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Deeper Learning and District-Level Curriculum Leadership: A Case Study of One Large Public School District

Jonathan Warren Cooney

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

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Jonathan Warren Cooney

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ABSTRACT

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A key element within school accountability frameworks across the United States is student performance as measured by standardized assessments. Scholars have argued that these types of assessments and accountability systems have narrowed the curriculum to emphasize students' development of discrete, specialized skills. Researchers have recently suggested that deeper learning approaches will better support students in building the skills and understanding needed for life and work. Unfortunately, deeper learning has not commonly been observed at the school-wide level. Recent research suggested that a prevailing culture of district-level curriculum leadership serves as a potential barrier to the enactment of deep learning in schools.

The purpose of this instrumental case study was to generate a detailed description of the beliefs, values, and attitudes that characterize the culture of district-level curriculum leadership in one large public school district. The findings were then compared to the conditions scholars have suggested as supportive of deeper learning. Data were collected from 22 interviews, 13 documents, and two observations. Participants included six district-level curriculum leaders, three school principals, and 12 teachers. A key feature of the culture in Haggerty, the sampled district, was its commitment to a uniform curricular approach across schools. Specifically, findings indicated a high degree of prescriptiveness concerning content and instructional materials. While the literature suggested this form of prescriptiveness has typically been enacted

through centralized control, the approach to influencing teachers in Haggerty did not include mandates or other forms of coercion through power.

One important condition to support deeper learning is that the district culture reduces emphasis on pacing for coverage of curriculum and, concurrently, increases flexibility for teachers to address the unique and varied needs and interests of students. While the curriculum leaders in Haggerty encouraged teachers to serve student needs and interests, the culture also placed value on curricular coverage. Teachers in the district's classrooms were faced with daily decisions regarding whether to adjust the prescribed approach to meet unexpected needs or interests or remain faithful to the district's curricular guidance. As the culture did not use power to police or punish non-compliance, the decisions being made by teachers, teams, and schools resulted in variability across the system.

While the prescribed curriculum in Haggerty was well defined, guidance concerning daily decision-making was not as systemic. For deeper learning to proliferate, district-level curriculum leaders need to develop teachers' knowledge and understanding regarding decisions that shape those experiences for students. Haggerty's leaders were aware of this tension and the data indicated that some degree of reculturing was taking place in the district. Beyond the one tension that was described, the culture in the district was evolving in ways that align well with the conditions identified as supportive of deeper learning.

The findings from this study may support district curriculum leaders in analyzing their own cultures and considering what aspects may need reculturing. However, more studies are needed to richly describe existing cultures of curriculum leadership and to adequately characterize cultures that are most aligned with the conditions necessary for deeper learning to proliferate.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

If we cannot shift from a world where learning deeply is the exception rather than the
rule, more is in jeopardy than our schools. Nothing less than our society is at stake.
(Mehta & Fine, 2019, p. 400)

The purpose of K-12 schooling in the United States has been debated extensively since

the early 19th Century (Kliebard, 1986). Numerous reform movements have demanded business-

oriented approaches to school management and promoted curricula focused on preparing

students to be workers that support our economy (Tyack, 1974). Simultaneously, there has been

a disparate set of pleas for a student-centric, constructivist philosophy toward curriculum

leadership and an emphasis on schools preparing students to be good citizens who preserve our

democracy (Kliebard, 1986). History illustrates that school reformers promoting these different

perspectives have struggled to find common ground. However, a 2012 report from the National

Research Council (NRC) titled *Education for Life and Work: Developing Transferable*

Knowledge and Skills in the 21st Century included references to both the democratic and work

purposes of education (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012). The report contended that schools should

prepare students for both citizenship and employment by enhancing "deeper learning"

experiences for students. This research project was inspired by an interest in deeper learning as a

unique and compelling reform movement with the potential to appeal to varied stakeholders and

support greater engagement and learning for students.

Background

This study considered relationships between district-level curriculum leadership and the

conditions that support "deeper learning" experiences for students. "Deeper learning" is defined

as learning focused on both content mastery and other transferable competencies such as critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and learning to learn (Hewlett Foundation, 2013). Within deeper learning, students develop knowledge, connect personally to the learning, and generate authentic products (Mehta & Fine, 2019). In their recent study of deeper learning, Mehta and Fine asserted "districts were created a century ago in a command and control, compliance-oriented model that is antithetical to modern learning" (p. 393). This statement contextualizes the chronologically organized content within this chapter.

Historical Overview

This overview considers the roots of standardized curricula, reviews the push for efficiency in school systems in the early 20th Century, discusses the period following the former Soviet Union's launch of the Sputnik satellite, reflects on the *Nation at Risk* report, summarizes the introduction of No Child Left Behind legislation, and addresses the movement to adopt the Common Core standards. I have focused on the intersection between leadership beliefs, values, and attitudes, and the various processes guiding curricular design and implementation. The overview of these periods and associated beliefs related to curriculum helps to describe the setting within which "deeper learning" resides, or does not reside, in schools and school systems at present. In this work, I accept the definition of curriculum to be "a set of desired goals or values that are activated through a development process and culminate in successful learning experiences for students" (Wiles, 2009, p. 2).

A statement made by Kliebard (1986) frames the historical summary:

At any given time, we do not find a monolithic supremacy exercised by one interest group; rather, we find different interest groups competing for dominance over the curriculum and, at different times, achieving some measure of control, depending on

local as well as general social conditions. Each of these interest groups, then, represents a

force for a different selection of knowledge and values drawn from the culture and hence

a kind of lobby for a different curriculum. (p. 7)

The following sections illustrate this ongoing "competition" for control of the curriculum in

United States schools. By reviewing selected eras, I present the perspectives of different interest

groups and consider the influences of various social conditions.

Early Standardization

Teachers served the central role in curricular and logistical decision-making in the

American educational system in the early 19th Century (Kliebard, 1986). As the 19th Century

progressed, there was a "change in the educational center of gravity; it shifted from the tangible

presence of the teacher to the remote knowledge and values incarnate in the curriculum"

(Kliebard, 1986, p. 1). One factor that influenced this shift in the locus of control was the

promotion of age-based classrooms (Tyack, 1974). Henry Barnard was influential in advancing

this idea in 1838 through a series of lectures across the United States (Tyack, 1974). William

Harvey Wells, superintendent of Chicago Public Schools, continued this line of thinking by

connecting the grouping of students by age to a "program of study" between 1856 to 1864

(Tyack, 1974). As one example, he established a uniform schedule that teachers were expected to

follow (Tyack, 1974). In 1862, Wells published a guide prescribing the content to be covered in

each subject at each grade and delineated specific teaching methods to be used (Tyack, 1974).

Numerous cities adopted Wells' publication as an "official curriculum," and standardization of

public education in the United States began to proliferate (Tyack, 1974, p. 46). An additional

example of early standardization was the use of uniform resources like the McGuffey readers as

far back as the 1830s (Kliebard, 1986). Kliebard suggested that "these books contributed to a growing nationalization of the curriculum" (p. 2).

A move toward standardization of assessment accompanied the increased emphasis on specified content and prescribed teaching methods. The assessment approach in Portland, Oregon in the 1870s was one example of a movement toward standardized testing (Tyack, 1974). Portland's first superintendent, Samuel King, developed a uniform curriculum in 1874 and then tested the children at the end of the year to discover if they had been "thoroughly drilled in the work assigned" (Tyack, 1974, p. 47). These developments provide evidence of the culture of curricular leadership in this era of early standardization. Changes such as age-based classrooms, delineation of content to be taught by age, mandates regarding teaching approaches, and a desire to check on student progress through common assessments all represented a shift of curricular control away from the classroom teacher.

Tyack (1974) described the reformers advocating these values and beliefs as "administrative progressives" (p. 196). Different viewpoints were put forth by a group Tyack called the "pedagogical progressives" (p. 197). John Dewey was an important figure within this group of reformers (Tyack, 1974). Dewey called for education to focus on preparing students for a democratic way of life (Henderson et al., 2000). Furthermore, Dewey espoused a curricular approach that focused on cooperative learning, projects, experiential learning, and involving "more subtle techniques of teaching students and less overt control of teachers" (Tyack, 1974, p. 197). He also championed the use of assessments as diagnostic tools to get to know children better instead of being used for standardization (Callahan, 1962). A professor named George Counts voiced additional concern regarding the reforms suggested by administrative progressives

(Tyack, 1974). Counts accused business leaders of promoting their self-interests rather than those of society (Tyack, 1974).

Efficiency and Accountability

The influence of "business ideology" became evident across many aspects of life in the United States in the late 19th Century and early 20th Century (Callahan, 1962, p. 5). Despite opposition from the pedagogical progressives, this ideology influenced the management of schools and public sentiment regarding school accountability. For example, a prominent educator named William Bagley stated operating a school was a "problem of economy: it seeks to determine in what manner the working unit of the school plant may be made to return the largest dividend upon the material investment of time, energy, and money" (Bagley, 1907, p. 2). These beliefs began to influence the culture of school leadership.

During this time frame, Joseph Mayer Rice, a pediatrician turned school reformer, began releasing publications calling for school reform (Kliebard, 1986). Rice was critical of American schools and felt educators needed to be forced to "do the right thing" (Kliebard, 1986, p. 20). In alignment with the business ideology of the time, Rice asserted that a more scientific approach should be taken, including systematic standards-based measurement of results (Rice, 1893). Rice's call for scientific management was a reference to the "Taylor System" that had been sweeping through the industrial sector (Callahan, 1962, p. 19). The Taylor System advocated for a set of clearly communicated values and beliefs (Callahan, 1962). Important to note, once again, the pedagogical progressives disagreed with the beliefs expressed by Rice and valued within Taylor's principles (Tyack, 1974). For example, Dewey promoted "substantial autonomy on the part of teachers and children" (Tyack, 1974, p. 197).

In contrast to Dewey's preferences, one fundamental belief associated with the Taylor System was that "there was always one best method for doing any particular job and this best method could be determined only through scientific study" (Callahan, 1962, p. 25). The Taylor System not only advocated for one best method but also held a set of critical assumptions about the workers themselves. For example, if there were poor outcomes, then the workers should be blamed for deliberately completing less work than expected (Callahan, 1962). Taylor also believed "the natural laziness of men was serious but that it could be handled by 'external pressure'" (Callahan, 1962, p. 26). Taylor went so far as to communicate "the men who did the work were incapable, either through lack of education or mental ability, of understanding the scientific basis which underlay the job" (Callahan, 1962, p. 27). Correspondingly, Taylor argued that management should take on more complex tasks and that the worker's role was to simply do as he was told by management (Callahan, 1962; Taylor, 1911).

Rice was not the only public figure to recommend applying scientific efficiency principles to management in education. Ellwood Cubberley of Stanford University and Franklin Bobbitt of the University of Chicago also championed this approach (Anderson & Cohen, 2018). These two professors used the Taylor System to give credibility to their new school administration programs (Anderson & Cohen, 2018). Cubberley compared school principals to business managers or military commanders and noted that "clear lines of managerial authority" were as important in schools as they were in business (Anderson & Cohen, 2018, p. 34). The work of Rice, Cubberley, Bobbitt, and others in promoting the principles of the Taylor System influenced the public perception of teachers by applying this same perspective to the role of the teacher in the classroom (Kliebard, 1986).

While calls for scientific management were influencing the management of schools, business leaders were simultaneously pushing to reform what was taught in the schools (Callahan, 1962). Andrew Carnegie, a prominent industrial leader, mounted a noteworthy challenge to the instructional focus in schools in 1902 (Callahan, 1962). Carnegie supported a practical curriculum and was critical of "the traditional curriculum" (Callahan, 1962, p. 8). Carnegie's sentiments gained traction during the 1908 National Education Association meeting (Callahan, 1962). During that meeting, a businessman presenting to those in attendance persuaded educators to include more "commercial and industrial subjects" in school (Callahan, 1962, p. 9). This type of pressure from business leaders became prominent in the early 20th Century (Callahan, 1962).

School administrators also faced more accountability from the public due, in part, to ongoing tax increases (Callahan, 1962). Communities raised taxes to meet the additional need of fourteen million immigrants that had arrived in America between 1865 and 1900 (Callahan, 1962). Immigrants continued to come at a rate of about one million per year, and the "result was that hard-pressed educators needing additional funds were forced to deal with a suspicious, economy-minded public wanting to cut costs" (Callahan, 1962, p. 15). This type of sentiment resulted in a context within which the public "demanded that schools provide evidence of their contribution to society or have their budgets cut" (Callahan, 1962, p. 47-48).

Sputnik

The late 19th Century and early 20th Century showed evidence of business ideology and tax increases influencing the management of schools, the focus of instruction, and the degree of accountability from the public. About 50 years later, an entirely different impetus, the launch of a foreign satellite, led to another era during which external forces exerted an influence on schools.

The former Soviet Union launched a satellite named Sputnik in 1957 (Steeves et al., 2009). This event sparked a call for schools in the United States to improve due to a commonly held belief that the United States was defeated in the race to space because the Russians had better schools (Steeves et al., 2009).

This thought process was one example of a broader "crisis" mindset regarding public education between 1940 and 1970 (Tyack, 1974). As a consequence of the Sputnik launch and correlated opinions about education, the federal government began to take on an expanded role in setting priorities related to education across the country (Steeves et al., 2009). Steeves et al. argued "fear has been the tool of choice in shaping the American curricular landscape in the post-Sputnik era" (p. 73). The impact of Sputnik went beyond an amplified focus on science and mathematics in schools. Steeves et al. asserted that "Sputnik was a watershed event because it introduced the crisis mentality into the development and implementation of education policy and equated curriculum with the overall security of the nation" (p. 83). Sputnik established an association between external threats and curriculum leadership and development.

A Nation at Risk

The idea of a perceived crisis leading to increased federal intervention surfaced again in 1983 with the release of a report titled *A Nation at Risk*. Ongoing fear regarding students' performance in the United States relative to those in other countries led to federal government sponsorship of a 1983 report titled *A Nation at Risk* (Cuban, 2004). This report, produced during the Reagan administration, was similar to the Sputnik-driven National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1957 in that the purpose was to delineate problems with the public school system in the United States and make suggestions about ways to improve the system (Steeves et al., 2009). Johanningmeier (2010) further contextualized similarities between post-Sputnik sentiment and

the aims of the *Nation at Risk* report by stating that both emphasized "producing citizens with the knowledge and skills the nation needed to build and maintain its defense establishment and to maintain the nation's economic competitiveness" (p. 350). Johanningmeier also asserted that the reports of the Cold War Era "focused on the nation's need for knowledgeable human capital" (p. 361).

  The *Nation at Risk* report reignited the ongoing debate regarding the focus of teaching and learning in schools (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The report specifically mentioned conflicting priorities, including the development of rudimentary skills, attention to higher-level problem-solving and analytical skills, emphasis on technical and occupational skills, and time for arts and humanities. This debate is reminiscent of when Carnegie and Dewey expressed their viewpoints (i.e., Carnegie advocating for practical education and Dewey for democracy as purpose) (Callahan, 1962). While the *Nation at Risk* report did not resolve this perpetual dispute, it did result in a resurgence of pressure from the business community (Cuban, 2004). In part, this pressure led to many states increasing graduation requirements, extending the school year, and adding more mandated tests in their schools (Cuban, 2004; Koretz, 2017).

