school program and next year's SIP. The piano program has been the strategy funded by the School LAND Trust program for the past 4 years. The piano program has also been approved for next year.

Reading Program

The principal reported:

Before I got here, and I'm definitely not going to take credit for that. I give all the credit to our staff. Before I got here two principals before me, [the principal] and his staff got together. The average median reader of the kids coming to us at that particular moment in time was a little above second grade. And second grade—these were seventh grade kids man. There's something missed there. They

decided that they would do something about it. So what they did is they were going through that path finding process that we're having to go through now because, and you have to do that about every five or six years to rehone your focus. They looked at several different models and landed on Success For All [SFA] out of Johns Hopkins University, and it's very logical to me why they would do that because it's a highly structured, scripted type of program that content area teachers could use very effectively because that was originally developed for the elementary level, and I understand why they did that because the kids coming were coming to us at that level in their reading ability. Again, the logic behind landing on SFA was that it's a very structured program and you got content area teachers—math teachers, social studies teachers, health teachers and that type of thing that could very easily fit into that highly structured, “This is what you do on day one; this is what you do on day two; blah, blah, blah” and that type of thing.

As a result of the low reading performance, the school focused on literacy and literacy development. The school (a) made a commitment to improve reading ability, (b) developed a reading program, and (c) executed the reading program. One component of the reading program includes a reading class for every student during the first hour of the day. The principal reported that “first period every day every teacher” teaches a reading class regardless of their certification.

Although the school improvement and School LAND Trust plans were not developed by the SCC, the SCC did receive reports on the reading program. During the January SCC meeting the minutes record under the heading “principal's report”, “109 students achieved grade level from beginning of the year. We still have about 200 students left to reach that goal.” A teacher member of the SCC also indicated that reading levels and reading growth was reported in SCC and SIC meetings regularly. Because of the reporting system of the reading program, the principal said, “We do a very good job at knowing where our kids are with respect to their reading.”

The perceived impact of the reading program is that it has a very positive

influence on student achievement. A teacher described the program as being successful in bringing students with a 0.0 reading level up to the 4.0 in a single year including summer school. The community partner SCC member explained that with the reading program, “Our literacy rates have gone up every year. Kids are at a higher reading level because [the principal] instituted an hour—a certain period each morning that the kids read.” A parent member, upon learning of the reading program, investigated the materials on the Internet. The same parent described his experience when the principal presented the data about the reading levels.

I have often said that the only reason I’m on the council is to help me to understand what is going on at the school, so I’m not in the dark as to what is taking place here. It was definitely important to know the levels that the students were at in the school as a whole and to see how those were improved upon—that was big. It was a lot of emotion. Because when we first found out how poorly the state of the reading level was for the school—it was like, ‘OUCH!’ And then when we found out how much improvement had been made it was like ‘WOW!’

This comment demonstrates how the parent obtained the perception that the current reading program is having a positive impact on student achievement.

Remediation Program

Another part of the SIP for next year that has already been implemented is a remediation program that includes providing students with packets, which if completed will change a student’s failing grade to a pass. The principal explained the packets have impacted students by “really giving kids some additional time to focus on essential curriculum that they need to have focused on with the additional tool.” To facilitate the students completing the packets the principal reported:

I literally sit down with parents one-on-one and we go through this. I do. This

year I've gotten a little bit of help from my assistant principal and some of my counseling staff from my after-school program. For the most part I just sit down with parents, and we go over all of the data, and we have some very frank discussions about their [the students'] future and how education is a vital component. I've talked to thousands of parents from every socio economic background from the upper-end echelon to those that are just struggling to eat each and every day, and I've looked in their eyes and found the common denominator. Parents from—it doesn't matter if you're from Sudan or if you're from the east bench—all parents care deeply and passionately love their kids and want their kids to do well... They love their kids intently, and they want to make sure their kids succeed, whether or not they have the parenting skills or the educational background themselves. I can see it in their eyes, and those meetings are vital. That's probably the best thing to come of that, and that type of thing. Not so much that their working on the packets, of course that's very important because they're gaining essential skills and knowledge, but that dialogue that we're having with the parent. We're getting the parent on board. The parent is a part of the process is vital. The more you get the parent involved in that process ... the better the kid succeeds.

During the school year, reports from the after-school teacher were provided to the SCC concerning the packets. At one meeting it was reported that 75% of the students with packets had completed their assigned packets. Another report was given that the packets resulted in 75 fewer failures for the second quarter of the 2007-2008 school year. The reports were cited by different SCC members as providing the perception that the packets are having a positive impact on student achievement at M3.

Piano Program

The piano program is provided at M3 through the school LAND trust funds and a matching music grant. The program provides a piano class to as many as 60 students as a part of their regular school day. Behind M3, there is a set of portable classrooms, and one of the portable classrooms serves as the piano classroom. The piano classroom has ten full size electronic keyboards that were provided through the original grant money. The

piano teacher described the program.

The kids have this regular class during the day, and they get a grade, and they come for attendance, and it's a regular music course in the school. The program is—we study—well, we start with beginning piano. Most of these kids have never had any music class. A few of them have had maybe band or orchestra and play a little of the violin or something in grade school. Most of them start from the very beginning—we start from finger numbers and learning the musical alphabet – ABCDEFG, ABCDEFG. We're starting from scratch. They use an Alfred course, which is a condensed book for late beginners. We're not going to spend as much time maybe as a 6-year-old on reinforcing the basic concepts. They catch on really quick, and they move from the white keys to the black keys to reading on the staff in just a few weeks. They are very fast learners. We have a recital at the end of every quarter, so they work from the book for their basic curriculum, but then they have their special song. The recital song at the end of each quarter that is their own song. So they are familiar with the songs that one another are learning from the book. So we can do a lot of group things together because they are doing the same material in that book and that helps to do games together and reinforce the concepts by playing in groups doing duets, et cetera. But then at the end of the term—maybe a couple of weeks before the end of the term—they get their own song that no one else has. It's just their own song, and we do that four times a year.

Although the course uses the text, the teacher acknowledged that some students are able to play by ear. “They just teach one another and by hearing it. Lots of them play by ear. I swear they just have rhythm in their blood, and they're able to just learn it that way.” The teacher is able to utilize students' natural ability to help them develop the skills to read music also.

So they will come in, and it's fun to see them actually learn “Oh, that's a C, that's a G, oh, that's what I'm playing” and it starts to come together kind of Backwards maybe, instead of reading first and then playing. You know they're coming in and playing and then discovering later what it is they're playing and that they can read it.

The SCC was not involved in the development of the plan to fund the piano program, nor has the SCC received any reports concerning the implementation or impact of the piano program. The piano program is not mentioned in the SIP. The only exposure

one parent had to the program was being asked to sign the School LAND Trust plan.

Another parent, upon learning of the School LAND Trust program, went to the website and learned the funds had been used for the piano program. The parent then asked the principal who provided a general explanation of the program.

When asked about the benefits of the piano program, the principal said:

The Trust LAND dollars is a continuous flow of money that helps me with enhancing my fine arts program a little bit because often times is what happens in schools like ours is that you rob Peter to pay Paul. The kids miss out on some beautiful, wonderful experiences. What the Trust LAND dollars helps me is give our kids that unique musical experience that enhances their lives and helps them academically. Although no data was available to document an academic impact, the piano teacher perceived the piano program as providing the students real benefits. The teacher felt the piano program impacted students' attitudes and confidence as well as their performance in math and reading classes. The teacher also expressed an intuitive sense that students are happier and doing better in classes because of the piano experience.