No Child Left Behind

  While the *Nation at Risk* report instigated reforms at the school and state levels, faster and more widespread improvements were the aim of federal and state officials who began to call for "national goals, curriculum, and tests" in the early 1990s (Cuban, 2004, p. 57). This push for more sweeping legislation triggered what became the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and a continuation of the standards-based reform movement (Cuban, 2004). Legislators passed NCLB with broad support in 2002 (Koretz, 2017). The bill represented the first national accountability

system in the United States, and the sponsors intended it to promote uniformity across the fifty states (Koretz, 2017). As mentioned above, this legislation can be considered another response to a "crisis" in public education (Steeves et al., 2009). Steeves et al. argued NCLB included "terminology stressing penalties, strict timetables, rigorous testing, scientific measurement, and rigidly prescribed outcomes" (p. 74). While some policymakers may dispute that this legislation was punitive or strict, this act's passage impacted the degree to which teachers could control their instructional approach in the classroom (Au, 2011).

Extending that thought, Au (2011) contended NCLB and associated high stakes testing are "promoting the standardization of teaching that both disempowers and deskills teachers" (p. 30). Similarly, Steeves et al. (2009) articulated the bureaucratic process resulting in NCLB took part without classroom teachers' involvement or consideration and that NCLB reforms have reduced teacher autonomy. Both Au and Steeves et al. cited the prescription of instructional programs, mandated daily lessons, and use of instructional scripts as examples of reforms that have impacted teacher autonomy. Steeves et al. also claimed that "the high stakes nature of testing places teachers in a role that, at times, seems more similar to a corporate trainer hired to maximize resources, increase production, and boost company profits" (p. 79). The enactment of NCLB seems to have reinforced the administrative progressives' historical belief that reform is best accomplished through a managerial, top-down approach.

Common Core

While NCLB required standardization of accountability, states still had different content standards (Porter et al., 2011). It was not until the Common Core that English language arts and mathematics standards became more nationalized, with most states volunteering to adopt the new standards (Porter et al., 2011). Generation of the Common Core standards was "led jointly by the

National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)" (Porter et al., 2011, p. 103). One driving force for the national standards was the familiar concern (e.g., Sputnik, *Nation at Risk*) related to international comparisons of student achievement (Rothman, 2011). The standards, published in 2010, addressed English language arts and mathematics and were quickly adopted by 36 states and the District of Columbia (Porter et al., 2011). The purpose of the standards was to delineate what content to teach without prescribing how (i.e., the pedagogy) that content should be taught (Porter et al., 2011). However, Rothman claimed the standards "were aimed at making it easier for test developers and curriculum designers to come up with better products, rather than having to address the needs of different states" (p. 2). That claim indicated at least some conflict with the assumption that the standards would not influence how content should be taught.

Porter et al. (2011) listed "efficiency" as one of the critical benefits that policymakers espoused through the promulgation of a "national curriculum" (p. 103). In this sense, the Common Core has some similarities with the principles of the Taylor System. One of the underlying beliefs driving the creation of the Common Core was that the states, left to their own devices, lowered expectations to inflate achievement scores (Rothman, 2011). Correspondingly, the federal government provided $330 million of funding directed to two different consortia (SMARTER Balanced Assessment Coalition and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) to create assessments aligned to the Common Core standards (Porter et al., 2011).

These standards have been lauded by some and criticized by others. Advocates asserted that these standards would require more cognitive demand and were more focused than pre-existing state standards (Porter et al., 2011). However, findings from a Porter et al. study

comparing state standards and the Common Core called these assertions into question. The study concluded that the Common Core was more focused than some state standards and less focused than others. Also, international benchmarking showed there might not have been the intended level of cognitive demand compared to other high achieving countries.

Beyond the degree to which the standards provide a sharper focus, scholars considered how these standards may prepare students for college and careers (Rothman, 2011). Rothman shared that the standards only include selected academic skills and do not communicate all the competencies students need to succeed beyond school. Rothman's review of the body of research regarding what students need for success in college and the workplace concluded collaboration and other habits of mind are also necessary. Rothman argued that "students who master the Common Core might not be ready for colleges and careers if they have not developed these abilities as well" (p. 11). Steeves et al. (2009) suggested that the high stakes from accountability systems linked to the assessments of Common Core standards can shift focus away from developing such habits of mind. This shift of emphasis in schools has been referred to as "narrowing" of the curriculum (Cuban, 2004; Joseph, 2011). Steeves et al. explained narrowing by stating that "teachers are not always encouraged to explore subject matter in a deep and meaningful way, investigate topics outside the conventional framework, or create assessments emphasizing a variety of intelligences or different modalities of learning" (p. 79). A desire for more meaningful learning has led to a movement to provide "deeper learning" experiences for students (Hewlett Foundation, 2013).

Problem Statement

A key element within school accountability frameworks across the United States is student performance, as measured by standardized assessments (Haertel, 2018). Scholars argued

that these types of assessments and accountability systems resulted in a narrowing of the curriculum that emphasizes the development of discrete, specialized skills (Joseph, 2011; Tucker, 2011). Researchers espousing the human capital production purpose of education (i.e., preparation for the workforce) criticized the narrowing of curriculum by noting the skills required to succeed in the workplace during the 21st Century have become increasingly multi-dimensional (Fullan et al., 2018). Simultaneously, scholars who favor a more democratic purpose of schooling expressed displeasure with curriculum narrowing for different reasons (Cuban, 2004; Joseph, 2011). For example, Joseph argued that "there is little interest in how to create curriculum for students to study meaningful questions based on their curiosity about the world; nor do schools help learners to imagine how they could change the world" (p. 36).

Researchers recently suggested that "deep learning" approaches better support students in building the skills and understanding needed for the workplace as well as supporting a more democratic aim of schooling that allows students to investigate social issues, collaborate authentically, and bring their identity into their schoolwork (Fullan et al., 2018; Huberman et al., 2014; Mehta & Fine, 2019; Rickles et al., 2019). Unfortunately, Mehta and Fine's (2019) prolonged study conducted across the United States found deeper learning practices were not being observed at the school-wide level. Two of the most influential barriers to systemic enactment of deep learning noted by Mehta and Fine were "district pacing guidelines" and the associated "compliance-oriented model" at the school district level (p. 393).

Scholars have documented that compliance and top-down approaches played a prominent role in the history of public education in the United States (Callahan, 1962; Tyack, 1974). Henderson et al. (2000) suggested that "the traditional management paradigm has determined the business of schooling in our country since the turn of the twentieth Century" (p. 17). Henderson

et al. also contended that the "factory model of standardization" created an approach to management of schools that "has at best resulted in compliance to rules, regulations, and policies imposed from on high" (p. 17). A critical analysis by Au (2011) provided a similar, but more recent description of administrative control over teacher practices. For deeper learning to take root at the school and system (e.g., district) level, Mehta and Fine (2019) advised that district leaders undertake a cultural shift including redesigning curriculum and establishing a "new balance between breadth and depth" (p. 388).

Teachers and principals in studies conducted by other researchers described district cultures as being similar to the characterization presented by Mehta and Fine (2019) (i.e., compliance-oriented, top-down, etc.) (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Newberg-Long, 2010; Ylimaki, 2012). These studies, however, did not focus on the perspective of the district-level curriculum leaders. Indeed, a cultural shift may be necessary for deeper learning to proliferate across schools in a district. However, it is vital to richly describe a school district's existing culture before considering how a cultural shift may take place. I contended that a thorough analysis of the values, beliefs, and attitudes (i.e., culture) of district-level curriculum leadership was necessary before further consideration of reculturing for the proliferation of deeper learning would be successful.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this investigation was to generate a rich description of the beliefs, values, and attitudes held by the district-level curriculum leader(s) in a large public school district. I compared the findings to the beliefs, values, and attitudes that scholars have suggested support the proliferation of deeper learning (Fullan et al., 2018; Mehta & Fine, 2019). Mehta and Fine (2019) put forth a proposition that a district-level cultural shift needs to take place. As Yin

(2009) noted, this type of single-case study can "be used to determine whether a theory's propositions are correct or whether some alternative set of explanations might be more relevant" (p. 47).

Rationale and Significance

One reason to contribute to the body of literature regarding deeper learning is that a deeper learning movement may engender more unified support than reform movements from the past. As noted, administrative progressives and pedagogical progressives debated the purpose of schooling and argued over the curriculum's focus since the middle of the 19th Century. The 2012 NRC report regarding deeper learning, however, included rhetoric from both reform movements. This report indicated at least some degree of shared interest in promoting deeper learning practices in schools (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012). For example, the report claimed that "today's children can meet future challenges if their schooling and informal learning activities prepare them for adult roles as citizens, employees, managers, parents, volunteers, and entrepreneurs" (p. 1). The NRC's language alludes to the human capital production purpose of education (i.e., employees, managers, entrepreneurs) alongside language referencing a democratic purpose of education (i.e., citizens, parents, volunteers). Advancing the study of deeper learning may present an opportunity to unify stakeholders calling for school reform.

While the NRC report indicated an appeal for the practices that promote deeper learning, Fullan et al. (2018) warned that "the movement of deep learning is fragile and may become domesticated by strong forces in the status quo" (p. xv). Fullan et al. also reminded readers to "keep in mind that the outcome could go either way" (p. xv). Mehta and Fine (2019) contended that bureaucratic mindsets and compliance-oriented approaches to curriculum leadership at the district level are specific forces in the status quo that serve as barriers to the proliferation of

deeper learning in schools. Perspectives of teachers, school principals, and researchers have supported the contentions made by Mehta and Fine (Au, 2011; Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Newberg-Long, 2010; Ylimaki, 2012). However, the body of literature has not adequately represented the district-level leaders' perspectives regarding what values, beliefs, and attitudes have driven their approaches. I proposed it would be beneficial for educators throughout all levels of the system (i.e., teachers, principals, and district-level leaders) to gain a rich understanding of varying or shared perspectives regarding the values, beliefs, and attitudes that influence curricular decisions and actions. An organizational implication of this type of mutual understanding could be that school districts take positive steps toward removing barriers to the enactment of deeper learning in schools.

This study may also inform future research. Mehta and Fine (2019) called for district curriculum leaders to make a cultural shift to support deeper learning in schools. However, the literature has not thoroughly described the existing cultures (i.e., values, beliefs, and attitudes) of district-level curriculum leadership as those cultures have primarily been described from the perspectives of teachers and school-level administrators. It was valuable to directly study the values, beliefs, and attitudes of district-level curriculum leaders to more richly characterize a culture that may, or may not, need to "shift." Future researchers could use this type of clearly defined picture of an existing culture (i.e., status quo) to theorize how a shift may occur.

Definition of Terms

- *Curriculum Leader*: A leader based in the school district central office who coordinates, supports, or evaluates curriculum and instruction across all non-charter schools in the district including elementary, middle-level, and high school.

- *Curriculum*: Rather than being considered a prescribed or explicit object, curriculum may be conceptualized as a complex and dynamic interaction among values, visions, beliefs, norms, and practices (Joseph, 2011).

- *Culture of Curriculum Leadership*: A culture of curriculum leadership is defined as the set of beliefs, values, and attitudes held by the leaders of the curriculum at the district-wide level. This culture is separate from any characterizations of "school culture" or notions related to "climate and culture" within a school or across the school district.

  - *Belief:* "Part of a system that includes our values and attitudes, plus our personal knowledge, experiences, opinions, prejudices, morals, and other interpretive perceptions of the social world" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 111).

  - *Value:* "The importance we attribute to oneself, another person, thing, or idea" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 111).

  - *Attitude:* "The way we think and feel about ourselves, another person, thing, or idea" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 111).

- *Deeper Learning*: Learning that involves application of concepts across broad contexts (i.e., beyond recall), development of competencies that support success in other domains (e.g., creativity and critical thinking), and a focus on building meaning through collaborative construction of knowledge (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012).

- *Reculturing:* The process of changing "commonly held assumptions, values, norms, and practices" (Joseph, 2011, p. 55).

Research Question

The research question I investigated to achieve the purpose of the study was:

Q1   What beliefs, values, and attitudes characterize the culture of district-level curriculum leadership in a large public school district?

Overview of Methodology

This qualitative study employed an instrumental case study design to investigate the research question (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This design allowed me to generate a rich description of the district-level curriculum leadership in the sampled school district. The study had an embedded design as the district was the unit of analysis, but the curriculum leaders were a critical subunit within the case (Yin, 2009). I applied an "ethnographic perspective" in the study to examine dynamics within the culture-sharing group (i.e., the school district) (Gee & Green, 1998; Windschitl & Sahl, 2002). The school district was selected to represent a "typical" case (Yin, 2009). Specifically, the district's enrollment and demographic makeup approximated the averages for public school districts in the United States.

The study participants were six district-level curriculum leaders, three school principals, and 12 teachers. While the curriculum leaders in the district were the central focus, teachers and school-based administrators' perspectives added detail to the case and served to triangulate data collected from the curriculum leaders. Data for the study was collected from interviews, observations with field notes, and documents. A conceptual framework established by Joseph (2011) was used to guide the data collection process. The framework outlines 12 different dimensions to consider when exploring "curriculum as culture" (Joseph, 2011).

I conducted two interviews with the assistant superintendent and one interview with each district-level curriculum coordinator using an in-depth approach (Yin, 2009). Teachers and school administrators were interviewed one time each using a focused approach (Yin, 2009). I also observed two district-level curriculum coordinators during a professional development session and a curricular planning session. I collected documents throughout the study from multiple sources. The documents were used to provide supplementary data and substantiate

information gathered from interviews and observations (Yin, 2009). An inductive approach was used to code and analyze the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, the deeper learning research base served as the "study proposition," providing more focus within the analysis (Yin, 2009, p. 28).

Limitations

The data I collected was limited by the personal perceptions of the participants willing to participate in interviews. I collected data from only one school district and six district-level curriculum leaders. Findings, correspondingly, should not be generalized beyond that scope. Suryani (2013) reinforced this limitation of case studies by advising that "the researchers may not be able to cover all issues and offer a *scientific generalization* because they tend to have limited evidence" (p. 121). Furthermore, Clifford (as cited in Mills & Morton, 2013) reminds us ethnographic truths are "inherently partial – committed and incomplete" (p. 38).

Although not intended to support scientific or statistical generalization to populations, Yin (2009) noted that case studies generalize to "theoretical propositions" (p. 15). Yin (2009) refers to this form of transferability as "analytic generalization." Analytic generalization from this study was achieved by contributing to the theoretical body of knowledge related to district curriculum leadership and deeper learning conditions. However, Yin (2009) advised analytic generalization is "not automatic" and my findings would need to be replicated further to test any theories derived from those findings (p. 44).

Positionality of the Researcher

I am an educator with 23 years of experience as a secondary science and math teacher and K-8 principal in public schools. I identify as a middle-class white male, and I am dedicated to supporting students' school and life success in our K-12 education system. I feel students are

being hindered by the narrowed focus (e.g., discrete and shallow learning targets) often evident in public education institutions, and I desire to work toward a deeper and more relevant experience for students in the K-12 system. When I began my career as a high school science teacher, state standards and accountability systems were only beginning to take shape and did not impact my daily work in the classroom. I designed thematic learning experiences, including a multi-disciplinary Mount Everest unit within which students learned about India and Nepal's history and culture, studied the geologic events that formed the peak, investigated high altitude biology, and collaborated with peers to complete a research project. This type of approach would not be viable within the current landscape of standardization at that school. However, not all the "freedom" we had as teachers in the 1990s was productive. I witnessed some positive outcomes of enhanced accountability and clearly delineated learning targets (e.g., standards) during the past two decades. I contend relationships between standardization, accountability, leadership, curriculum, and instruction are complex and cannot be described in singular terms (e.g., compliance-oriented).

I am biased positively toward approaches espoused by scholars promoting deeper learning. I took specific steps to address this bias throughout the study. Yin (2009) admitted researchers conducting case studies could be "especially prone" to the concern of working to reinforce existing positions (p. 72). To counteract bias, I remained "sensitive and responsive to contradictory evidence" (Yin, 2009, p. 69). I also worked to address "all major rival interpretations" during data analysis (Yin, 2009, p. 160). This approach included placing extra attention on addressing all the evidence collected and considering whether another person may have presented alternative explanations to any of the findings (Yin, 2009).

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is presented in five chapters. Chapter one provided a historical context for the study, identified the problem being investigated, and communicated an overview of the plan for conducting the study. Chapter two reviews the literature. The review begins with a brief synopsis of standardization and school accountability. It continues with sections that define deeper learning, summarize selected deeper learning studies, and discuss the conditions that support the enactment of deeper learning in schools. Next, the literature focused on curriculum leadership and the reculturing of curriculum are discussed. Chapter three is focused on the design of the study. The methodology section communicates the setting, the selection of participants, the approach used for data collection and analysis, and a consideration of ethics and trustworthiness. In chapter four, I present the findings from the study within five broad themes. The final chapter includes a discussion of each theme followed by sections that communicate implications for practice and policy and make recommendations for further research.

Chapter Summary

Studies exploring deeper learning in schools have found school-wide enactments of deeper learning are uncommon, if not altogether absent. Scholars have suggested that bureaucratic top-down approaches from district-level leadership have inhibited the cultivation of conditions necessary for deeper learning to flourish. These bureaucratic approaches have been described as the "traditional management paradigm" (Henderson et al., 2000, p. 17). An appraisal of various seminal historical events over the past two hundred years shows this paradigm's evolution. Although numerous studies have described this type of leadership from the viewpoint of teachers and school administrators, researchers have not sufficiently investigated the culture of district-level curriculum leadership from the perspective of leaders in those positions. This

case study was conducted to generate a rich description of district-level curriculum leaders'

beliefs, values, and attitudes in one large public school district. The findings were then analyzed

in relation to the beliefs, values, and attitudes scholars have suggested to support the proliferation

of deeper learning at the school-wide level.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter Overview

The literature review provided a foundation for this study that investigated relationships between district-level curriculum leaders' beliefs, values, and attitudes and the conditions scholars have suggested to support deeper learning across the schools in a district system. The review begins by providing background related to accountability, managerialism in public schools, and curriculum narrowing. Next, I summarize the body of research that defines deeper learning and give an overview of the conditions scholars have theorized are necessary for deeper learning to flourish. I then consider selected literature regarding district-level curriculum leadership and reference a conceptual framework that supported this examination of the beliefs, values, and attitudes related to curriculum leadership. The section concludes with a brief discussion of the reculturing of district-level curriculum leadership.

Setting the Context

In chapter one, I summarized influential reform movements from the past 200 years of public education in the United States. The historical overview showed how different interest groups have been in an ongoing competition for control over the public school curriculum. As referenced, this power struggle has influenced the leadership of curriculum and contextualizes this study of the intersection of district-level curriculum leadership and deeper learning in schools. The battle for dominance over the curriculum has continued into the 21st Century with

increasing influences from Performance Accountability and New Public Management

approaches in schools (Maxcy, 2009).

Performance Accountability

Cibulka and Derlin (1998) defined "Performance Accountability" (PA) as the use of

student achievement data to measure the performance of schools, districts, and states (p. 502).

While PA began influencing public schools as early as the 1960s, Maxcy (2009) referred to PA

as the "dominant model of statewide school reform" by the late 1990s (p. 490). Furthermore,

Maxcy contended that the passage of NCLB intensified the climate surrounding PA into the type

of environment Professor Ernest House had criticized in his 1972 article, "The Dominion of

Economic Accountability." House warned that this approach to accountability would skew

public education too far toward the purpose of human capital production and result in educators

attempting to raise achievement in the most efficient way possible (Maxcy, 2009). Apple (2000)

drew associations between PA and the Taylor System and argued that PA reinforces the use of

national standards and results in policies that centrally prescribe curricula and decrease control

for teachers and principals. Apple also maintained that "managerialism takes center stage" in the

environment created by PA (p. 245).

New Public Management

The type of public sector managerialism referenced by Apple was previously referred to

as "New Public Management" (NPM) by Hood (1991). Numerous parallels exist between the

language of PA and Hood's description of NPM. For example, one attribute of NPM is the use of

"explicit standards and measures of performance" (Hood, 1991, p. 4). Other characteristics of

NPM include an emphasis on results over procedures and the attitude that power should reside at

the top of the organization rather than being distributed throughout its various members

(Hood, 1991). Various reforms associated with NPM have shown evidence that applying market-based principles to public education is also part of this management approach (Anderson & Cohen, 2018). For example, there has been an increased emphasis on contracting services to private sector vendors and using consulting companies in reform initiatives (Anderson & Cohen, 2018). The influence corporations have exerted over curriculum development and adoption also illustrates the marketization of public education (Mahiri, 2005). Mahiri argued that textbook corporations promoting specific curricula have become a "form of corporate takeover and control of public schools" (p. 72).

An institutional ethnography by Maxcy (2009) depicted relationships between PA and NPM. The Maxcy study considered the effect of PA on relations between school and school district personnel in one Texas elementary school. Publicly available documents and reports were investigated through discourse analysis to consider the process of implementing a specific district-level reform. One of Maxcy's findings was that the high degree of pressure related to the school's performance resulted in district-level leaders initiating "a highly specified and strongly enforced instructional regime" that included centrally prescribed curricular content and instructional approaches (p. 514). The study referenced the managerial style described by House and characterized by Hood as NPM.

Daly and Finnigan (2011) also investigated accountability pressures during a district-wide reform. Unlike Maxcy's ethnographic method, Daly and Finnigan used a social network analysis in their longitudinal case study of an underperforming school district's reform efforts. Daly and Finnigan referenced prior studies which indicated that "under high-stakes accountability, school central office relations become more bureaucratic and rule bound" (p. 69). Similarly, they found the high-stakes environment created by NCLB and fear of sanctions

resulted in a highly centralized network. Their analysis revealed the district had a "core-periphery" (CP) network structure, meaning there were dense ties between leaders within the central office but weak ties between actors in the central office and those at school sites (p. 47). Daly and Finnigan argued that the CP network structure marginalized the people on the periphery and resulted in a system that lacked the coherence and connectivity needed to engage in productive partnerships. This context caused an "organizational homeostasis" within which the district structures and networks were preserved rather than recultured (p. 68).

Curriculum Narrowing and Assessment

As noted above, pressure stemming from school accountability has been linked to the enactment of NPM philosophies and movements to increase control over teachers' instructional approaches. Beyond those impacts, the environment of PA has also shaped decisions regarding curricular content. Specifically, scholars have suggested PA has resulted in a "narrowing of the curriculum" (Cuban, 2004; Joseph, 2011). In chapter one, I reviewed the ongoing debate regarding the focus of school curriculum. As noted in that summary, curriculum focused on developing specific content knowledge and discrete academic skills was referred to as antiquated as far back as the late 19th Century when J. M. Rice (1893) authored a book titled *The Public-School System of the United States*. After observing more than 1,200 teachers in 36 cities, he concluded that "the aim of the instruction is limited mainly to drilling facts into the minds of the children, and to hearing them recite lessons they have learned" (p. 20). Unfortunately, this mirrors what Tucker (2011) concluded 118 years later when he asserted that "the United States has in recent years emphasized mastery of basic skills at the expense of mastery of more advanced skills" (pp. 8-9). Tucker supported this statement by referencing the proliferation of multiple-choice test items administered by computers.

Narrow targets on tests like those referenced by Tucker are the subject of criticism by scholars studying what is required to succeed in the evolving and increasingly complex world of work students will enter (Huberman et al., 2014). Beyond success in the world of work, narrowing of curriculum has been criticized by scholars who view the purpose of schooling in more democratic terms (Cuban, 2004; Goodlad, 1984; Joseph, 2011). Joseph articulated this sentiment in stating, "The compulsion to cover material is antithetical to several aims of progressive reform, e.g., the deep and elaborate understanding of selected core ideas, democratic curriculum planning, and critical examination of social conditions" (p. 39). Harris et al. (2019) expressed a similar attitude in proclaiming that our education system must prepare students to confront the challenges that exist now and in the future by applying knowledge in novel situations beyond understanding specific content.

Despite interest in a more comprehensive approach to curriculum, Herman et al. (2016) noted that schools feel pressure to focus their curricula on aligning with tests. Furthermore, Herman et al. lamented, "State accountability tests measure mostly low-level learning and give little attention to higher-level thinking, communication, and use of knowledge in novel or complex situations" (p. 1). In response to concerns about curriculum narrowing, scholars have argued for a curriculum that includes enhanced opportunities for "deeper learning" (Fullan et al., 2018; Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012; Rickles et al., 2019). The next section of this review defines and describes deeper learning.

Defining Deeper Learning

Deeper learning, as terminology, was first described in a 2012 publication from the National Research Council (NRC) authored by their Committee on Defining Deeper Learning and 21st Century Skills, Board on Testing and Assessment, and Board on Science Education

(Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012). The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation helped initiate and served as a supporting agency for the work that resulted in the NRC report. The Hewlett Foundation (2013) built on this report to define deeper learning, more succinctly, as an "umbrella term" that is inclusive of six different competencies: content mastery, critical thinking, collaboration, communication, learning to learn, and academic mindset (p. 1). The Hewlett Foundation elaborated in stating:

> The typical worksheet, drill-and-memorize, and test preparation approach to classroom teaching actually makes it difficult for students to retain the myriad bits of information they encounter during the school year. More effective is an instructional method that requires students to use important information repeatedly in complex and meaningful ways. (p. 1)

Other scholars have defined deeper learning in a similar yet distinct manner.

Six "global competencies" were outlined by Fullan et al. (2018) from work done with the consortium of New Pedagogies for Deep Learning. These six competencies are character, citizenship, collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking. Note that collaboration, communication, and critical thinking are also three of the six competencies delineated by the Hewlett Foundation (2013). More commonalities also exist between the competencies outlined for deeper learning and those typically listed within 21st-century learning descriptions. Fullan et al. argued their deeper learning competencies are distinct from 21st Century skills in "comprehensiveness, precision, and measurability" (p. 18). The deeper learning descriptions provided by the Hewlett Foundation and Fullan et al. capture the most critical elements recognized by scholars within this area of research. However, other definitions add value when creating a thorough overview of deeper learning.

Mehta and Fine (2019) referenced the Hewlett Foundation definition while suggesting deeper learning in both school and life is represented by a thoughtful integration of mastery, identity, and creativity. Specifically, within deeper learning, students develop knowledge and skill, find connections between their unique selves and the learning, and produce something as an output rather than only receiving knowledge as an input. Furthermore, Mehta and Fine suggested that the presence of different apprenticeship forms is an element often seen within deeper learning environments. Examples of apprenticeship may include students in the classroom being guided by experts in the field, teachers imparting specific expertise, or students with more advanced skill sets supporting their peers.

It is worth including some additional details regarding deeper learning from the NRC's original definition. The NRC report described deeper learning as "the process through which an individual becomes capable of taking what was learned in one situation and applying it to new situations (i.e., transfer)" (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012, p. 5). The NRC publication also grouped deeper learning competencies into three domains: cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Although there are many definitions of deeper learning, these varied articulations have commonalities. Each description shares a focus on the application of student learning in broader contexts (i.e., beyond recall), development of competencies that support success in other domains (e.g., creativity and critical thinking), and a focus on building meaning through collaborative construction of knowledge.

Fullan et al. (2018) provided numerous examples of deeper learning in action. One example was a choice-based high school research project completed by a student from an indigenous community. Based on his difficulty adjusting to a different culture, the student chose to research indigenous youth's experiences when transitioning to high school. The student

recruited peers from the class to form a research team, and they designed a survey, wrote interview questions, and gathered data from students experiencing this type of transition. After the project was completed, the student extended his interest by forming an advisory committee at the school to give indigenous students a voice. Another example shared in the Fullan et al. text came from a sixth-grade classroom within which the students were challenged to solve a local, community, or global issue. After a class-wide discussion, the students decided to investigate food supply, including consideration of bees' role in pollinating different plants. The students researched non-GMO fruits and vegetables and presented their findings in a family showcase using varied mechanisms, including three-dimensional models, coding software, and other chosen tools. The class then collaborated with a world-renowned beekeeper to build a school garden with 20 varieties of non-GMO organic fruits and vegetables and three bee pollinator gardens.

Mehta and Fine (2019) also presented a variety of examples of deeper learning. One of their most detailed illustrations was a theatre production they observed at one of the schools in their study. Although the theatre students engaged in mastering content, Mehta and Fine noticed the approach differed from traditional classroom experiences. The theatre production used time differently, was multi-disciplinary (e.g., history, language arts, music), had an embedded sense of purpose, and provided high degrees of student autonomy. The process also included forms of apprenticeship, including students working directly with older or more experienced peers. Furthermore, the theatre experience exemplified interdependence and a sense of community. The theatre production and the examples from Fullan et al. (2018) show evidence of what Mehta and Fine note as powerful elements of deeper learning, including purpose and performance, choice, community, interdependence, and apprenticeship.

Deeper Learning Research

In 2014, Huberman et al. reported there was a "limited empirical base" focused on deeper learning and called for more "rigorous research" (p. 3). This section summarizes two of the most widely cited studies related to this call for action. Jal Mehta and Sarah Fine (2019) conducted an extensive case study of deeper learning in high schools across the United States. They observed 30 schools in nine different cities for more than 750 total hours. During the study, Mehta and Fine interviewed more than 300 students, teachers, parents, and school administrators. The findings of the study were discussed in a book titled *In Search of Deeper Learning: The Quest to Remake the American High School* (Mehta & Fine, 2019). The Mehta and Fine investigation focused on schools suggested to them by colleagues as being aligned to deeper learning principles. However, after spending time in these schools, their findings were less than inspiring.