At one point while being interviewed the piano teacher became emotional and said, "I see the students happier.... I see them caring about doing better in their other classes." The piano teacher went on to tell a story of one of her students.

I was driving home the other day and [saw] one of my students who I see walking home with his hands empty everyday—meaning he never does home work. He just leaves everything at school, comes, shows up at school and does whatever, I guess, and then goes home never taking a book, and I've seen this for, what are we in our 7th month or 8th month of school, and I drove by and I saw him carrying a couple books in his hands and I rolled down my windows as I was driving by and said, "I see you're going to read tonight or you've got some project that you are going to work on." And he looked at me like, "yeah." And he was proud of it. He thought, "Yeah, my teacher just saw me taking home a book and that's okay." I don't know. I can't contribute [attribute] that to music, but I know he cares more about school. And wherever that comes from, it is a good thing. But he cares about piano, and I've seen that change. I would like to assume there is some sort of connection there. It just makes them feel like they have something.

The teacher could not say the piano caused the change, but she felt it did have an

influence, as she witnessed the change in attitude take place relative to the piano as his skills increased. The teacher commented:

You know they'll bring their friends in at recess and say, "Listen to my song", and they'll hook up two headphones, so they can listen to the same piano, and they'll show them. They're so proud of that, and I feel like that gives them their thing—their identity. If that's a starting point, then great.

Speaking with the piano teacher, one gets a sense of the impact the piano program is having on the students involved. The parent members of the SCC have not received any information related to the impact of M3's music program. One parent commented, "I just trust that it is a good deal and is beneficial to the school." Another parent member explained:

It was explained how it [the piano program] fit in with the school improvement plan. That music and the arts, of course, lend to the whole learning experience. How it was shown that students who take part in music and learn to play instruments and so forth are shown to do better in school, so by being able to take part in a music program, the likelihood of them doing better in school is very much improved. That was how its impact was shown to me to be worthy of its funding—I guess.

Conclusion

The implementation of the SIP at M1 is a complex web of activity. The two main goals of providing academic support and promoting healthy and respectful relationships both involve different strategies of implementation. As demonstrated, the areas most heavily emphasized were the strategies related to MYP implementation, academic support provided through the Homework Club, and curriculum mapping. The implementation of each of these strategies is an evolutionary process, and although they are implemented to improve student achievement and perceptions are that the strategies

are having a positive impact, measurable evidence of impact has not been identified.

The M2 SIP had the goal of increasing student achievement by 5% in math, science, and language arts. Two primary activities developed by the SCC support the accomplishment of this goal.

First, in conjunction with the standard curriculum, special education programs, and programs for English language learners, the Walkaway program serves to focus teachers' attention on helping students master the core objectives that will be measured on the end of level tests. The programs discussed above are geared towards supporting the Walkaways for different student populations. The Walkaway program is considered a universal program that facilitates learning for all students. The advisory program serves to provide extension opportunities for students who have already achieved the standards and provides remediation for students who have not yet achieved the standards. The late bus program provides an additional opportunity for students who require more help than can be provided during the advisory time period to achieve the standard objectives. The tracker program has been added to serve the needs of the lowest achieving students. Each program has been implemented within the last two years, but within that relatively short time period there is a strong perceived impact on student achievement.

Second, technological hardware and software is purchased with the belief that it will facilitate a higher degree of learning. Mobile computer labs have been purchased, and another is planned for purchase for 2008-2009. Classroom sets of graphing calculators have been purchased, and two additional classroom sets will be purchased for 2008-2009. The impact of the mobile computer labs and graphing calculators is more

assumed than perceived because little evidence has been provided to the SCC regarding impact. The reading and writing software has been used for a few years, and data have been shared that have demonstrated that test scores have increased since using the software. Although this is not evidence of causation, it is evidence that has influenced SCC member perceptions of a positive impact.

At M3, the cases of the reading program, the remediation program, and the piano program provide a picture of how the SIPs and School LAND Trust program plans are implemented at M3. The SCC has had very little involvement in the development or implementation of the programs, but the amount of information received on programs had a direct relationship to the perceived impact of the programs on student achievement.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative strength-based process evaluation of Utah middle SCCs was to examine exemplary middle level SCCs to seek what is working especially well, examine why it is working well, and seek ideas for making similar performance more common (Preskill & Catsambas, 2006). The evaluation was guided by three questions related to (a) legal compliance, (b) strategies and processes, and (c) implementation and perceived impact of developed plans. In this chapter I will briefly discuss the findings related to the guiding questions and then present the general themes that emerged through the evaluation of the three participating SCCs. I will then present the significance of these findings and recommendations for future research.

Findings

As I began the evaluation I had clear questions related to legal compliance, promising strategies and processes, and perceived impact of implemented plans. Throughout the analysis process, it became more and more difficult to separate all the different components I was looking for in the evaluation, as shall be seen in the following discussion. Although the legal requirements assume some ideal situations that are not carried out in every school, the exemplary SCCs, and to a certain extent the fledgling SCC, evaluated did strive to create councils that represented their communities in the interest of improving education for the students within each community.

Legal Compliance

Are Utah middle SCCs identified as exemplary implementing the law as prescribed? Yes, they are, though I do have some reservations. The presentation of data in Chapter IV demonstrates how the exemplary middle-level SCCs strive to follow the legal requirements. The main issues with regard to legal compliance were elections and membership, development of the school plans utilizing U-PASS data, and communicating with the public.

The legal compliance is not perfect at any of the schools evaluated; however, there were notable differences between the exemplary and the fledgling SCCs. M1 and M2 had a historical pattern of holding consistent elections for parent members. M3 had two reliable parent members for the first time in several years. None of the schools had consistent election procedures for school employee members that matched the legal requirements. M1 and M2 SCCs were fully involved in using U-PASS data to inform decisions related to the development of the required school improvement plans. The M3 SCC was not fully engaged in the school improvement process. Although the SCCs had some effective forms of communication within the council and with the public, there were many weaknesses related to communication with the public.

Strategies and Processes

Do Utah middle SCCs identified as exemplary utilize strategies of effective site-based management and shared decision-making identified in the literature? Yes, as discussed in Chapter V, which provides a view of what strategies are used and how each school implements the different strategies identified in the literature. The strengths and

recommendations for the strategies and processes are identified in Table 6. In this table, the first column lists the strategies or processes that were identified as potentially influencing the ability of an SCC to impact student achievement. Evidence of the seven strategies and processes were identified at each middle school. The second column lists the essence of the strengths of those processes that were identified through the appreciative inquiry at the selected SCCs. The third column represents the heart of what was expressed by SCC members as they were asked to imagine how the SCC process could be improved. Analyzing the collection of responses to these *imagine* questions in the appreciative inquiry resulted in the listed recommendations.

Many of the strategies and processes were directly related to the legal requirements of the SCC. The strategies and processes were also closely related to each other. The full engagement of the SCC in the plan development process was a direct result of principal support and working together in a professional learning community with a focus on student learning. The principal provided support by sharing data, which were essential to the collaboration within the professional learning community. Further, the existence of the resources, though not adequate, has made the development of plans promising and the implementation of plans possible. The recommendations are also closely related to one another. One of the primary areas where each school can improve is in gathering specific data related to how the implementation of the developed plans impact student learning and providing the SCC and larger community with regular reports.