Some individual classrooms served as exemplars of the practices that support students in having deeper learning experiences (Mehta & Fine, 2019). These exemplary classrooms (more likely to be elective courses), however, were not observed to be consistently located across an entire school. A small number of schools did present more deeper learning opportunities for students than others, and these bright spots provided some ideas for how a school may expand deeper learning. The findings of this study were complicated and multi-faceted. However, a memorable quote from Mehta and Fine was, "The dominant patterns we had observed reflected a school system that was trapped by a 'grammar of schooling' that was cast a century ago" (p. 4). This statement referenced the organizational structures and rules that Tyack and Tobin (1994) referred to as the "basic 'grammar' of schooling" (p. 454). Tyack and Tobin (1994) characterized this "grammar" as including teacher-centered and textbook centered approaches that focus on assigning specific tasks to students and monitoring and controlling them. The separation of

students into age-based grade levels and the division of knowledge into separate subject areas are also components of the structure to which Tyack and Tobin referred.

Although Mehta and Fine (2019) did not find school-wide deeper learning in their extensive study, an investigation by a group of scholars at the American Institutes for Research (AIR) claimed broad implementations of deeper learning do exist (Rickles et al., 2019). The AIR team communicated findings from a more extensive investigation named the "Study of Deeper Learning: Opportunities and Outcomes" (commissioned by the Hewlett Foundation) (Rickles et al., 2019). This study "was designed to produce the most rigorous evidence to date on the effects of implementing a school-wide approach to promoting deeper learning for high school students" (p. 215). Rickles et al. produced evidence that students' enhanced opportunities to experience deeper learning could yield positive outcomes.

The study analyzed 16 small high schools in a network focused on deeper learning (i.e., Hewlett Foundation's Deeper Learning Community of Practice) (Rickles et al., 2019). The researchers determined from student survey results that students in the network schools experienced more opportunities for deeper learning than students in the comparison (i.e., "traditional") schools. Examples of opportunities were creativity, complex problem solving, interdisciplinary learning, activities with real-world connections, and varied forms of assessment. The results reported effect sizes that quantified differences between students in the network and comparison schools across nine different types of opportunities, including such domains as creative thinking and communication. The average effect sizes ranged from 0.21 to 0.55, depending on the type of opportunity.

Results of the Rickles et al. (2019) study also indicated students in the sample schools "demonstrated better deeper learning competencies compared with students in comparison

schools" (p. 228). Competencies included intrapersonal and interpersonal skills measured by student survey results and cognitive skills measured through content assessments and the PISA-Based Test for Schools. Results of the cognitive assessments indicated that "students in network schools scored 0.10 to 0.12 standard deviations higher on the three cognitive competency assessments (reading, mathematics, and science) than students in the comparison schools" (p. 228). The survey results regarding interpersonal and intrapersonal skills showed four of eight domains had statistically significant differences between the two populations. Students in the network schools rated themselves higher in the four domains of collaboration skills, academic engagement, motivation to learn, and self-efficacy (i.e., the degree to which students felt capable of succeeding on tasks in varied contexts).

While these results were encouraging, it is worth noting some limitations pointed out by the authors of this study. First, the students in the network schools had self-selected into those schools while those in the comparison schools did not (Rickles et al., 2019). Second, the network schools were much smaller (398 students on average) than the comparison schools (1,350 students on average). It is also important to communicate that the Hewlett Foundation funded the study, and the network schools investigated were also participants in the community of practice associated with the Hewlett Foundation. Although Rickles et al. presented hopeful results from an analysis of school-wide deeper learning, they recommended that future research determine strategies and supports that traditional districts (i.e., those not in a deeper learning network) could use to support broad enactment of deeper learning.

Assessing Deeper Learning

The studies I reviewed above focused on the degree to which deeper learning was taking place in selected schools. An additional body of literature is developing regarding the assessment

of deeper learning. Herman et al. (2016) completed a study, funded by the Hewlett Foundation, to assess the depth of knowledge (DOK) of test items included on the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) using a scale developed by Webb (2002). The study used depth of knowledge as a proxy for deeper learning and defined DOK 3 and DOK 4 as levels that indicated measurement of deeper learning competency (Herman et al., 2016). Webb defines DOK level 3 as "strategic thinking," including supporting ideas with details and applying a concept to different contexts. DOK level 4 is considered "extended thinking" and includes analyzing information from various sources and designing and carrying out an experiment. Herman et al. speculated the PISA, due to a strong reputation for a focus on problem-solving, might serve as an exemplar for assessment of deeper learning. The findings were unexpected as the analysis showed fewer than 10% of PISA items tested deeper learning for reading, and 14% for math. Furthermore, none of the PISA items for reading or math assessed competency at the DOK 4 level.

The Herman et al. (2016) study also included analyses of the DOK levels of various assessments aligned to the Common Core standards in the United States calculated by other expert panels. They reported the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and Smarter Balanced assessments had higher DOK demands than PISA. For example, the eighth-grade language arts assessments by PARCC and Smarter Balanced included 69% and 44%, respectively, of items at the "deeper learning level" (i.e., DOK 3 and 4 combined). The results for eighth-grade mathematics from PARCC and Smarter Balanced were 25% and 9%, respectively.

The percentages reported are averages from each of the four "panels" (e.g., WestEd) that studied these assessments using the DOK scale (Herman et al., 2016). However, the findings

from each of the four panels were disparate. For example, there was a 29 percentage point difference between the number of higher-level items (DOK 3 and 4) reported by two panels for eighth-grade language arts. The reliability of the analyses seems questionable due to the size of this discrepancy. Beyond that concern, I question the use of DOK 3 and 4 as a meaningful proxy for deeper learning. For example, Webb's (2002) DOK 3 for reading includes verbs such as determine, summarize, and analyze while DOK 3 for math includes verbs asking learners to justify, draw conclusions, and cite evidence. While these verbs indicate alignment with some deeper learning competencies, the DOK descriptions do not include other critical elements of deeper learning, such as collaboration, learning to learn, and creativity.

Despite these concerns, the Herman et al. (2016) study did indicate that updated assessment systems (e.g., Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium) include some degree of critical thinking and open-ended tasks. However, Noguera (2017) asserted that schools have remained focused on a narrowed approach to raising test scores instead of engaging students in deeper learning. Critics of accountability systems have argued that such policies have influenced schools and teachers to teach directly to assessments (Cuban, 2008; Dee et al., 2013; Hursh, 2013). This approach has been considered problematic. For example, Yazzie-Mintz (2010) reported a correlation between practices such as teaching to the test and low student engagement and communicated specific concerns with students' perception of the authenticity and relevance of learning in schools. Proponents of deeper learning contend that deeper learning approaches address student engagement concerns and help students see school as authentic and relevant (Mehta & Fine, 2019).

As deeper learning has gained traction, test designers have begun work on a "new generation" of assessments (Harris et al., 2019, p. 53). Despite interest in creating new forms of

evaluation, it has become clear that "it is not well known how to measure this complex, multidimensional learning" (Harris et al., 2019, p. 54). Harris et al. stated that a focus on deeper learning calls for a different way of defining what it means to be proficient, including an emphasis on "knowledge-in-use." Knowledge-in-use includes applying knowledge for problem-solving and reasoning to make sense of various phenomena as professionals do in their everyday work in their fields of expertise. Assessments of deeper learning will need to address knowledge□in□use, and Harris et al. asserted doing this "poses a formidable challenge to assessment design and validation" (p. 54). Harris et al. took on this challenge by presenting ideas to measure deeper learning in science. Still, they cautioned their concept is "early and ongoing" and is only one example of this new way of assessing (p. 64). Rethinking assessment is one domain to consider to support deeper learning in schools. The next section considers assessment along with other conditions that could support the enactment of deeper learning.

Conditions for Deeper Learning

Scholars suggest various conditions that support enhanced opportunities for students to experience deeper learning. Fullan et al. (2018) advised revisions to "policy infrastructure," including realignment of assessment systems and adjustment to demands for curriculum coverage (p. 160). For example, New Zealand eliminated National Standards in 2017 "in favor of a new system that utilizes learning progressions and other elements compatible with deep learning" (Fullan et al., 2018, p. 161). Rickles et al. (2019) also considered the use of unique forms of assessment aligned with deeper learning experiences as one of the conditions schools needed to meet to be part of the sample in their investigation. In particular, the assessments had to show evidence of problem-solving, communication, and collaboration.

As a nationwide policy change like in New Zealand seems less likely in the United States, Mehta and Fine (2019) made recommendations within similar domains as Fullan et al. (2018) but focused on the school and district levels of educational leadership. Mehta and Fine advised that district leaders undertake a cultural shift that includes redesigning curriculum to establish a "new balance between breadth and depth" (p. 388). This shift involves removing barriers such as "district pacing guidelines" and the associated "compliance-oriented model" (p. 393). Teachers in the Mehta and Fine sample consistently communicated that district leaders required the use of pacing guides that "dictated the rate at which students were supposed to learn" (p. 388). Although pacing guides were developed to be supportive, they were packed with so much content that teachers did not have the time needed for students to learn deeply. Furthermore, the guides were implemented without enough flexibility for teachers to make adaptations based on student interests or needs. Mehta and Fine also addressed rethinking student assessment in their recommendation for more authentic, performance-based approaches.

The conditions mentioned to this point have been policy revisions to address the demands of curricular coverage and retooling of assessments for better alignment with deeper learning principles. However, scholars have also called for leaders to reconsider the values and beliefs that form the professional culture in districts and schools. Mehta and Fine (2019) asserted that "the qualities associated with student deeper learning - having opportunities to take risks, acknowledging that failure is part of learning, having some control and choice over one's learning - should instead characterize the adult culture in our schools and districts" (p. 393). Mehta and Fine called for a shift from a bureaucratic approach focused on standardization and "fidelity of implementation" to a professional mindset that honors the complexity and variability of the work and values practitioners (p. 393). Noguera (2017) also recommended leaders should

aim to build the professional capacity of teachers instead of merely relying on "prepackaged curricula" (p. 26). Furthermore, Noguera suggested prioritizing "time so that staff can engage in deeper learning themselves" (p. 26). Other scholars have noted similar concerns with adult cultures focused on fidelity and expressed the need for a more professional mindset (Au, 2011; Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Newberg-Long, 2010; Ylimaki, 2012).

It is also worth mentioning more granular, strategic moves that scholars have put forth in discussing the conditions necessary for deeper learning to proliferate in schools. The Rickles et al. (2019) study shared that "strategies that schools commonly used to foster deeper learning included project-based learning, internship opportunities, collaborative group work, longer-term cumulative assessments, and advisories" (p. 216). Interdisciplinary learning and "instructional activities that emphasize real world connections" were also noted as some of the conditions necessary to provide students with deeper learning opportunities (Rickles et al., 2019, p. 222). The work of Rickles at el. also referenced the idea that deeper learning should "promote development in the cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal competency domains" (p. 216). Mehta and Fine (2019) noted that the teachers who were most able to support deeper learning viewed students as producers, focused more on depth than breadth, viewed boundaries between disciplines as permeable, and provided opportunities for students to experience relevant work. These ideas were a few of the many components Mehta and Fine listed as indicative of a "new grammar of schooling" (p. 380).

An example of this instructional approach shared by Huberman et al. (2014) was a case study project completed by high school students about a West Virginia coal mining disaster. Students studied the disaster and related it to broader policies and contexts such as the U.S. dependence on fossil fuels. The students selected one issue related to energy use, collaborated to

collect data or evidence, and wrote a white paper to present to local experts (e.g., university professors, political figures). The unit of study also involved West Virginia's history and connections to music from different periods. This long-term project was an in-depth and multi-disciplinary (i.e., language arts, social studies, science) learning experience connected to real-life issues. The experience also allowed students to act as producers (i.e., rather than only as consumers of content. While this example was from a longer-term project, Huberman et al. noted that examples of deeper learning might come from shorter-term project-based assignments or even rich learning tasks that are not project-based.

District-Level Curriculum Leadership

The instructional approach used in the coal mining project was indicative of the values held by the curriculum leaders in the "network" of schools studied by Huberman et al. (2014). In this section, I review literature that considers the beliefs, values, and attitudes of district-level curriculum leaders. Both Bruner (1996) and Joseph (2011) contended that curriculum reflects beliefs, social values, and political values. Joseph also claimed that curriculum could be considered a "series of interwoven dynamics," including "power relationships" and "norms that affect our sense about what is right or appropriate" (p. 28). These characterizations of curriculum, combined with Mehta and Fine's (2019) findings regarding barriers to implementing deeper learning, made it essential to include a review of scholarly work related to beliefs, values, and power dynamics associated with curriculum leadership. In this section, I review seven different studies that address these topics.

A phenomenological dissertation by Newberg-Long (2010) investigated the experience of teaching in the age of accountability. The study detailed three teachers' experiences concerning district-level expectations around curriculum and instruction. Findings revealed that teachers

struggled with a mismatch between their perceived role and the requirements that came from the district. One specific theme was that the teachers did not feel they had time to teach everything they were required to cover. Teachers expressed that "there are just too many standards to teach if they must also remain obedient to the time allotments and scripted programs that are prescribed by their district" (p. 179). Newberg-Long also concluded that the teachers did not feel trusted by the district leadership.

A related perspective was portrayed in a qualitative study conducted by Crocco and Costigan (2007) to describe the experiences of beginning teachers in New York City. The study generated data from over 200 interviews across five years. One of the themes that Crocco and Costigan observed was that "prescribed curriculum frequently limits pedagogical options" (p. 514). More specifically, Crocco and Costigan (2007) shared that many of the teachers "conclude that the only way to 'cover' the curriculum is through direct instruction, that is, lecture or lecture with recitation" (p. 516). These findings illustrate the tension Mehta and Fine (2019) discovered when interviewing teachers and school leaders attempting to implement deeper learning approaches.

The studies by Newberg-Long and Crocco and Costigan illustrated teachers' feelings regarding values that seemed to be espoused by district curriculum leaders. A critical ethnography by Rose Ylimaki (2012) investigated four school principals' curriculum leadership and considered the perspectives of students, teachers, and parents regarding the intersection of curriculum leadership, policy requirements, and politics. One of the principals in the Ylimaki sample referenced having to "sneak" to adjust curricular approaches, and two of the principals expressed feeling a lack of control over curriculum leadership in their schools due to the power held by central office administrators (p. 322). There were discrepant views amongst the four

principals in the study. In two cases, the school leaders accepted the dominant conservative focus on standardization and competition. In contrast, the other two principals became critical of the discourse stemming from that focus. Ylimaki contended that the leadership of curriculum is not focused only on content and teaching practices as decisions about curriculum may now be considered "political acts" (p. 305).

In each of the three studies reviewed above, teacher and school leader perspectives allude to conflicts between personal autonomy and centralized control. This conflict was the focus of a study by Floden et al. (1988) investigating district-level curricular leadership. Although this research was completed 32 years ago, the concepts contributed to the context of this study. Floden et al. set out to "move beyond the autonomy-control dichotomy often used to discuss the impact of policy on teachers" (p. 98). The study used a questionnaire to survey fourth-grade math teachers in school districts across five states chosen to represent diverse policies and student enrollment demographics. The researchers also surveyed district curriculum directors for each district and the principal for each sampled school.