Table 6

Strategies and Processes of Exemplary Middle-Level SCCs

Strategy or process	Strengths	Recommendations
SCC member confidence	Full engagement in plan development process.	Measure impact of plan implementation and report to SCC and school community.
Professional learning community	Collaboration is focused on student learning.	Involve more teachers in reporting to SCC on needs and impact of programs.
Principal support	Freely share knowledge and data.	
Student data	Continual use of multiple forms of data to inform decision-making.	Seek and share more data on how the implemented programs impact students.
Communication mechanisms	SCC members are well informed.	Seek more effective ways to inform the school community.
Adequate resources	Although funds limit possibilities, School LAND Trust funds make programs possible.	
Collective accountability	Recognize the importance of and supported programs that influence collective accountability.	Conscious focus on ensuring SCC decisions require collective accountability.

Implementation and Perceived Impact

To what degree are the plans developed by exemplary middle SCCs being fully implemented, and are they perceived by council members and school personnel as having a positive impact on student achievement? There is strong evidence that the plans are fully implemented at all three schools, and yes, the implementation is perceived as having a positive impact on student achievement. Chapter VI presented the unique plans developed at each school and the perceived impact. In the cases of M1 and M2, the plans were developed and fully implemented with SCC involvement. Although programs like the MYP at M1 are at relatively early stages of implementation, they are still

implemented and are already perceived as having an impact. At M3 the SCC was not involved in the development of the plans, but the plans were being implemented.

The perception of the impact the plans were having was closely related to the amount of data provided to the SCC members in relation to the plan. In other words, where SCC members regularly received data on achievement test scores, grades, and attendance, they were more likely to perceive that implementation of the plan was having an impact. In contrast, when SCC members were asked to sign off on a plan without data, implemented a plan and had not received any information, or never heard reports from individuals involved in implementation, the perceived impact was weak.

It is important to recognize that the impact discussed in this evaluation is based on perceptions of SCC members and school personnel. The measurability of actual impact is one of the problems identified with the shared decision-making as a reform strategy. Determining actual impact would require appropriate research and evaluation designs. The strength of implementation is apparent at each school, but each SCC expressed a desire to have some way to measure impact of implemented programs, and reporting the impact to the SCC.

Discussion

In the process of evaluating legal compliance, strategies and processes, and implementation and perceived impact, several themes emerged related to what works especially well and what concerns arise in the SCC process. One critical factor that clearly distinguished the exemplary SCCs from the fledgling SCC related to successfully

generating interest in SCC membership and election procedures. Second, although the experiences were more frequent at the exemplary SCCs, the sources of confidence for each SCC consistently related to direct involvement in important decisions related to the school improvement process. A third critical element emerged as the SCCs effectively used multiple forms of data to drive school improvement decisions. Although data was shared in all three SCCs, the distinguishing factor was how the data was used to inform decisions. A fourth theme relates to mechanisms of SCC communication.

Communication within each SCC was strong, but each SCC expressed a desire to be more effective in reaching out to the larger school community. Each of these themes will be discussed in turn. The discussion will conclude with a general theme that is interwoven through each facet of a successful SCC—a balance between professional expertise and democratic participation.

Interest in SCC Membership and Elections

SCC membership and elections are outlined in the law (Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1A-108). The most recent version of the law outlines procedures for notification of elections and calls for candidates. The two exemplary SCCs have well established election procedures for parent membership designed to fit the needs of their respective school communities. Each year the SCCs consider how they can be more effective in generating interest and motivating candidates. The law assumes that there will be multiple parents and school employees who are interested in declaring candidacy for open positions. The three middle schools evaluated demonstrate that in some areas that assumption is false. At M1, with its higher socioeconomic class, there have always been

sufficient parent candidates to fill the open positions. At M2, the current SCC members had to do more ambitious recruiting to get enough candidates, but always managed to get enough to fill the available positions. At M3, with its lower socioeconomic class, it has proven most difficult to get enough interested parents to even have a functioning SCC.

School employee interest in SCC membership is lower than parents. The principals at M1 and M2 both discussed how they had to encourage faculty to be a part of the SCC. At M3, school employee members were assigned from another school committee. Once the school employee members are a part of the SCC, they appreciate the experience. As one M2 SCC school employee member said, "I am glad I am on it because I have actually learned a lot about how that money is given and how it's used." An SCC school employee member at M1 said, "It's nice to have an increased awareness of everything else that is going on in the school and feel more connected." Even with the positive response, the M2 principal commented, "There are not a lot of people knocking the door down to get in."

Once the candidates are established, the law (Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1A-108) required the parent members to be elected by parents, and school employees be elected by school employees. At M1 and M2 the parent elections were held, and both had well-established procedures for the elections. At M1, adjustments were being made to make sure the school was compliant with the law. The 2007-2008 school year was the first time M3 had any parent interest at all, so they had not held an election. None of the schools evaluated held a school employee election as prescribed by the law.

Specific data were not gathered concerning how many people voted in the actual

elections that took place at M1 and M2, but at M1 the incoming sixth grade parents were invited to vote for the new SCC members at spring registration, and at M2 elections took place at parent teacher conferences. The new legal requirements (Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1A-108) have become more specific with regard to elections requiring that notice be posted 14 days in advance and that ballots be cast in a secure ballot box. The election process is designed to provide a fair democratic process to becoming a member of the SCC. Although a few parents expressed active interest in becoming members of the SCC, most members had to be encouraged and receive specific invitations to declare candidacy or accept a position appointment. Although the law does provide an avenue to make appointments, it does not address the needs of a school like M3 that still does not have enough interested parents to form an SCC as prescribed by law.

Fung (2004) found that participation rates are also very low in Chicago schools, where local school councils have a majority parent membership, as 30 to 50% of elected membership positions went uncontested and another 15% of available positions go unfilled. Elections are a fundamental component of representative democracy, but elections assume that there will be candidates and interested voters. The lack of involvement calls into question whether the SCC is really a form of democratic participation. Fung suggests that the democratic ideal should be judged based on quality rather than quantity and also on the connections between those who participate and those who do not. Are the participants representative of the larger population?

The SCCs participating in the current evaluation have demonstrated different levels of participation in the decision-making process. Using the standards for measuring

quality determined in the current evaluation, the quality of participation is relatively high. The SCC process is reliant upon participation of the principal, school employees, and parents. The evaluation results have shown that to obtain the candidates necessary for an election that follows the legal guidance, active recruitment must take place for both parents and school employees.

Sources of SCC Member Confidence

Not only is interest in membership important, but also for an SCC to contribute to school leadership, it is essential that SCC members have confidence that their involvement will make a difference. As SCC members shared confidence-building experiences, common themes emerged at each school. At M1, confidence was built as members invested time and energy in the decision making process. The favorite part of that process was spending money on programs that showed promise for improving student learning. At M2, confidence was built as members became fully involved in the school improvement process under the direction of a supportive principal. At M3, as a fledgling SCC, confidence was built as the SCC worked with the school in the hiring of a new principal. A consensus existed at M3 that more parent involvement would increase the confidence in the process. All three SCCs expressed the expectation that confidence would increase by knowing that SCC decisions had a positive impact on student learning.

Full engagement in the SCC process serves as the foundation for confidence at M1. Although a parent commented that spending money to implement programs built confidence, the programs were not random recommendations. Each SCC decision was preceded by concerns, recommendations, investigations, and discussions. The SCC

process requires a large investment of time and energy as well as a level of expertise to inform the final democratic decision. It is possible that parent SCC members could participate in the investigation and develop expertise as demonstrated at M1, when a parent member made a site visit to another school with the principal and district personnel to witness a high computer access classroom. Although parent SCC member expertise is possible, it is much more common for the expertise to come from school professionals—primarily the principal. The suggestion that confidence would increase by being better informed about the impact that SCC decisions are having on student achievement also demonstrates the need for expertise in measuring and reporting that impact.