Floden et al. (1988) claimed that the existing (i.e., before their study) perception concerning district-level instructional leadership was that the leaders either adopted a loosely coupled or tightly coupled approach. The loosely coupled approach included removing central controls and promoting teacher autonomy, whereas the tightly coupled approach featured centralized decision-making and teacher persuasion. In framing their study, Floden et al. also clarified that "teacher autonomy requires more than an absence of central directives" (p. 100). At the time of publication, these scholars contended little was understood about the type of district leadership that emphasized building a partnership with teachers.

Floden et al. (1988) generated a framework to characterize the relationship between district curriculum leaders and teachers' curricular decisions in the classroom. The framework included four components: consistency, prescriptiveness, power, and authority (p. 102). This framework guided their survey questions and informed their data analysis process. For example, one questionnaire item asked participants to respond on a four-point agree-disagree scale to the statement, "policy matches content teachers think ought to be taught" (p. 119). Floden et al. concluded that it was inappropriate to characterize the tension between control and autonomy as dichotomous. They asserted that districts endeavor to lead reform movements without a proper understanding of how to carry out necessary changes. Furthermore, Floden et al. argued that "few districts" deserved to be criticized for exerting oppressive control. Instead, many districts lacked the "budgets and capacities" needed to prepare teachers to be more autonomous (p. 120). They called for both district leaders and teachers to enhance their understanding of the relationships between policies and teacher actions. Floden et al. summarized their viewpoint by suggesting that recognizing both district leaders and teachers as important "rejects the dichotomy between control and autonomy" (p. 100).

Like Floden et al. (1988), Meyer and Rowan (2006) expressed concerns with using a simple dichotomy to describe a system as complex as public education. In the late 1970s, scholars asserted that schools were a key illustration of loose coupling (Meyer & Rowan, 2006). However, Meyer and Rowan's (2006) more recent book, *The New Institutionalism in Education,* indicated that the onset of standards-based curricula and intensified accountability systems instilled doubts about the idea that schools in the United States are loosely coupled systems. Specifically, Meyer and Rowan argued that vague statements about coupling should be avoided as "institutional environments can be tightly coupled with some dimensions of instructional

practice, whereas loosely coupled with others" (p. 87). Meyer and Rowan identified six dimensions of instructional practice: academic content, academic tasks, classroom discourse, teaching strategies, student grouping, and instructional materials. They suggested that the degree of coupling may vary across dimensions and within a given dimension. For example, they cited evidence that language arts and mathematics are more tightly coupled with school and district administration (i.e., less teacher control and autonomy over content) than other content areas. The dimensions identified by Meyer and Rowan allow for a more nuanced analysis of the findings from the studies by Newberg-Long (2010), Crocco and Costigan (2007), and Ylimaki (2012). These studies indicated evidence of tight coupling but did not consider each of the Meyer and Rowan dimensions. The studies reviewed below support Meyer and Rowan's (2006) argument that a dichotomous view of tight or loose coupling may not adequately describe relationships between district-level leaders and school-based practitioners.

Like the Floden et al. (1988) study, Firestone and Cecilia Martinez (2007) investigated relationships between district curriculum leaders and teachers with the school district as the unit of analysis. They completed case studies of four schools in three districts focused on distributed leadership in the implementation of a math reform. Although their aim was to investigate the role of distributed leadership, the investigation was similar to the studies reviewed above regarding consideration of power and control dynamics. In contrast to the Floden et al. (1988) findings, Firestone and Cecelia Martinez noted that teachers in all three school districts were mandated through formal authority at the district level to use specific math textbooks and adhere to a prescribed order in how they used the books. One teacher lamented that the district had told them to "follow it step by step," and another said, "You're not supposed to do anything extra" (p. 15). Teachers from each of the three districts expressed mandates impacted the content they taught

and the strategies they were to use. In some instances, teacher leaders helped bridge the divide between their colleagues and district curriculum leaders. Nonetheless, Firestone and Cecelia Martinez concluded that centralized control (i.e., rather than distributed leadership) was the overall approach toward implementing the math reform. These findings suggested that the three districts were tightly coupled in the Meyer and Rowan (2006) dimensions of academic content, academic tasks, instructional materials, and teaching strategies.

A more recent study by Ylimaki and Brunner (2011) is also reminiscent of the autonomy-control dichotomy investigated by Floden et al. (1988) and Firestone and Cecelia Martinez (2007). Ylimaki and Brunner (2011) conducted a qualitative case study to investigate a potentially dichotomous relationship between collaboration and conflict in two school districts. The study included 48 participants across the two districts, including one curriculum director, one principal, 16 teachers, and six parents from each district. They completed 62 interviews, collected pertinent documents, and gathered data through participant-observation. The Ylimaki and Brunner study was unique because it focused on district-level curriculum directors' perceptions. In alignment with that focus, the researchers shadowed each curriculum director for ten days and completed multiple interviews with each director. Although the curriculum directors were critical figures in the study, the researchers clarified the school was the unit of analysis.

Ylimaki and Brunner's (2011) findings showed that the "relationships among conflict, power, and collaboration" were complicated and did not fit the "dualistic" characterization cited in other literature that associates collaboration with the maintenance of status quo and conflict with change processes (p. 1280). They asserted that their findings "add a macro level of understanding to collaboration about curriculum change efforts" and they hoped this type of

understanding could "disturb traditional propensities for order, stability, and the status quo" (p. 1280). Ylimaki and Brunner cautioned that power dynamics should not be viewed as dualistic (symbolic of either collaboration *or* conflict), but rather these dynamics should be considered only through more in-depth examinations that reflect the complexity of relationships in organizations. More specifically, they advised "more nuanced and theoretically robust conceptions of power and collaboration-consensus/conflict may help curriculum leaders move beyond the modern propensity to seek consistency, collegiality, and order/standardization" (pp. 1281-1282). This call to set aside dualistic characterizations in exchange for more nuanced conceptions was like the recommendations from Floden et al. (1988) and Meyer and Rowan (2006).

The studies above considered tensions between centralized control and autonomy within school districts. Honig et al. (2010) considered these same concepts in a study investigating central office transformation in three school districts selected because of positive transformational work in those districts. Their qualitative case study included 282 interviews, 265 hours of observation, and an analysis of 252 documents. These scholars embarked on the study, in part, to address "shortcomings associated with district research to date (e.g., one-time interviews with a small handful of central office administrators or school principals' and teachers' responses to a survey about the performance of their central offices)" (p. 126). The study considered whether control of teaching and learning should be centralized or decentralized. The findings suggested that a binary view "unproductively dichotomizes the problem confronting school district leaders," and Honig et al. contended that both centralized and decentralized approaches are necessary (p. 117). This conclusion was similar to those of Floden et al. (1988), Meyer and Rowan (2006), and Ylimaki and Brunner (2011). These scholars' publications

rejected dichotomous characterizations of the dynamics between central office leadership and school-based practitioners.

The Honig et al. (2010) study was later connected to the context of deeper learning in a 2015 report within the "Students at the Center Deeper Learning Research Series," a collection of 11 reports commissioned by the nonprofit Jobs for the Future. The report summarized and presented findings from the Honig et al. study, another prior investigation, and learnings from 17 districts that were partnering with Jobs for the Future (Honig et al., 2015). The report argued that a "fundamental redesign of most central office functions, as well as some major departures from business-as-usual" is necessary for school systems to support deeper learning for all students" (p. 1). The studies reviewed in this section provide support for this argument. However, the findings from those studies suggest that this type of redesign will be complex and nuanced, and practices associated with "business-as-usual" may be challenging to characterize. The next section of this review presents a conceptual framework that will support the investigation of the complex dynamics related to district curriculum leadership and the enactment of deeper learning in schools.

Culture of Curriculum (Conceptual Framework)

Joseph (2011) created a conceptual framework (shown in Table 1 below) for researching beliefs, values, and attitudes (i.e., culture) of curriculum. Joseph's framework "provides the means for us both to see and to question explicit practice, underlying beliefs about teaching and learning, implications of curriculum work, and implicit social and political visions" (p. 30). Joseph constructed this framework to provide heuristics for ethnographic studies. The heuristics honor that an "ethnography often shows us that the 'real' world is messy; a myriad of experiences, beliefs, and aims - often inconsistent and contradictory - co-exist in that world" (p.

33). The framework was built with the classroom as the unit of analysis, but it will be useful in this context to consider the values, beliefs, and attitudes of district-level curriculum leaders.

Table 1

Conceptual Framework

Focus	Question
Quote	• What statement(s) synthesizes major beliefs within this culture of curriculum?
Impressions	• What depiction of education within this culture of curriculum captures many of its important themes and assumptions?
Visions	• What are the goals of education or schooling for the individual? • What is the ultimate benefit for society if all individuals were educated in this culture of curriculum? (may be implicitly stated)
History	• How has this culture of curriculum been present in schooling? • What are the forces, events, and ideas that influenced this culture of curriculum?
Students	• What are the beliefs about students' needs, development, competencies, motives, and interests? • How have these beliefs influenced practice?
Teachers	• What are the beliefs about the role of teachers? • How should they facilitate learning?
Content	• What constitutes the subject matter? • How is the subject matter organized?
Context	• What is the environment of the classroom? Of the school? • How is instruction organized?
Planning	• What are the models of curriculum development? • Who plans the curriculum? Who has the power to make decisions?
Evaluation	• How should students be assessed? • How is the worth or success of the curriculum determined?
Dilemmas of Practice	• What problems or challenges do teachers face when they work in or try to implement this culture of curriculum?
Critique	• What problems are inherent in the vision of this curriculum for individuals and society? • What are the blind spots not perceived by advocates of this culture of curriculum?

Note. Reprinted from *Cultures of Curriculum* (2nd ed., p. 31), by P. B. Joseph (Ed.), 2011, Routledge, Ltd. Copyright 2011 by Routledge/Taylor & Francis. Reprinted with permission.

The framework begins by asking for a "telling quote" and solicits a participant's impressions to bring forth central ideas that capture the essence of the culture of curriculum (Joseph, 2011). After considering visions and historical background, the framework promotes analysis of belief systems across Joseph Schwab's four "commonplaces of curriculum" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). Schwab suggested that curriculum development should include consideration of teachers, students, subject matter, and milieu (context) (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). These "commonplaces" reflect Connelly and Clandinin's stance that curriculum is more an experience than a course of study. Correspondingly, the conceptual framework investigates "assumptions about students and teachers, content and context" (Joseph, 2011, p. 31). Joseph also included probes regarding planning and evaluation and suggested the framework may bring out beliefs shared explicitly by educators and those alluded to through images and metaphors. The final components of the conceptual framework (i.e., dilemmas and critique) provide an opportunity to further investigate the culture and engage members of the curricular culture in reflective thinking.

Joseph (2011) articulated one intent of the *Cultures of Curriculum* book was to "name, articulate, and reveal curricula as visions and belief systems" (p. 33). The data collected through this conceptual framework support examination of relationships between different elements of curriculum. Using this framework also helps to identify if there is a "folk pedagogy," or "collection of deeply imbedded *[sic]* notions of learning, schooling, and teaching" in the school district's culture of curriculum (p. 30). To help guide data collection, I obtained a set of interview protocols associated with this framework from Joseph (2017). Her students used the protocols for inquiry projects in her university courses. These tools (i.e., framework and protocols) provide a

practical blueprint for in-depth analysis of the curriculum leadership's mindsets and beliefs in the district studied.

Reculturing Curriculum

As mentioned earlier, Mehta and Fine (2019) argued that a cultural shift needs to take place to support deeper learning at the system level. Chapter four of *Cultures of Curriculum* addressed curriculum reculturing (Joseph, 2011). The text advised that "curriculum transformation cannot come about from superficial and piecemeal changes" (p. 55). Furthermore, they warned that educators must challenge firmly held beliefs and values to shift culture. Various reform efforts have presented challenges to dominant cultures without resulting in transformation (Tyack, 1974). For example, "More publicized reform movements such as *A Nation at Risk* or No Child Left Behind have not provided models of curriculum transformation" (Joseph, 2011, p. 57).

Henderson and Gornik (as cited in Joseph, 2011) referenced curriculum transformation as a progressive challenge to the "standardized management paradigm" that has been dominant in schools (p. 55). Joseph (2011) pointed out that reculturing is particularly challenging "because educational practices are rarely subject to critical internal and public reflection beyond those related to efficiency in maintaining the status quo" (p. 60). Joseph also argued that "reculturing curriculum means to create environments for helping students to develop as human beings and not just as workers, test-takers, or technicians" (p. 74). The history I summarized in chapter one contextualizes Joseph's argument and reinforces the plea for a cultural shift made by Mehta and Fine (2019).

As mentioned, Daly and Finnigan (2011) completed a social network analysis to investigate how central office leaders initiated a district-wide reform. They concluded that

leading a successful reform "may require a shift in the way that change strategies are conceptualized and enacted within a district" (p. 43). They suggested that this would include the engagement of different levels of the system (e.g., district curriculum leaders, principals, and teachers) in a more interconnected network. Daly and Finnigan explained that this type of connectivity would be characterized by strong and strategic social ties between leaders in the central office and teachers and administrators at school sites for more effective transfer of information and development of new knowledge. Henderson et al. (2000) referenced a similar thought in stating transformative cultures include a higher degree of shared decision making and collaboration. These recommendations from Daly and Finnigan and Henderson et al. were referenced, along with others noted above, when I explored the culture of curriculum leadership within the school district in this study.

Gap in the Literature

Mehta and Fine (2019) asserted that deeper learning was not observed at the school-wide level and argued that a key factor limiting the proliferation of deeper learning was the existing culture of curriculum leadership in school districts. Numerous studies have addressed values and beliefs about curriculum leadership from the lens of teachers and school principals (Au, 2011; Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Newberg-Long, 2010; Ylimaki, 2012). The perspective of the central office curriculum leaders, however, was not included in those investigations. This same type of focus on the school as the unit of analysis (e.g., reculturing a school) was evident in Joseph's (2011) work regarding curriculum as culture. Although a few studies have focused on the school district as the unit of analysis (Floden et al., 1988; Honig et al., 2010; Ylimaki & Brunner, 2011), I contend that the values, beliefs, and attitudes of curriculum leadership at the district level have not been richly described during recent times.

Honig et al. (2015) reinforced this notion in stating that "district central offices appeared mainly in the background of studies focused on schools" concerning challenges for making improvements (p. 2). Honig et al. also asserted that district leadership studies have often used existing datasets to consider correlations between district-level characteristics and desirable school outcomes. While studies with the district as the unit of analysis have increased recently, most have reported findings regarding the district as a whole rather than considering the impacts that specific district-level leaders may have on teaching and learning in schools (Honig et al., 2015). Honig et al. stated:

> Because such methods leave the inner workings of central offices unexamined, researchers have been able to provide few insights into the specific and various ways that district central offices influence teaching and learning. For example, studies have made no distinctions among the myriad district-level staff members whose actions might have differing impacts on school outcomes. (p. 2)

Furthermore, the body of research has not explicitly considered the relationship between curriculum leadership and the conditions researchers suggest are most supportive of deeper learning with the school district as the unit of analysis.