Some have criticized the prominent role the principal plays in a site-based council (Malen & Vincent, 2008). Yet, the confidence at M2 was a direct result of principal actions. The principal at M2 was a strong leader and had a dominant role in the SCC. Even with the dominant role, the M2 SCC members felt a strong level of trust in the principal, as there was a feeling that he was completely honest. “He gives us the good, the bad, and the ugly—everything.” The prevalence of data provided by the principal informs the SCC members, so they understand the needs of the school. Based on the needs of the school, the SCC members can focus their attention on proposals that will serve the needs of all students rather than isolating their focus to the needs of their own children. Although the principal was a strong leader and authority, the M2 SCC members were a respected part of the process. SCC members did not just follow the principal’s lead. They questioned programs, proposed alternative programs, and requested

information to inform the SCC decisions. At M2, it was the principal filling the role of providing a level of expertise balanced with the respect for SCC parent member suggestions and concerns that served as the source of building confidence in the process.

M3 SCC members gained confidence by participating in the process of hiring a new principal and said increased parent participation would increase the confidence of SCC members. M3 SCC members also provided evidence of one practice that erodes confidence. Parents were asked to sign off on plans when they did not participate in the development of the plans. Disappointment was expressed as one member responded to a question about the implementation of a school program. "I wish I could tell you a lot about that. My exposure was 'here's the paper work, and we need you to sign it.'" Although the SCC members were not involved in the development of the school plans, the expertise at M3 was highly respected. Speaking of the process of hiring the new principal, the community partner commented, "[The current principal] has brought [M3] a long ways, and the parents want the same type of principal coming in." The few active members of the SCC, including the principal, all recognized that the SCC provides an excellent avenue for increasing parent voice in the process, but work remains to build the confidence desired by participants.

The sources of confidence at the three evaluated middle level SCCs demonstrate how important it is to engage SCC members in the full development process. All SCC members need to have a voice in making proposals and expressing concerns. The SCC members come from different perspectives. The professional educators have a level of expertise that informs the process, but parents bring a perspective involving student needs

as they relate to local circumstances. Professional and parent participation in the development process creates an environment where educational innovation can occur in response to government requirements and local conditions.

When community is the ideal, conflict and tension are seen as not only unavoidable but as necessary elements in becoming educated. Only through informed, open, critical, public dialogue about the aims and means of education is it possible to create agreement around a normative framework based upon the principles of empathy, justice, and reciprocity, that would allow educators, students, and parents to build a consistent and sensible educational program. (Bullough, 1988, p. 135)

*Use of Data to Drive SCC School
Improvement Decisions*

Malen and Vincent (2008) have documented how principals and other professionals can manipulate the democratic process to maintain control. One way to hinder that tendency and restore balance is through the use of data to drive the decisions made in the SCC. The use of multiple forms of data at M1 and M2 to inform the decision-making process was evident and served as a counterbalance to principal control.

In the case of M3, evidence demonstrated that although data were shared in the school improvement plan, the SCC was not involved in the development of the school improvement decisions beyond reading and providing approval. M1 and M2, however, demonstrated effective use of data. U-PASS data were presented to the entire SCC to identify needs, and general goals were established based on needs identified in the data. At M1, the U-PASS data were continually before the SCC as a historical record was posted on bulletin paper in the conference room where the SCC met. At M2 the principal started out the year with a presentation of the U-PASS data.

The data shared at each school went far beyond the U-PASS test results. A characteristic of both SCCs identified as exemplary was a continual use of multiple forms of data. At M1, the SCC spent time reviewing the data from a survey of students, teachers, and parents concerning school quality. The complete data were given to the SCC, and the principal asked for input in making sense of it. There was no evidence of the principal manipulating the data to serve his personal needs; there was an authentic desire to understand what the school could do to improve, and the SCC members all had the opportunity to contribute to the conversation. Other data used at M1 consisted of student grades, school test scores, and more informational data on possible programs as presented by the assistant principal concerning the reading program.

The principal at M2 continually shared multiple forms of data with the SCC. As stated earlier, the perception of the SCC members was that the principal did not hide anything. The open sharing of data empowered the SCC members to make informed decisions. It also increased the confidence level, so if the SCC members questioned a program's effectiveness, they were willing to ask for needed data to inform the decision. Data at M2 consisted of Walkaway results, student grades, and practice CRTs, as well as the information on potential programs provided by teachers, the principal, and occasionally other visitors when requested. Although a principal could possibly withhold data or try to use data to manipulate the SCC, a perceptive SCC would be able to recognize the deception, and the broken trust would lead to decreased confidence and greater SCC challenges.

SCC members at each of the evaluated schools appreciated openness and honesty

with data. From studying the implementation and perceived impact of the decisions made by the SCCs, a strong desire was expressed to have additional data directly related to the implementation and impact of the plans developed by the SCC. As a parent SCC member at M3 said relative to the piano program, “I want to see the data, and I didn’t get any of that.” At M2, one of the reasons the SCC was so supportive of the Walkaway and tracker programs was because they had received data on the impact. A couple of parent members at M2 expressed a desire to have some kind of data on the computer labs or the graphing calculators. A parent member at M1 indicated that the SCC experience would become more meaningful if she could see the plans implemented in the classroom to see their effect. The evaluation found that the plans were being implemented and there was a perceived impact by those involved in the programs, but the SCC members did not always receive data demonstrating the impact.

Openly and honestly sharing data can empower the SCC process as members use data to deliberate on meaning and implications. The professional expertise will influence SCC member perceptions, but the data provide a means to maintain focus on student learning while making school improvement decisions. Of particular interest to SCC members are the data directly related to the SCC developed plans.

Mechanisms of SCC Communication

One of the characteristics of effective site based management is possessing mechanisms for communication (Briggs & Wohlstetter, 2003). Although the sharing and use of data are forms of communication within the SCC, the theme of communication relates to a desire for increased communication with the larger school community.

Communication with the larger school community brings the democratic principal of representation into the picture. As M2 SCC meeting minutes for October 2007 read, “We [The SCC members] represent the communities we live in and are the voice in their behalf.” Although SCC members understand the principle of representation, the communication with the larger constituency regarding SCC activities is a weakness at all three SCCs.

M1 SCC members expressed concern for the lack of knowledge on the part of the larger school community. Suggestions were made to make better use of the school website and back-to-school nights to communicate with the public concerning SCCs. There was also a desire expressed to get more feedback from parents and faculty as critical decisions are made concerning school improvement. At M2 the school website is used very effectively, as the next SCC meeting is posted on the home page with a link to a picture of SCC members and all the historical SCC meeting minutes. The automated calling system is a new strategy used by M2 to communicate with the larger community. Although M2 has made effective use of the website and the automated calling system, the SCC members still have the perception that very few parents know anything about the SCC.

M3 also expressed concern about the lack of communication with the larger school community as a historical problem. The principal indicated that the new building has made a difference as the community has taken pride in the new facility, but more still needs to be done. M3 SCC parent members were actively developing ways to increase the level of communication as they negotiated for a space where parents could be more

closely involved with the school.

The principle of democratic representation could help prevent the tendency of an SCC to favor an elite group (Caines, 2006; Schutz, 2006; Swift-Morgan, 2006).

Suggestions were made by SCC members for improving communication, but each SCC has a different clientele, and different forms of communication will have different effects on each. Acknowledgement of the weakness in communication with the larger school community should serve as a catalyst for each SCC to use the collaborative SCC process to solve the problem, as it exists in each school community.

Standard of SCC Balance

The SCC process at the evaluated middle schools demonstrates the importance of full participation of all SCC members. SCC membership and elections are a fundamental part of the democratic ideal of the SCC, but the election requirement is based on an assumption that the school community will have enough interested candidates. SCC member confidence at the evaluated schools is built as the SCC members become fully engaged in the process of developing plans and taking action for the purpose of school improvement. SCC use of data to drive school improvement decisions serves to inform members and prevent principal dominance. The evaluated SCCs each demonstrated a weakness in communication with the constituencies SCC members represent. With the recognition of the weakness, there was also a determination to find better ways of communicating with the larger community. The themes presented from the evaluation of the three middle-level SCCs provide an understanding of important characteristics that can help SCCs actively engage in the school improvement process with the objective of

increasing student achievement. A theme that emerged at the core of the SCC process was the need for balance between professional and democratic control.

The current evaluation provides an interesting connection to the historical context of community involvement in education. The historical perspective provides an image of fluid tension between community involvement and professional control of schools. The current evaluation of Utah SCCs did not reveal that tension. The evaluation did reveal an appreciation for SCCs introducing a type of democratic process into the evaluated public schools, and at the same time, the evaluation emphasized an appreciation for the knowledge and dedication of the professionals—the principals in particular. Breyer (2005) wrote about this balance between the professional and democratic control, which provides insight for the SCC process.

How can we reconcile democratic control of government with the technical nature of modern life? The former calls for decision-making by citizens or their elected representatives, the latter for decision-making by administrators or experts. If we delegate too much decision-making authority to experts, administration and democracy conflict. We lose control. Yet if we delegate too little authority, we also find democracy weakened. To achieve our democratically chosen ends in a modern populous society requires some amount of administration, involving administrative, not democratic decision-making. To achieve those same ends in a technologically advanced society requires expertise. The average citizen normally lacks the time, knowledge, and experience necessary to understand certain technical matters.... Without delegation to experts, an inexpert public, possessing the will, would lack the way. The public understands this fact.... To reconcile democratically chosen ends with administrative expertise requires striking a balance—some delegation, but not too much. The right balance avoids conflict between democracy and administration.... How to strike that balance? That is the mystery. (pp. 102-103)

The three middle schools evaluated are striving to strike that balance. The SCCs are a key decision-making body for the schools, but to make the decisions they need to make, the SCC relies heavily on the expertise of the school principals. The evaluated

SCCs each had school principals who demonstrated support of the democratic process by inviting participation, sharing data, and making proposals that could positively influence student learning. Malen and Vincent (2008) observed that the strength of professional control is intact regardless of the attempts to empower parents through school councils. The current evaluation does support the observation that the professionals do have great control over the decisions made, but, in light of Breyer's (2005) observation, the SCC does provide an important democratic balance to the professional control.

As demonstrated at M2, when the parent SCC members questioned the use of the writing software, the SCC does provide a venue for a more democratic process to take place. The writing software experience also demonstrated how the democratic process relies on expertise and data to inform the decisions. The parents each had a small view of the writing program through the lens of their own children and hearsay. Making a democratic decision based on the information they initially had would simply have been irresponsible. The principal did not possess the expertise on the writing program either, so he arranged to have the teachers who actually use the program come and present. When the teachers presented to the SCC, they did not come in as individuals, but as representatives of a larger teacher group who used the program. The expertise and data brought by the teachers informed the democratic decision to continue the use of the program. The democratic influence also caused the teachers to consider and make adjustments based on the concerns raised.

M1 also demonstrated the process when the reading software was proposed to assist with the Homework Club. Most SCC members knew nothing about the program

prior to the meeting. The SCC possessed a solid understanding of their purpose to make decisions to improve student achievement, and the members understood the school data had demonstrated a weakness in reading for some students, but SCC members did not possess the expertise to know the best approach to the problem. The parent SCC members as volunteers with many other responsibilities, who spend three hours in an SCC meeting each month, could not be expected to have a level of expertise to make the best decisions without reliance upon experts. With the professionals' expertise and openness with the data, the SCC members can question and even reject the proposal, but to make an informed decision the SCC relies heavily on the expertise of the professionals.

The SCC process involving a complementary relationship between democracy and expertise undergirds each of the themes that emerged from the evaluation data. When professionals and citizens work together in deliberative problem solving, trust can be built and mutual cooperation can develop (Fung, 2004). The themes of interest in SCC membership and elections, sources of SCC member confidence, use of data to drive SCC school improvement decisions, and mechanisms for SCC communication work together to provide a framework for an SCC that can foster an innovative school improvement process.

Significance

The significance of this study results from the current demand on schools to achieve continual improvement in regard to student achievement and the responsibility of

community and parents to become involved to contribute to the innovation that will facilitate that achievement. In this age of accountability and increasing competition, the public schools need to know how they can best engage parents and community in the school improvement process. The purpose of the strength-based process evaluation was to examine middle school SCCs in the state of Utah to determine what the process looks like in the best cases. As a result it was determined that exemplary SCCs are implementing the law as prescribed, practices and strategies used to develop plans were identified, and perceptions of impact of implementation of plans were gathered. The appreciative approach to questions enabled the evaluator to get at the practices that were of most value to participants. The results of the evaluation will serve to inform the schools, communities, and the state about what processes have been used to build confidence in SCC members and have made engagement in the process worthwhile.

The balance between the democratic and the professional expertise is possible as a supportive principal collaboratively works with the school community to (a) generate sufficient interest in sustaining the needed SCC membership, (b) engage all SCC members in the SCC process using data to inform decision-making including data on impact of implementation, and (c) communicate with the entire school community with regard to the school improvement instituted by the SCC.

Recommendations

The primary responsibility of an SCC is the development of the plans aimed at improving student achievement. Although student achievement is the primary

responsibility of an SCC, the common understanding is that a causal link between SCCs and student achievement is problematic (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998a; Malen & Vincent, 2008). Although the decision made by the SCC may not cause improved student achievement, it is quite possible that the purchases and programs determined by SCC decisions could have a measurable impact on student achievement. Every Utah SCC is making decisions to make purchases and implement programs. The locally developed programs, like the Walkaways, should be continually evaluated to assess both intended and unintended consequences.

Engaging the SCC in the decision making process requires a large investment of time and energy. Does a democratic SCC process provide an added benefit to a school over school professionals making the decisions on their own? If so, what is that added benefit? Does an increased sense of accountability to the public exist with schools using the SCC process? And what difference does an increased sense of accountability make? I believe this evaluation has merely begun to shed light on these questions.

Establishing a functional SCC at a Title I middle school like M3 is challenging. A study of the development of the SCC at M3 as the school strives to increase parent interest and involvement over the ensuing years would be an interesting and beneficial longitudinal study that could inform schools in similar situations.

Issues related to SCC membership are a subject for further investigation. Why do schools face difficulty in generating interest in serving on the SCC? Is the lack of interest by parents and faculty exhibited in the schools evaluated a unique challenge faced by middle school SCCs or do high school and elementary SCCs face the same challenges?

What are the characteristics of the individuals who choose to participate in the SCC? Are there any SCCs that have been successful in generating significant interest of both faculty and parents in SCC membership? What caused the increased interest?