Chapter Summary

This literature review began by considering the context of Performance Accountability and its relationship to New Public Management. This context contributed to what scholars have referred to as "narrowing of the curriculum" (Cuban, 2004; Joseph, 2011). Concerns about the impact of curriculum narrowing and other factors have resulted in a movement to engage students in "deeper learning" experiences (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012). However, it has been argued that the enactment of deeper learning has been inhibited by district-level leadership

focused on compliance-oriented management approaches (Mehta & Fine, 2019). In some cases, these approaches included mandates regarding the pace of content coverage and fidelity to prescribed materials and instructional strategies (Mehta & Fine, 2019). Some studies have shown that centralized leadership did, indeed, exert control over school-based educators, while others reported a more nuanced and less dichotomous view concerning control and autonomy (Firestone & Cecelia Martinez, 2007; Ylimaki & Brunner, 2011).

This study thoroughly investigated the culture of district curriculum leadership using Joseph's (2011) conceptual framework and compared that culture to conditions that support the enactment of deeper learning at the school-wide level. By generating a detailed description of the existing culture of curriculum in the school district, it was possible to address whether reculturing was, in fact, necessary. While some scholarly work regarding district-level curriculum leadership has been done, it has not been a heavily studied area (Honig et al., 2015). Also, scholars have not considered such leadership in direct relation to deeper learning.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Background and Research Question

This chapter communicates the methodology I used for the study and the rationale behind the study design choices. The purpose of this investigation was to generate a detailed description of the beliefs, values, and attitudes held by district-level curriculum leaders in a large public school district. I compared the findings to the beliefs, values, and attitudes that scholars have suggested are most supportive of the proliferation of deeper learning in schools (Fullan et al., 2018; Mehta & Fine, 2019). Conclusions from this study will help researchers and education leaders more thoroughly characterize what type of cultural shift might be necessary to support deeper learning in large public school districts. The research question I investigated to achieve the purpose of the study is as follows:

Q1   What beliefs, values, and attitudes characterize the culture of district-level curriculum leadership in a large public school district?

The interpretive framework used in this research study was "social constructivism" (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This philosophical perspective is rooted in the belief that there is no universally accepted reality, but rather multiple realities exist, and these realities are socially constructed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The purpose of examining the beliefs, values, and attitudes of district-level curriculum leadership was to understand the perspectives held by district-level curriculum leaders by discovering a variety of subjective meanings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This section explains the research design, communicates the approach to selecting

the setting and participants, and outlines methods used for data collection and analysis. The trustworthiness of the study is also addressed, as are limitations.

Research Design

I used an instrumental case study approach to investigate the research question. The study focused on district-level curriculum leadership in relation to the proliferation of deeper learning through analysis of "one bounded case" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 98). The bounded case for this study was one large public school district. Although the school district was the primary unit of analysis, the study had an embedded design as the curriculum leaders were central subunits within the case (Yin, 2009). Yin (2009) noted that a case study design is useful for investigating a phenomenon in its "real-life" context when "the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 18). A case study was appropriate for this investigation. It would have been challenging to separate the complex beliefs and values of curriculum leadership from the specific context of the school district within which those leadership beliefs and values existed and were expressed.

I also considered an ethnographic approach to investigate the research question. Creswell & Poth (2018) noted that an "ethnography is appropriate if the needs are to describe how a cultural group works and to explore the beliefs, language, behaviors, and issues facing the group such as power, resistance, and dominance" (p. 93). This description did match, to a degree, the purpose of the study. However, there were elements of an ethnographic design that were not aligned with nor practical for this investigation. The following description from Creswell and Poth (2018) illustrates one alignment issue:

> The entire culture-sharing group in ethnography may be considered a case, but the intent
> in ethnography is to determine how the culture works rather than to either develop an in-

depth understanding of a single case or explore an issue or problem using the case as a

specific illustration. (p. 96)

While this study did aim to investigate how the culture of district curriculum leadership

works, the purpose was more targeted toward generating an understanding of district-level

leadership using the one sampled district as the case.

Concerning practicality, Suryani's (2013) article comparing case study and ethnography

as qualitative approaches noted that researchers aim to develop long term social relationships

during ethnographic studies. The window of time available for data collection in this study made

it difficult to establish long-term relationships, limiting the extent to which the recommended

technique of participant-observation could be practically applied (Suryani, 2013). Selecting a

case study as the design also came with the benefit that a case study can "follow ethnographic

methods" in describing a case whereas "ethnographers do not always produce case studies"

(Suryani, 2013, p. 126).

While an instrumental case study design aligned with this study's purpose and allowed for

a practical approach to addressing the research question, the application of ethnographic

principles (i.e., as opposed to a comprehensive ethnography) within the research process

strengthened the study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained, "Ethnographic case studies are

quite common, for example, wherein the culture of a particular social group is studied in depth"

(p. 39). Scholars have referred to this approach as a case study with an "ethnographic

perspective" (Gee & Green, 1998; Windschitl & Sahl, 2002). Windschitl and Sahl (2002) used an

ethnographic perspective in their case study regarding teacher beliefs and institutional culture

during the implementation of a one-to-one laptop computer program. In their research report,

Windschitl and Sahl articulated that "an ethnographic perspective, as opposed to a complete

ethnography, does not focus on understanding an entire culture but rather can be used to take a more focused look at the actions of members" (p. 173). I applied an ethnographic perspective within this case study to analyze roles, relationships, norms, and expectations within the group (i.e., one school district) (Windschitl & Sahl, 2002).

Setting

I collected data within one large public school district in the Western region of the United States. The district and the schools within it are referred to by pseudonyms. I selected the school district to serve as a "representative or typical" case (Yin, 2009, p. 48). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained that "a typical sample would be one that is selected because it reflects the average person, situation, or instance of the phenomenon of interest" (p. 97). A large public school district was selected to serve as this average situation. According to NCES (2020), over 85% of students in the United States attend traditional (non-charter) public schools. Furthermore, 55% of students are educated in school districts with more than 10,000 students (NCES, 2014). Therefore, I selected a public school district with more than 10,000 students consisting of mostly traditional (i.e., non-charter) public schools for this study.

The district was selected to mirror, as closely as possible, the average demographic make-up of public schools in the United States and the most typical accountability status (i.e., not designated as lowest or highest performing) for a district within the state where it is located. The National Center for Education Statistics (2020) reported the following enrollment percentages by race/ethnicity for public elementary and secondary schools in the United States in the year 2017: 48% White, 27% Hispanic, 15% Black, 5% Asian, 4% two or more races, and 1 % American Indian/Alaska Native. The same report indicated 52% of students qualified for free or reduced meals, 10% were categorized as English language learners, and 14% were identified

as students with disabilities (NCES, 2020). The district for this study was selected to match these demographic indicators as closely as possible. The district was also one that is not currently designated for sanctions related to state accountability. As noted in the literature review, there is evidence that pressure associated with such sanctions would influence the management approach of district-level leaders (Maxcy, 2009).

<div align="center">**Participants**</div>

The participants for this study were selected by purposeful sampling to support an instrumental case (Creswell, 2015). As referenced in chapter two, Ylimaki and Brunner (2011) conducted a case study to investigate relationships between collaboration and conflict in two school districts. The Ylimaki and Brunner (2011) methodology is similar to what I used for this study. The participants in the Ylimaki and Brunner case were selected "based on their professional positions and/or personal roles" (p. 1266). Correspondingly, the purpose of this study calls for the curriculum leaders in the school district to participate. This selection represented what Yin refers to as "straightforward" due to the nature of the inquiry (Yin, 2009, p. 91). Before beginning the study, I identified the leaders by asking the district research representative to name the organization's district-level curriculum leaders. Creswell and Poth (2018) advised that "the culture-sharing group must have been intact and interacting for long enough to develop social behaviors of an identifiable group that can be studied" (p. 91). For a school district to be selected, I decided the superintendent and the primary curriculum leader needed to have been together for at least two years.

I also recruited school administrators and teachers to describe the district-level curriculum leadership's values, beliefs, and attitudes more thoroughly. Yin (2009) recommended defining clear criteria for selecting qualified participants to add to the data collection. To be

chosen, these participants needed to have a minimum of two years of experience in the school district. I recruited these administrators and teachers by sending email messages to all school administrators and teachers in the district's traditional (i.e., non-charter) schools. The email clarified that participants needed at least two years of experience in the district. I offered participants a $25 gift card for taking part in a 45-minute interview. I also sent out an email to notify the population once I had accumulated the desired number of participants.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) advised that qualitative researchers using purposeful sampling should select "a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 96). While I emailed many administrators and teachers, I selected "those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96). As a reference regarding the number of participants, Ylimaki and Brunner (2011) included one principal and 16 teachers from each district in their sample. I included three school principals and 12 teachers in this study. More specifically, I selected one school administrator from each grade-level configuration (i.e., K-5, 6-8, and 9-12) with priority given to those with more years of experience in the district. For teachers, I prioritized selecting those leading departments or professional learning communities or who had served on specific curriculum development committees. Yin (2009) advised this type of two-stage screening when the number of possible participants is larger than 20 or 30 people.

Mehta and Fine (2019) found more barriers to enacting deeper learning in core classes than elective courses and concluded that deeper learning was more likely to be found in elective or other non-core courses. Correspondingly, I focused on gaining participation from teachers of core classes only (i.e., math, language arts, science, and social studies). At the elementary level, I gained participation from four total teachers, two who served the primary grades (i.e., K-2) and two who served the intermediate grades (i.e., 3-5). These targets were set with feasibility in

mind, as Yin (2009) recommended the larger the number of qualified participants studied, the better. At the secondary level, the study included four middle-level teachers and four high school teachers. The intent was to have one participant for each core content area at the middle level and high school level. This target was achieved with one exception. I did not gain participation from a teacher that worked specifically as a middle-level social studies instructor. Instead, I was able to include a teacher who worked across multiple disciplines and had knowledge of social studies and other content areas. I used pseudonyms for all participants.

Data Collection

Yin (2009) suggested using multiple forms of evidence to develop "converging lines of inquiry" for corroboration and triangulation in case study research (p. 115). After receiving Institutional Review Board approval, I collected data in the Spring of 2021 through three of Yin's (2009) recommended sources of evidence: interviews, direct observations with field notes, and documentation. This study's primary form of data collection was personal interviews with the district-level curriculum leaders, school principals, and classroom teachers. Yin (2009) suggested that interviews are one of the most critical data sources for case studies, and Creswell and Poth (2018) advised that researchers "rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation" (p. 24). Burke (2009) also noted that interviews allow for data to arise regarding the participants' perceptions, which aligns well with the study purpose.

The first step in the data collection process was to interview the primary curriculum leader. In the Haggerty district, that was the assistant superintendent of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. I used an "in-depth" approach when interviewing this leader (Yin, 2009, p. 107). This type of interview includes gathering factual information, opinions, and insights and takes place for an extended amount of time (i.e., more than one session) (Yin, 2009, p. 107). Overall, I

conducted two interviews with the assistant superintendent. While the first interview launched the data collection process, the second interview was held after I completed interviews with all other participants. The second interview was used to examine ideas that surfaced during interviews with the school-based participants. After my first interview with the assistant superintendent, I conducted "in-depth" interviews with each of five district-level curriculum coordinators. Each coordinator was charged with leading curriculum and instruction in a different content area. Specifically, there were separate coordinators for science, math, social studies, elementary language arts, and secondary language arts.

The next step in the data collection process was to interview the school principals and teachers. I conducted these interviews as "focused" interviews that took place one time for about 45 minutes (Yin, 2009). I also requested consent for follow-up conversations with these participants to allow for clarification as needed. Interviews with the district-level leaders and school-based participants were "guided conversations rather than structured queries" (Yin, 2009, p. 106). A series of semi-structured interview questions were used in the interviews, with the question set being followed more closely in the focused interviews than the in-depth sessions. The same set of questions was used for the leader interviews and the teacher and principal interviews. Using the same questions helped when comparing the responses and triangulating the data.

Questions considered the domains in the conceptual framework including visions, history, content, context, planning, and dilemmas of practice. For example, one question asked: How is the curricular content planned and organized? Another example considers the participant's perspective: Is there is a difference between your "ideal" and the "real" curriculum work? A full set of sample questions is included in Appendix B. Throughout the interviews, I

used prompts to refocus the participants on the main topics. I asked probing questions to delve more deeply into areas identified as most pertinent to the study's purpose. A transcription service was used to transcribe interviews. The transcriptions were then loaded into Microsoft Word and checked against the recording for accuracy. I also replaced names with pseudonyms and removed or altered other identifiers to preserve participant anonymity. Initial coding was done after each interview to assist in identifying areas that needed to be considered during ongoing data collection (i.e., additional interviews, documents).

Yin (2009) advised despite heavy reliance on data from interviews, "conclusions cannot be based entirely on interviews as a source of information" (p. 88). Based on this guidance, I intended to gather data from direct observations with field notes to the degree possible with participant permission. Due to various constraints (e.g., context of coronavirus pandemic), I was only able to complete two observations. In both, I acted as a "nonparticipant" observer by watching and taking notes without direct involvement (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 168). These observations were formally scheduled opportunities to collect data (Yin, 2009).

I observed a middle-level math curriculum planning session during which teacher-leaders were working to identify high quality supplements to add to the district's curriculum guides. The session was facilitated by the district-level math curriculum coordinator. For my other observation, I watched the elementary language arts coordinator lead a professional development session focused on evidence-based literacy instruction. In my initial research design, I planned to include shadowing of the curriculum leaders to collect additional observation data. Ylimaki and Brunner (2011) shadowed two curriculum leaders to study power, collaboration, and conflict within two school districts. Similarly, I asked permission to shadow the assistant superintendent

and the five curriculum coordinators for up to two full days or three to four half days. As noted above, various contextual factors prevented that opportunity from coming to fruition.

During the two observations, I typed field notes in an electronic journal. I also used an "observation protocol" that included three sections (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 168). The first section included the details of the observation (i.e., date, time, place, type of event). The second section was for descriptive notes (e.g., quotes, sequence of the event). The third section was reserved for reflective notes including my own thoughts, feelings, and experiences during the observation. Throughout the observations I was able to conduct, I focused on capturing comments that fit within any of the twelve domains of Joseph's (2011) conceptual framework. After each observation, I completed an initial coding process.

As mentioned above, I interviewed the assistant superintendent for a second time after completing all other interviews and observations. The questions asked in the second interview were generated through the ongoing data collection and analysis process. I investigated themes for which I had not collected enough data to reach saturation and probed on topics for which I had collected conflicting information.

Throughout all phases of data collection, I gathered pertinent documents to "corroborate and augment evidence from other sources" (Yin, 2009, p. 103). These documents were used for two purposes: to verify discrete information such as definitions of terms and for additional detail to support data from other sources (Yin, 2009). I collected documents throughout the data collection and analysis processes. Decisions regarding what documents to collect were made by considering needs arising from other data and referencing the foci in the conceptual framework. For example, I analyzed documents that articulated the scope and sequence (i.e., learning progression) for each core subject area. In collecting and using documents, I remained mindful of

Yin's warning that researchers should not rely too heavily on documentation as a data source. Yin cautioned that documents could be misinterpreted, considered out of context, and in some cases, may lack validity.