This evaluation has simply begun an investigation of Utah SCCs. Many questions remain, but this dissertation has provided a descriptive view of how two exemplary middle level SCCs are functioning and how one fledgling SCC is establishing itself. Promising practices and current concerns have been identified through an appreciative inquiry of compliance, processes, and perceived impact. Placing this evaluation in a historical context of tension between professional or state control and community control, the evaluated SCCs demonstrate a promising balance between professional expertise and democracy. As schools strive to meet the state and federal requirements for improved student achievement, the exemplary SCCs have demonstrated that school professionals and community members can successfully engage in deliberation for improved student learning. The insights gained through the practices at the evaluated schools are merely a beginning but can serve to inform practices, policy, and further research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

School Community Council Compliance Checklist

School Community Council Checklist to Assure Compliance with the Law June 2007

The School Community Council law requires:

- 1) Properly constituted School Community Council
 - Parents must have a student at the school during their first term on the council.
 - Parents must be elected by a majority of parents voting at the election and serve a two-year term beginning July 1. Parents may work up to six hours (average) at the school and qualify to fill a parent position.
 - Employees (except the principal) must be elected by a majority of the employees that voted, and to serve a two-year term beginning July 1.
 - The number of parents must exceed the number of school employees on the council.
 - If a parent position is unfilled after the election, parent members appoint a parent.
 - If an employee position is unfilled after the election, employee members appoint an employee to serve.
 - The council elects a chair and vice-chair with one from the parent group and one from the employee group.
 - Councils may appoint non-members to serve on subcommittees.

- 2) Council Duties - Each council is to:
 - Evaluate U-PASS results and develop a School Improvement Plan
 - Develop their School LAND Trust program.
 - Assist in developing and implementing a staff professional development plan.
 - Develop a child access routing plan.
 - Advise and make recommendations to the school, school district administrators, and local school boards regarding the school and its programs and environment.
 - Develop a reading achievement plan, if an elementary council.

- 3) Election Procedures
 - Any parent who is interested in serving may declare themselves to be a candidate.
 - Written notice should be provided to parents and teachers two weeks ahead of their respective elections.
 - Election results should be available to anyone who asks.

The School LAND Trust Program law requires the council to:

- Identify the school's most critical academic needs.
- List programs, practices and materials needed to have a direct impact on the instruction of students that will result in measurable, increased student performance.
- Explain how the school will spend the funds to improve academic excellence at school.
- Annually approve and submit the plan and get the approval of the local school board.
- Publicize how the funds were used to school patrons and the community.
- Report on how the funds were used in the current year to the local school board.

The Open and Public Meetings Act requires that "actions be taken openly." It is important to:

- Notify parents and teachers in advance of meetings through the methods that work best for your school. Be sure to post the meeting agenda on the school front door at least 24 hours in advance in addition to other methods of notification and include the date, time and location of the meeting. Encourage input and participation from all parents and staff.
- Have a simple majority present when you adopt the School LAND Trust Plan or anything else you are given responsibility for. A majority is required to take formal action on anything.
- Keep written minutes of the date, time, and place of the meeting, who was present and absent, what was discussed and decided, and the names of anyone who presented.

Appendix B

School Community Council Member Interview Protocol

School Community Council Member Interview Protocol

This interview is being conducted as a part of a strength-based process evaluation of Utah middle level School Community Councils. Your signature on the consent form indicates your consent to participate in this interview. The audio of this interview will be recorded.

Tell me your role in the school:

Please tell me about the process for how you became a member of the SCC and why you chose to be a part of the SCC.

As you review these questions you will recognize that they are not mutually exclusive. There is a great deal of overlap between several questions, but each question has been developed in relation to specific characteristics that have been identified as contributing factors to community involvement that results in increasing student achievement. I have underlined the characteristic that serves as the focus point of each question.

1. Can you tell me about an instance when you felt great confidence that the work of the SCC would make a positive difference in student achievement in this school?
 - a. What would you like to see happen to strengthen confidence or increase the frequency of those types of experiences?

2. Think back on the experience of developing the school improvement or School LAND Trust Program plan and tell me of an instance when you felt the council was working with the school as a professional learning community that was focused on positive change for the students.
 - a. Tell me as much as you can about the process.
 - b. What were the circumstances?
 - c. What information was available to you?
 - d. What was your role?
 - e. What role did the school principal play?
 - f. Who was involved from outside of the SCC?
 - g. How did this experience validate/reinforce the mission and vision of the school and council?
 - h. If you could make three suggestions to make it so your work in the council is always this meaningful, what would they be?

3. Share a time when you were particularly impressed with the principal's support of the SCC.
 - a. Give some examples of practices the principal uses to instill confidence in the procedures and responsibilities of the SCC?
 - b. How is the leadership distributed in the school?

- c. What would be your desires for the sharing of leadership and principal support in the school?
4. Describe a time when information (Data) on student achievement was shared and how it influenced the decision-making process.
 - a. What was the information?
 - b. How was it shared?
 - c. How could the SCC make the most effective use of student data?
5. Describe how you have learned about the implementation of the School Improvement or School Trust Land plans and the impact they are having.
 - a. What information about the implementation and impact is most meaningful?
 - b. What has facilitated your understanding of the implementation and impact?
 - c. Describe three meaningful ways the implementation and impact information could be better reported to the SCC and community at large?
6. Please share with me a time when you felt the resources provided were adequate to accomplish what the SCC planned to do.
 - a. What were the resources available?
 - b. What were the sources?
 - c. Could you provide suggestions for increasing the adequacy of resources?
7. What evidence do you have that would demonstrate that the entire staff accepts responsibility for student achievement?
 - a. Is it primarily departmental?
 - b. To what degree are all involved?
 - c. If you could make three specific requests of the entire faculty that would increase accountability for student achievement, what would they be?

Appendix C

M1 Implementation and Impact Questions

M1 Implementation and Impact Questions

Implementation and Impact questions for the homework club.

Tell me about the program. What is it? How many students are served? How are they served?

Looking at your experience with the homework club, Could you share a time when you felt it was having the most impact on students?

What does the homework club provide to students that they wouldn't get if it didn't exist?

What do you look for to determine the program's value? Is there any data gathered that helps identify the effectiveness of the program?

What are some key practices in the homework club that help students increase their level of learning and achievement?

If you could make three improvements to the program what would they be and why?

Implementation and impact of MYP

Tell me about how the MYP has impacted you as a teacher.

Tell me of an instance when you have seen the MYP impact student learning.

What would you most like to see happen with regards to the MYP?

Implementation and impact of curriculum mapping

Tell me about how the curriculum mapping has impacted you as a teacher.

Tell me of an instance when you have seen the curriculum mapping impact student learning.

What would you most like to see happen with regards to curriculum mapping?

Appendix D

M2 Implementation and Impact Questions

M2 Implementation and Impact Questions

Implementation and Impact of new computer lab

The school LAND trust funds were used to purchase a mobile computer lab for the math department this year. Tell me about the lab.

What do you appreciate most about this computer lab?

Tell me about what the lab has enabled you to do as a teacher that you would not have been able to do otherwise?

What impact do you perceive this lab having on student learning?

What would you suggest the school or department could do to make this lab have a more meaningful impact on student learning?

Implementation and Impact of new computer lab

A classroom set of graphing calculators has also been purchased.

What do you appreciate most about having a classroom set of graphing calculators?

Tell me of a time when the calculators impacted your instruction?