Throughout the data collection process, I referred to the conceptual framework created by Joseph (2011) to study curriculum as culture. Although Joseph originally constructed the framework for the ethnographic study of curriculum at the classroom level, it provided a helpful structure for this study. The framework, shown in the literature review, outlines twelve different foci to be considered when investigating the practices, beliefs, and visions within curriculum leadership. I used the twelve domains and the associated guiding questions listed for each specific domain as an architecture for the data collection process. For example, a question listed for the "vision" focus was "What are the goals of education or schooling for the individual?" (p. 31). Another question, within the "teachers" focus, was "What are the beliefs about the role of teachers?" (p. 31).

I noted some of the framework questions were "Level 2" questions (Yin, 2009). Yin (2009) described Level 2 questions as those "asked of the individual case" and advised that these questions represent the researcher's "mental line of inquiry" rather than the "verbal line of inquiry" (p. 87). For example, a question being asked of the case in this study (i.e., Level 2) could have been: To what degree is the curriculum leadership compliance-oriented? This question was converted into a Level 1 probe for the actual verbal inquiry (i.e., interview). The inquiry referencing compliance-oriented management was converted into a Level 1 question: How are decisions made regarding "what" to teach and "how" to teach it? I converted many of the questions in the conceptual framework from Level 2 to Level 1.

Another tool I used to write questions was an interview protocol Joseph shared with me after discussing my research project during a phone conversation (personal communication, July 16, 2020). The protocol, included in Appendix A, is a tool she used to support her graduate students during their study of curriculum as culture. The questions within the protocol were more consistently Level 1 in nature. One example of a pertinent probe from the protocol was, "Who, besides the teacher, influences what will be taught?" The Joseph (2011) conceptual framework and protocol provided the "means for us both to see and to question explicit practice, underlying beliefs about teaching and learning, implications of curriculum work, and implicit social and political visions" (p. 30). Although I identified specific interview questions and observation opportunities before data collection, I was also open to additional questions to consider perspectives or domains not included in the conceptual framework. Like Ylimaki and Brunner (2011), I used a constant comparative method that called for "concurrent data collection and analysis" (p. 1267).

Data Analysis

After collecting data from interviews, observations, and documents, I worked to make meaning from the data using a combination of an inductive approach and reflections derived from the theories that informed this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell advised that there can be a tension between being inductive and using existing frameworks. An inductive analysis involves "moving from specific raw data to abstract categories and concepts" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 19). However, Merriam and Tisdell also noted "the sense we make of the data we collect is equally influenced by the theoretical framework" (p. 88). While Joseph's (2011) conceptual framework guided data collection, it did not provide the desired data analysis structure. Instead, I used the literature outlining conditions that support deeper learning as a

research base to support the analysis of the data (Fullan et al., 2018; Mehta & Fine, 2019; Noguera, 2017; Rickles et al., 2019).

Mehta and Fine's (2019) "new grammar of schooling" was one framework I used during data analysis (p. 380). Mehta and Fine delineated twelve different domains within this framework, including the purpose of schooling, view of knowledge, organizational model, and assessment approach. For example, the organizational model should shift from "linear, top-down planning" to "distributed leadership" to better facilitate deeper learning (p. 380). Mehta and Fine also argued that district curriculum leaders need to find a new balance of breadth and depth, promote teacher-directed pacing, limit calls for the fidelity of implementation, align resources to deeper learning, and employ more authentic forms of assessment. These conditions, along with the research cited in the literature review regarding conditions for deeper learning, represented what Yin (2009) referred to as a study proposition. Yin (2009) explained that a study proposition "directs attention to something that should be examined within the scope of the study" (p. 28).

As mentioned earlier, I began the coding process while collecting data. I completed pre-coding by making "preliminary jottings" including highlighting, underlining, and circling (Saldaña, 2013, p. 20). I also wrote analytic memos to record thoughts, emotions, or realizations during the pre-coding process (Saldaña, 2013). As recommended by Saldaña, coding took place in two cycles. The first cycle was done with a hybrid approach employing a combination of descriptive, in vivo, and values coding methods. Descriptive coding helped summarize basic topics from the various forms of data (i.e., transcripts, field notes, and documents). In vivo coding was a good match for this study as it is a method often used by ethnographers to highlight the voice of participants to understand "cultures and worldviews" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 91). Values

coding was also a method that was helpful for this study. I used the values method to apply codes pertaining to the values, beliefs, and attitudes of the participants.

In the second cycle of coding, I used the method of pattern coding (Saldaña, 2013). During pattern coding, I pulled "together a lot of material into a more meaningful and parsimonious unit of analysis" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 210). For example, I combined a descriptive code labeled as "equity," an in vivo code labeled as "common experience," and a values code marked "sameness" into one theme titled "uniformity." I used pattern coding to generate a smaller number of themes and explanations. I also looked for relationships between codes during the pattern coding process.

Although Joseph's (2011) conceptual framework provided a structure for different foci during data collection, I did not automatically adopt those elements as themes. Instead, I used the process outlined above to avoid forcing the data into predetermined domains. I delineated the approaches I used for pre-coding, first cycle coding, and second cycle coding. As coding is "a cyclical act," I did not proceed through each phase in a linear manner but rather each cycle was repeated multiple times (Saldaña, 2013, p. 8).

After identifying themes through this inductive process, I referred to Mehta and Fine's (2019) work regarding the conditions that support deeper learning. Using this foundation, I sorted through the data again. Some themes were adjusted, and more discrete categories within some of those themes were labeled (i.e., sub-categories within the broader theme). I then reorganized the responses according to those themes and categories (Burke, 2009). True to the circular nature of the analysis process and the concept of reorganization, some of the initial themes were collapsed into more distinct themes. Reflection on the literature base informed those changes. Although conclusions from past research informed the study, I generated findings from

the data as themes and concepts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A guiding aim of the analysis was to produce a written product Mills and Morton (2013) suggested should be a combination of "thick description and sharp analysis" (p. 28).

Ethics

I obtained IRB approval and school district approval before data collection. I kept electronic records in password-protected files on my computer. Hard copies of documents related to this study will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the advisor's office and will remain there for three years after completing the study. I used pseudonyms for all district, school, and participant names to help protect the identities of the district, schools, and personnel interviewed. Participants were given the option to refrain from answering any interview question they were asked. They also had the right to withdraw altogether from participation before, during, or after any involvement. Throughout the study, I remained mindful of the potential impact on participants once the study has been completed and shared back with them. Creswell and Poth (2018) advised it is essential to be sensitive to participants' needs and consider the study's impact on the participants. Suryani (2013) also shared the "researcher should be careful in reporting participant's experience, opinion, or personal view that might offend the participant" (p. 121). Mills and Morton (2013) cautioned "negotiating informed consent can be ethically discomforting" (p. 30). I worked to be forthright during the consent process. For example, I shared with the district-level curriculum coordinators that pseudonyms would preserve their anonymity with readers from outside the school district, but readers from within the district being studied would be able to identify them despite those measures.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative studies achieve trustworthiness "through careful attention to a study's conceptualization and the way in which the data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted, and the way in which the findings are presented" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 238). Specific strategies related to a qualitative study's trustworthiness were organized by Creswell and Poth (2018) into three groups: the researcher's lens, the participant's lens, and the reader's lens. I considered each of these three lenses to address the trustworthiness of this study. From the lens of a researcher, the triangulation of data sources was one key strategy. In this study, I triangulated using evidence from different sources (e.g., interviews and documents) (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I also triangulated by gathering data from participants that may hold different perspectives. Another strategy I used from the researcher's lens was to engage in reflexivity by acknowledging the biases I bring to this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I stated my positionality in an earlier section.

To address trustworthiness from the participant's lens, I completed member checks (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I asked participants to view the transcripts from their interviews for accuracy. I worked toward establishing trustworthiness from the reader's lens by having three different peers review the methodology and findings of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) advised that researchers use at least two of the nine strategies they outlined for trustworthiness. I used four such procedures (triangulation, reflexivity, member checking, and peer review) in this study.

Chapter Summary

This chapter described the methodological approach used to complete this study. I described the rationale for employing an instrumental single-case design and discussed the

application of an ethnographic perspective. I explained that a large public school district was the

setting and that it was selected to mirror, as closely as possible, the average (i.e., typical)

demographics of students enrolled in public schools in the United States. The study included

participation from six district-level curriculum leaders, three school principals, and 12 teachers.

Data was collected through interviews, observations, and documents. Joseph's (2011) conceptual

framework was used to help guide the data collection process and the data was analyzed during

and after it was collected. The conditions supporting deeper learning were used as a theoretical

proposition that helped focus the data analysis (Yin, 2009). However, I approached the process

with a balance of inductive and deductive methods. I coded the data using a combination of

approaches during pre-coding, first cycle coding, and second cycle coding (Saldaña, 2013). The

trustworthiness of the study was also reviewed in this chapter. I addressed trustworthiness

through three lenses: reader, participant, and researcher.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Chapter Overview

This chapter presents findings from the analysis of 22 interviews, 13 documents, and two observations. After contextualizing the study, I share data within five themes that communicate varied findings. I divided each theme into sections and sub-themes to further organize the data. I relied heavily on direct quotations to richly describe the beliefs, values, and attitudes held by district-level curriculum leaders and the perceptions of the principal and teacher participants regarding those beliefs, values, and attitudes. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this investigation was to generate a detailed description of the culture of curriculum leadership in a large public school district. The research question that guided this study was:

Q1   What beliefs, values, and attitudes characterize the culture of district-level curriculum leadership in a large public school district?

Context

Introducing the School District

Haggerty School District was a large (25,000-35,000 students) suburban school district made up of approximately 50 elementary, K-8, middle, and high schools (Haggerty School District, 2021a). These schools were spread across several counties and more than 10 communities. The district also included charter schools which accounted for approximately 10% of the total district enrollment. Haggerty School District was divided up into eight non-charter

"feeder systems." Each feeder included elementary and middle-level schools that funneled into one of the comprehensive high schools. The student demographics were disparate across these feeder systems. For example, in one system, 18% of students qualified for free or reduced meals, while in another system, 62% qualified. The percentages of English language learners were 3% and 32% for those same two systems, respectively.

The district emphasized choice and had focus programs within each high school and in some elementary and middle-level schools (e.g., International Baccalaureate (IB), Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM), Core Knowledge, Visual and Performing Arts). Overall enrollment in the district had grown by 10% over the prior ten years (Haggerty School District, 2021a). Across that same time frame, the district had been awarded an Investing in Innovation (i3) grant and a Race to the Top Grant, both from the United States Department of Education. These grants totaled over $20 million and included funding for one-to-one technology deployment, STEM programming, and personalized learning support. A mill levy override was also passed within the prior decade to support initiatives within the district's learning technology plan.

The superintendent had been leading the district for more than ten years. The district performance was stable within the higher range of the state's tiered accreditation rating system. There were five performance categories in that system, and the district was in the fourth highest of those five categories (State Department of Education, 2020). The state's accountability system scored districts on a 100-point scale, and the standard deviation of the district's scores across the ten years preceding this study was 2.9. As stated in chapter three, I selected the district to match, as closely as possible, the average student demographics for K-12 school enrollment across the United States. The table below shows the Haggerty demographics alongside those national

averages. The percentages for Haggerty are shown as ranges to preserve the anonymity of the

district.

Table 2

District Characteristics

Identifier	Haggerty School District (2021a) (%)	United States Average (NCES, 2020) (%)
Students Qualifying for Free/Reduced Meals	30-35	52
Students with Disabilities	10-15	14
English language learners	10-15	10
White	55-65	48
Hispanic	25-35	27
Black	1-5	15
Asian	1-5	5
2 or More Races	1-5	4
American Indian/Alaska Native	-	1

The Haggerty percentages and the national averages were closest for students with

disabilities, English language learners, and students categorized as Hispanic or Asian. The

demographics matched less closely for students qualifying for free or reduced meals and students

classified as White or Black.

Overview of Participants

Twenty-two Haggerty staff members participated in this study, including the assistant

superintendent of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, five district-level curriculum

coordinators, three school principals, and 13 teachers. I removed one teacher interview from

consideration in data analysis as the teacher was newly hired in the district and had worked

remotely for the first few months of the year from outside the state. That teacher had a limited

feel for the district values, beliefs, and attitudes related to curriculum leadership due to the short

tenure and unique situation. The school-based participants represented 13 sites, with at least one representative from each of the district's eight feeder systems.

As noted in Chapter 3, the district-level curriculum leaders served as a critical subunit in the case studied (Yin, 2009). Each of the leaders is introduced (names replaced by pseudonyms) below:

- Casey Darnell had been the assistant superintendent of curriculum, instruction, and assessment for the past two years. He had served in various district-level curriculum leadership roles (e.g., executive director of curriculum) for the previous seven years. Before working in the central office, Mr. Darnell was a secondary teacher, assistant high school principal, and elementary principal in the Haggerty district.

- Gary Watson was in his 13th year as the K-12 math curriculum coordinator. He taught high school math in the Haggerty district before assuming this position.

- Oliver Adams was the K-12 science coordinator. Mr. Adams had served for eight years as the science coordinator and worked in a role supporting STEM education in the district before becoming the coordinator.

- Cameron Edwards was the secondary ELA coordinator. He was a teacher for an innovative school in a northeastern United States metropolitan area before joining Haggerty in a central office position. He then worked on a project for the United States Department of Education before returning to Haggerty in the coordinator role. Mr. Edwards was in his fourth year in the position.

- Susan Barnes was the elementary English language arts (ELA) coordinator. Ms. Barnes worked as a teacher and instructional coach before shifting into the coordinator position, which she had held for two years. She had been in the Haggerty district for 20 years.

- Patricia Neil was the K-12 social studies coordinator. She taught for seven years in the district before taking on that leadership role and had been the coordinator for the past six years.

While the assistant superintendent and the five district-level curriculum coordinators were a focal subunit of this study, I also collected data from interviews with twelve teachers and three school principals. The table below shows the school-based participants. To preserve anonymity, pseudonyms were used, and participants' years of experience are shown as ranges.

Table 3

Overview of School-Based Participants

Name	Role	Years in District	Total Years as Educator
Caitlyn Fanning	Kindergarten Teacher	10-15	10-15
Wendy Yarnish	2nd Grade Teacher	1-5	10-15
Dylan Norton	3rd Grade Teacher	10-15	20-25
Steve Tiller	5th Grade Teacher	15-20	15-20
Edith Olliver	Middle-Level ELA Teacher	20-25	20-25
Molly Varner	Middle-Level Science Teacher	10-15	10-15
Julie Martin	Middle-Level Multi-Subject	10-15	15-20
Cindy Gilmore	Middle-Level Math Teacher	1-5	15-20
Nancy Rollings	High School ELA Teacher	1-5	15-20
Rachel Baldridge	High School Science Teacher	5-10	10-15
Vince Arnold	High School Math Teacher	5-10	15-20
Bill Parker	High School Social Studies Teacher	15-20	15-20
Darcy Tipton	Elementary Principal	15-20	15-20
Reed Young	Secondary Principal	5-10	20-25
Sandra Moore	Secondary Principal	5-10	15-20

I intended to include only school-based participants that had served the district for a minimum of two years. However, one of the teachers I selected had only one year of district experience. That individual was chosen to ensure diversified roles across the sample. Specifically, only one middle-level math teacher (i.e., the professional in her first year in the district) responded to the recruitment messages. Rather than selecting a second teacher from a

separate content area (e.g., middle-level science), I included the math teacher. Although I included all the data collected from the teacher with only one year of district experience, her perspective was considered most meaningful in areas that corresponded well with the other teachers, principals, and curriculum leaders I sampled.