How do you perceive it impacting student learning?

What have these graphing calculators enabled you to do that you couldn't do otherwise?

Do you feel a classroom set of these type of calculators is sufficient for your purposes?

What would you suggest the school or department could do to make these calculators have a more meaningful impact on student learning?

Implementation and Impact of tracker program

Tell me about the tracker program in general and what you do specifically as a tracker. How are the kids identified?

Tell me of an experience that made you grateful to be a tracker?

How many students are served by this program?

What do the students receive through this program that they wouldn't otherwise?

Can you share with me an experience that demonstrates what a difference this program is making for the students served?

What would make these types of experiences more common?

How do you think having a tracker will impact the students' future?

What would the ideal tracking program look like?

Appendix E

M3 Implementation and Impact Questions

M3 Implementation and Impact Questions

Implementation and Impact of Piano Program

Tell me about the piano program here at the school?

Think back on your experience with the program. Share with me what has been most rewarding about the piano program.

Tell me a little bit about the type of students that you have.

Tell me how you feel it impacts the students overall. Rather than just music what does it do for the students?

Share with me your dreams for this program.

Appendix F

IRB Informed Consent Form



Department of Elementary Education
 2805 Old Main Hill
 Logan UT 84322-2805
 Telephone: (435) 797-0385
 Fax: (435) 797-0372

Date Created: January 12, 2008; Page 1 of 3
 USU IRB Approved: 01/15/2008
 Approval terminates: 01/14/2009
 Protocol Number: 1965
 IRB Password Protected per IRB Administrator

Dr. Scott Hunsaker

INFORMED CONSENT

School Community Councils: A process evaluation of Utah middle level shared decision making for school improvement

Introduction/Purpose Professor Scott Hunsaker in the Department of Education at Utah State University is conducting a research study to find out more about the characteristics of an exemplary middle school community council. You have been asked to take part because your community council has been identified by your school district and the School LAND Trust Program administration as having an exemplary middle school community council. There will be approximately 7 to 15 participants at this site. There will be approximately 25 to 45 total participants in this research.

Procedures If you agree to participate in this program evaluation, you will be asked questions related to the nature of your involvement with and the practices of the school community council. There are three phases to this evaluation, and you may be involved in just one, two, or all three phases depending on your role in the three aspects of the evaluation.

Phase 1 - Compliance

1. You and/or other members of the School Community Council will complete a checklist concerning compliance to the state law. Followed by a brief interview to clarify how requirements are satisfied. This checklist and follow-up interview will require less than 30 minutes to complete.

Phase 2 – Council Procedures and Strategies

2. You will be interviewed concerning your experience as a member of the school community council. There will be an initial interview that will last between 30 minutes and 1 hour. If needed, you may be contacted after the interview for clarification. Audio of the interviews will be recorded. Follow-up interviews could take place in person, by telephone, or possibly email correspondence (You will not be identified in the study by name except to the interviewer who will keep a master list of names and aliases in a locked cabinet separate from the other research documentation).

3. School Community Council meetings will also be observed and possibly be recorded with audio or video equipment.

Phase 3 – Plan Implementation

4. As members of the School Community Council or as a member of the school staff you may be interviewed related to the implementation of the School LAND Trust Program plan and School Improvement Plan. This interview will require less than 30 minutes to complete.

5. Documents related to the implementation of the plans developed by the School Community Council will be requested.

New Findings During the course of this research study, you will be informed of any significant new findings (either good or bad), such as changes in the risks or benefits resulting from participation in the research, or new alternatives to participation that might cause you to change your mind about continuing in the study. If new information is obtained that is relevant or useful to you, or if the procedures and/or



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Date Created: January 11, 2008, Page 2 of 3
USU IRB Approved: 01/15/2008
Approval terminates: 01/14/2009
Protocol Number 1963
IRB Password Protected per IRB Administrator

David M. Hunsaker

INFORMED CONSENT

School Community Councils: A process evaluation of Utah middle level shared decision making for school improvement

methods change at any time throughout this study, your consent to continue participating in this study will be obtained again.

Risks Participation in this research study may involve some added risks or discomforts. These include:

1. There is the risk that your school will be identifiable in the final evaluation report. An alias will be used for your school name, and individuals will not be named in the final report, but with a small sample size it is possible to make accurate conclusions from demographic and descriptive data provided in the evaluation report.
2. Even with the use an alias, there is the risk of personal identification. Although this will be minimized by removing your name from all documents and maintaining any personal information in a file separate and secure from the evaluation report, there is the chance that identity could be revealed through information you provide.
3. Although this evaluation is utilizing an appreciative inquiry approach that is intended to reduce the anxiety typically associated with evaluation, there is the potential risk of psychological stress, political repercussions, or social pressures resulting from participation in the research.

Benefits Participation in the study will provide the school with a report that identifies the strengths and weaknesses of their school Community council practices. The school will also receive a copy of the entire dissertation which will include findings from two additional Utah schools. The investigator may also learn more about the characteristics of an exemplary school community council that could possibly help identify how a school community council can influence improved student achievement. The knowledge gained could then be used to help improve the effectiveness of middle school community councils. The evaluation report applicable to the school can also be used as an impetus for a celebration as well as the motivation to seek ways to be more consistently effective.

Explanation & offer to answer questions Richard (Jackie) Nygaard has explained this research study to you and answered your questions. If you have other questions or research-related problems, you may reach Professor Hunsaker at 435-797-0386.

Voluntary nature of participation and right to withdraw without consequence Participation in research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without consequence or loss of benefits. You may be withdrawn from this study without your consent by the investigator if it is found that you are being dishonest with the evaluator or you are unable to work within the time constraints of the evaluation. If you choose to withdraw or are withdrawn from the study all records related to your participation will be destroyed and any conclusions resulting from your participation will be removed from the study.



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IRB Password Protected per IRB Administrator

Dr. m. hunsaker

INFORMED CONSENT

School Community Councils: A process evaluation of Utah middle level shared decision making for school improvement

Confidentiality Research records will be kept confidential, consistent with federal and state regulations. Only the investigator, the PI, the doctoral committee, a transcriber, and a peer reviewer will have access to the data, which will be kept in a locked file cabinet in Richard (Jackie) Nygaard's office at BYU-Idaho for five years. Personal, identifiable information will be kept in a separate locked file at the home of Richard (Jackie) Nygaard for five years. The video and voice recordings will also be kept in the corresponding locked file (depending on whether it contains personal, identifiable information) for five years and then destroyed. Access to these locked files is limited to Richard (Jackie) Nygaard, spouse (at home), and secretary and department chair (at BYU-Idaho).

IRB Approval Statement The Institutional Review Board for the protection of human participants at USU has approved this research study. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights, you may contact the IRB at (435) 797-1821.

Copy of consent You have been given two copies of this Informed Consent. Please sign both copies and retain one copy for your files.

Investigator Statement "I certify that the research study has been explained to the individual, by me or my research staff, and that the individual understands the nature and purpose, the possible risks and benefits associated with taking part in this research study. Any questions that have been raised have been answered."

Scott Hunsaker, PhD
Principal Investigator
(435) 797-0386

Richard J. Nygaard
Student Researcher
(208) 351-2444

Signature of Participant By signing below, I agree to participate.

Participant's signature

Date

Appendix G

M2 School Community Council Application

SCHOOL/COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Would you like to have a say in your child’s education?
 Would you like to help determine how the school’s Trust Land funds are spent?
 Would you like to have a better connection between school and community?

If you answered ‘Yes’ to any of these questions, you may want to become involved in the Willowcreek School/Community Council.

*What is a School/Community Council? A School/Community Council is an advisory committee with communication connections between school and community. The School/Community Council helps assist in the development of school improvement plans and how the School/Community Trust Land money should be used. The council may advise and make recommendations on school programs and also help student safety and routing plans.

*Who is on the School/Community Council? The Council consists of members of the faculty, administration and members of the community. In order to have all the communities that attend our school represented, the [redacted] boundary has been divided into four (4) geographic sections. Representation from geographic sections is based on population:

- One representative - [redacted] _____
- Two representatives- [redacted] [redacted] _____
- Two representatives- [redacted] [redacted] [redacted]
- Two representatives- [redacted] [redacted]

Applications for the vacancies are being accepted

*How much time will it take? A total of 6-7 meetings will be held throughout the year. The meetings will be approximately 1 1/2 -2 hours each.

If you are interested in serving on the [redacted] School/Community Council, please complete the form below and return it to the school by February 7, 2008.

SCHOOL/COMMUNITY COUNCIL APPLICATION

Yes, I would like to be a member of the [redacted] School/Community Council. Please contact me with more information.

Name _____ Phone # _____

Address _____ Geographic Area _____


Appendix H

M2 Walkaway Letter

 *Middle School*
, *Principal*
 *Assistant Principal*,  *Assistant Principal*
, *Director of Activities*

November 30, 2007

Dear Parent/Guardian:

 Middle School is continually looking for strategies to improve the academic excellence of our students. One way we feel we need to improve is our end-of-level test scores. In order for scores to improve, students must know or *master* the concept(s) in each class. This is where “Walkaways” come into play.

What is a “Walkaway?” A walkaway is to ensure each student will *walkaway* completely knowing the core curriculum for each class. Students show mastery through testing.


How do “Walkaway’s” work? Teachers are given the core curriculum of their class/classes at the beginning of the year. From that, the core concepts, or the most important points to learn, are broken down. A “Walkaway” test is given for each of those concepts, which students must master. To show mastery, students may take “Walkaway” tests as many times as needed, until the test is passed at 80%.


What happens if a “Walkaway” is not passed? If a “Walkaway” is not passed, the student receives an “I”, which stands for “in progress” or “incomplete.” The grade will remain an “I” until the “Walkaway” test is passed. If the test is not passed and the “I” taken care of, it will then be changed to an “F”, upon the completion of the semester or school year.


To reach our academic goal, we will be taking some drastic measures. If your student(s) receives an “I” on his/her report card, he/she will no longer be eligible to actively participate in extracurricular activities. This means, if your student(s) is on the basketball team, the student council, the peer leadership team, or the yearbook staff, they will not be eligible to participate in the games, activities, or other things which would take a student out of class. This also includes, choir, band, and orchestra festivals/concerts, drama activities, FFA activities, or any club which will require students to miss any class time whatsoever. Furthermore, any field trip will not be allowed for any student who has an “I” on his/her report card. Once the “I’s” have been made up, the student can come to the office to obtain a current report card. They will need this to show the teacher/advisor they are now eligible to participate in the activities.

At this time, we are asking each student who has received an “I” on their report card, to work hard getting all “I’s” made up. Students who obtain “I’s” during any term are required to make them up by the last day of that class or the “I” will turn to an “F”. (*FOR SEMESTER CLASSES—LAST DAY OF THE SEMESTER; FOR YEAR CLASSES—LAST DAY OF SCHOOL.*) We will be monitoring each grade level weekly and the progress they are making to complete their “I’s”. By doing this, our overall goal is to see students achieve their very best!

Sincerely,


Principal


Assistant Principal


Assistant Principal

Appendix I

Letter from Peer Reviewer

LETTER FROM PEER REVIEWER

August 11, 2008

To Whom It May Concern:

I have analyzed the emerged themes and findings from this process evaluation and I successfully traced them back to the raw data provided by the participants. An audit trail was sufficiently kept to allow this process. I verify that from my perspective, the stated themes are accurately based on the raw data of this study.

Sincerely,

Cari Buckner

CURRICULUM VITAE

RICHARD JACKSON NYGAARD

Department of Mathematics
 Brigham Young University – Idaho
 525 S. Center St.
 Rexburg ID 83460-2155
 (208)496-1466
 nygaardr@byui.edu

EDUCATION:

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| Utah State University – Doctor of Education | expected 2008 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum and Instruction • Dissertation Title: Utah Middle Level School Community Councils: An Evaluation of Compliance, Processes, and Perceived Impact | |
| Southern Utah University – | 2002 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative and supervisory certificate | |
| Southern Utah University --Master of Education | 1998 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secondary Education • Masters Project: Dynamic Geometry Software in the Middle School Classroom | |
| University of Utah --Bachelor of Science | 1994 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mathematics/Teaching Major • Physics/Teaching minor | |

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

- | | |
|---|--------------|
| Mathematics Education Instructor | 2007-Present |
| Brigham Young University–Idaho | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Courses taught • Elementary Geometry | |

- Fundamentals of Number Theory
- Foundations of Quantitative Reasoning
- Precalculus
- College Algebra
- Trigonometry

Assistant Principal

2004–2007

Desert Hills Intermediate School, St. George UT

- Observed, collaborated with, and evaluated teachers using Danielson’s framework and the WCSD evaluation system
- Consultant for Math grade level department chairs
- Established and managed student discipline
- Intimate knowledge of & extensive experience developing master schedule
- Knowledgeable of district and state educational policies and resources
- Trained teachers serving on school leadership team
- Extensive work with school leadership team and community council
- Chaired school technology committee
- Managed annual school fundraiser
- Served as secretary of Washington County Association of Secondary School Principals
- Trained presenter for Breaking Ranks in the Middle (NASSP)

Mathematics Teacher

1994-2004

Dixie Middle School, St. George UT

- Taught students of basic mathematics through advanced algebra utilizing technology, manipulatives, relevant applications, and traditional methods.
- Served as a trained mentor teacher.
- Facilitated early years enhancement (EYE) level three for WCSD as a Math curriculum specialist.
- Piloted Applied Mathematics course for at-risk ninth grade students using a laboratory based, hands on approach to applied curriculum.
- Developed and revised computer laboratory assignments for use with dynamic geometry software in mathematics courses.
- Instructed USOE mathematics summer professional development for Algebra and Geometry
- Served as item writer for Applied Mathematics State End of Level Test
- Served as item writer and reviewer for Intermediate Algebra District End

of Level Test

- Served as Reviewer for Utah Basic Skills Competency Test
- Presented at multiple Mathematics district in-services
- Served on committee to write Power Standards for geometry and intermediate Algebra for school district

Technology Specialist 1998–2004

Dixie Middle School, St. George UT

- Administered and serviced local network in cooperation with district technology office.
- Serviced and maintained computer hardware and software for administration, teachers, and students.
- Trained and assisted administration and teachers in use of technology.
- Assessed and prioritized technology needs for school.

Personnel Administrator and Rifleman 1986-1990

United States Marine Corps

- Managed records section of Battalion Personnel Office – Supervised personnel clerks, updated and audited official Marine files.
- Primary auditor responsible for Personnel office receiving outstanding scores on pay related and general record inspections
- Squad leader and recipient of two meritorious promotions

PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS:

Presenter at Utah Middle Level Association Conference March 2007

- An extended period schedule: What we've learned so far

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:

National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM)

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)

National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)

National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)