Summary of Themes

Analysis of data from the interviews, observations, and documents yielded five themes. I referenced the conditions that support deeper learning, the theoretical proposition for this study, throughout the analysis process. An overview of the themes is shown in the table below. The first theme focuses on the district's beliefs regarding the purpose of education. The second theme presents data that illustrate the district's emphasis on a uniform, standardized curriculum system. The dynamics of autonomy and control in the culture of curriculum leadership are considered in theme three, and theme four describes tensions between depth and breadth in curricular planning and delivery. Finally, the fifth theme is comprised of data regarding the evolving beliefs, values, and attitudes of curriculum leadership in the Haggerty district.

Table 4

Overview of Themes and Sub-Themes

Theme 1: Purpose of Education	Theme 2: Uniformity	Theme 3: Autonomy and Control	Theme 4: Depth and Breadth	Theme 5: Evolving as a District
A Good Balance	Academic Standards	Mandates	Too Much	Teacher as Facilitator
Believing in Balance, Valuing Results	Content	Role of the Teacher	Coverage as a Value	Student as Producer
	Materials	Variation in the System	Decision-Making	Authentic Tasks
	Assessment		Priority Standards	Multi-Dimensional Assessment
				Flexible Curricular Planning
				A Bigger Job

Theme One: Purpose of Education

This theme described the values, beliefs, and attitudes held by curriculum leaders in the Haggerty district concerning the purpose of education as one aspect of this study's theoretical proposition. Patterns in the data led to two sub-themes. The first discussed the balance amongst different purposes of education, and the second revealed a tension between beliefs and values within this aspect of the curricular culture.

Sub-Theme: A Good Balance

The assistant superintendent and the five district curriculum coordinators all indicated a belief in the importance of preparing students for careers and supporting the aim of an educated citizenry. Each also contended that education should focus on students gaining both content knowledge and transferable skills (e.g., critical thinking, communication). In this sub-theme, I included data regarding the balance of these two sets of historically competing purposes. Assistant Superintendent Darnell stated that he believed the purpose of education is to prepare students for either "advanced schooling or the job market." He referenced the importance of developing a "foundation" in both skills and content while also explicitly mentioning the skills of communication, collaboration, problem-solving, and invention. Mr. Darnell emphasized 21st century or soft skills are "as important as having the skills of mathematics reading, and writing." Elaborating, he said, "you have to have both, and one's not more important than the other, and there is a good balance." Beyond espousing the development of a balanced skill set in students, Darnell also discussed the importance of students applying their knowledge and skills. He shared, "we have some students that are going to help us solve some of the great problems that we face, not only in our nation but the world."

As noted, each of the five district-level curriculum coordinators also communicated belief in a balanced purpose. Three of the curriculum coordinators specifically noted the importance of preparing students to be productive citizens. As one example, Secondary ELA Coordinator Edwards stated the purpose of education is to "create an informed and capable citizenry." Math Coordinator Watson stated the school should prepare students for "anything they choose to do," including opportunities in higher education, military service, or the workforce. According to Watson, Haggerty should give a "base of knowledge and base of experiences" rather than "dictating" what the future should look like for students. Both "skills and content" were referenced in comments made by Social Studies Coordinator Neil. She cited reading, writing, critical thinking, and collaboration as examples. Neil also mentioned students applying their knowledge by "solving issues in our own community." Elementary ELA Coordinator Barnes specifically mentioned, "the purpose of education is really a balance between cultivating those concrete hard skills, but also cultivating those soft skills that lead to success." Similarly, Science Coordinator Adams cited "literacy and math skills" as examples of "foundational pieces" of content mastery while also sharing that students should learn to be critical thinkers, collaborate well in groups, and be able to "acquire knowledge on their own."

Documents from the Haggerty district also alluded to specific purposes of education. For example, Haggerty's *Standards Based Philosophy* document outlined the "concepts and skills" that students need to "ensure success in a post-secondary and workforce setting" (Haggerty School District, n.d.). The document referenced essential skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, and self-direction and shares that these skills are "embedded" in the standards. These statements suggested that students needed to gain more than content mastery alone and that the purpose of education in Haggerty was to prepare students for varied future pathways.

All three school principals reinforced that Haggerty believed in balanced purposes of education. As one example, Secondary Principal Young stated, "there are really two purposes of education" and went on to describe those as the purpose to "prepare our students to be good citizens" and to prepare them to pursue post-secondary schooling or be "more employable." Six of the 12 teachers also alluded specifically to perceptions of a balanced purpose in the Haggerty district, most distinctly communicating a healthy mix between developing content mastery and transferrable skills. The other six teachers did not distinctly characterize a perceived purpose. Middle-level teacher Martin told me the district's approach to curriculum was "actually really good, and it's really robust of not only knowing the actual content, they need to learn those soft skills of teamwork and developing things in a group in working together."

While Darnell referred to Haggerty's purposes as balanced, Math Coordinator Watson described challenges with serving varied purposes. Watson declared, "we're kind of stuck in two different worlds right now, and we're trying to navigate." He named one world as serving students with an education "just-in-case" and another as supporting students "just-in-time." He described the "just-in-case" purpose as being focused on the acquisition of information and pre-determined skills "that everyone should know" and the "just-in-time" purpose as being focused on skills and concepts needed in real-time to address "issues happening right now." Mr. Watson explained that Haggerty was "trying to transform more into a just-in-time approach to education." He elaborated:

> We have a foot in the traditional camp of "just in case" education realm, but we're trying to get a firmer foot in the "just in time" problem solving and application. And I think we're wrestling with where that balance is. There's a lot of folks wrestling with that tug of war of what experiences should we be giving students.

While Watson referenced a "tug of war" between a traditional skill-building approach and an approach including more problem-solving in authentic contexts, the next sub-theme considered a different kind of tension within the Haggerty culture of curriculum leadership.

**Sub-Theme: Believing in Balance,
Valuing Results**

As noted above, all three principals expressed that Haggerty believed the purpose of education included developing students to be both citizens who contribute to the democracy and employees for the workforce. They also reinforced that the district focused on the mastery of content and the advancement of transferrable, non-cognitive skills. However, two of the three principals and seven of the 12 teachers shared a viewpoint that two other related, yet distinct purposes were prominent in this culture of curriculum leadership. These principals and teachers expressed that the district placed a high value on achieving positive results (e.g., graduation rates and test scores) and preparing students for post-secondary education.

Haggerty's emphasis on results was described in both general and specific terms. When I asked Secondary Principal Young what he perceived to be of utmost importance in Haggerty, he shared, "graduation rate." Elementary teacher Tiller reinforced a focus on results in expressing he felt the district was "concerned about numbers, statistics, data, test scores, and how they look from the outside." When asked about her perception of district-level beliefs about the purpose of education, middle-level science teacher Varner's first statement was, "they want numbers to look good." High school ELA teacher Rollings provided a more specific explanation:

> I think our district curriculum [for secondary ELA] is about choice and about finding your place in the world. But we're also super data-driven. So, our SAT scores matter. And if we live and die by test scores, sometimes those are the skills we value… I would

also say at a district level… it's within the confines of the skills needed to graduate. So, it's driven by graduation rates.

Rollings's comments alluded to some degree of tension within a curricular approach that valued student choice and identity development while also calling for an emphasis on specific, testable skills. Assistant Superintendent Darnell and Science Coordinator Adams also mentioned the influence of the SAT. Darnell shared that he and his team "do look at SAT data to see how we're doing" and also stated, "we made adjustments off that to our curriculum." One example of those adjustments was noted by Adams. He explained, "we really took a look at what was the best sequencing for our high school subject areas and content areas for best preparation for the ACT at the time, and now the SAT."

Although Darnell reported adjusting course content based on a standardized assessment (i.e., the SAT), he also discussed test results as a barrier when working to shift the Haggerty system toward a more viable curriculum. He noted he had been working for years to narrow down the scope and sequence for courses to "get into that depth piece so we can explore things more." He bemoaned:

> Unfortunately, also what comes into this is state testing. Well, if I don't teach this, then they're going to miss it on the state exams. Well, yeah, they might miss that little piece, but overall, they're going to do much better. But that's a hard thing to get people convinced.

In addition to consideration of graduation rate and test results, several participants mentioned that the curricular culture placed a disproportionate value on preparing students for post-secondary education (i.e., as opposed to a strictly democratic or career readiness purpose). High school math teacher Arnold stressed, "the big district push is college, college, college,

college, college, everybody has to go to college." Arnold shared that he appreciated that focus but that he felt it created an imbalance. Secondary Principal Moore expressed a similar opinion. Moore described, "sometimes when you live in a world where the district is looking at accolades, and we're looking at metrics of achievement, it's easy to lose sight of" a more open-minded understanding of how we prepare kids. Moore also noted that although Haggerty valued "technical programs" and other types of training for students, "sometimes that can get lost in the competitive noise of trying to say, this is what we're doing to prepare our students for the next level."

This sub-theme depicted tension within what Darnell called a "balanced" curricular approach. On the one hand, Haggerty believed in advancing both content mastery and soft skills that prepared students for "anything they choose to do." On the other hand, the curricular culture placed a high value on college preparation and outcomes such as graduation rates and standardized assessments. I asked Darnell if he felt there was tension between approaches for deeper learning (e.g., building soft skills and broader understandings) and a focus on enhancing discrete skills for the state test. He asserted, "You can do both."

Theme Two: Uniformity

In theme one, I analyzed data concerning the beliefs of district-level curriculum leaders about the purpose of education. This theme communicated Haggerty's values, beliefs, and attitudes regarding how actors within the district achieved those purposes. The data indicated that the culture of curriculum leadership placed value on what Marzano and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) (2003) called a "guaranteed and viable" curriculum that was advanced in a uniform manner across the district. I begin this description by providing historical context about the district's commitment to uniformity. After establishing

important background, I use the data to illustrate how uniformity was defined within the Haggerty culture of curriculum leadership. Next, I present four sub-themes that characterized various types of uniformity in the district. Each sub-theme represented a distinct dimension of what Floden et al. (1988) named "prescriptiveness." The four dimensions are: academic standards, content, materials, and assessment.

Historical Context

In 2008, Haggerty's central office leaders requested a comprehensive appraisal from a team assembled by the state department of education. While not required by the state, the report from the "Review for Improvement" indicated the request was a "proactive measure" prompted by the district's failure to make NCLB's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements for the 2006-2007 academic year (Haggerty School District, 2008). The report stated that "in comparison to state averages, the district is realizing a widening of the achievement gap for most subgroups" in reading, writing, and math. The appraisal included almost 500 interviews, over 600 school and classroom visits, and approximately 900 surveys completed by teachers, classified staff, administrators, parents, and community members.

Although completed in 2008, the review was still referenced as having a strong influence on the district's curriculum leaders' beliefs, values, and attitudes. Science Coordinator Adams emphasized, "It was 2008, but man, [Darnell] still talks about it, about every meeting." He continued, "Every little thing we've done in our curriculum department came out of that review piece." The state's review team produced an 82-page report that included dozens of recommendations (Haggerty School District, 2008). Amongst those suggestions, two stood out. First, the appraisal team stated that Haggerty needed to "move from being a district of schools to

a school district." Second, the team prioritized that Haggerty "synthesize a viable standards-based curriculum."

These two recommendations were mentioned in my first interview with Assistant Superintendent Darnell. For example, he specifically mentioned shifting from a standards-referenced to a standards-based approach. Addressing the other key finding from the report, Social Studies Coordinator Neil emphasized, "We really do have a school district; it's a school district." The 2008 report and recommendations were also referenced by Secondary Principal Moore, who has only been in the district since 2015. She stated, "this [report] is like the district folklore." The report's recommendations were addressed by establishing a guaranteed and viable curriculum and working toward uniform adoption of that curriculum across the district's schools (Marzano & ASCD, 2003).

Assistant Superintendent Darnell alluded to these foci when he told me, "our superintendent is very much a systems person" and explained that "we are not site-based in our curricular decisions." Darnell further described the overarching district values and beliefs by stating, "of course we believe in a guaranteed and viable curriculum" (Marzano & ASCD, 2003). He added that his role was to get "everybody on the same page." Darnell defined guaranteed as meaning "there's a scope and sequence and there's a vertical articulation of skills and people know about them." He also explained that viability meant "that teachers have the time to do it, they have the skillset to do it, i.e., professional training to do it, and they have the tools to do it."

Defining Uniformity

Recommendations from the 2008 review were used to shape the path forward in the Haggerty district. In particular, the curriculum leaders set out to establish Haggerty as a "school district" instead of a "district of schools." This aim required a renewed commitment to district-

wide uniformity in the curricular culture. The curriculum leaders defined uniformity, in part, as a desire for each Haggerty student to have the "same" experience, regardless of the assigned teachers or school of attendance. This desire for uniformity was described as a commitment to "equity."

Social Studies Coordinator Neil's thoughts exemplified this conception of equity. She stated that there were "structural and systematic things in place that provide equity for students across the district so a kid getting an education at one school is similar to the education that they would get at a different school." Expanding on that notion, Assistant Superintendent Darnell explained:

> We don't want your zip code or the master schedule to determine what type of education you're going to receive. And by that, we mean, if you have a very rich PTO that can provide lots of opportunities and money and materials, and you live in a section that doesn't have that rich PTO, you shouldn't suffer for that. So, we want that same high level of academic excellence across our district.

Neil and Darnell were not the only participants to talk about equity when referencing Haggerty's commitment to uniformity. Elementary Principal Tipton noted there was "a great wealth in our curricular resources as a district… with the intent of wanting to make sure that the equity piece is in place." Additional comments by Tipton indicated, once again, the conception of equity as sameness:

> So, whether you're at school A or you're at school B, or you're at school C, you know, those are very different schools, but the kids have the same opportunity for the same experience, as far as exposure to content and skills. It doesn't matter where you live in town A or B, everybody's going to have that same opportunity, and we don't water it

down in one school versus in another. We keep the same standards for everybody. It feels very, it can feel top-down to some people, I think, but at the same time, it's also holding us accountable for making sure that our curriculum is aligned and that we're on the same page with everybody else.

Participants not only described the Haggerty commitment to uniformity but also shared reasons why they felt that uniformity was important. Several participants discussed mobility as one such reason. Elementary Principal Tipton shared that the district had "a fair amount of mobility" and suggested having the "same thing going on" across schools made transitions smoother. Tipton noted a student that recently joined her school was "maybe not on the same page on the same day" at the other school "but had the same kind of instruction and materials." Similarly, middle-level teacher Martin explained, "If students need to move… you know what the standard is of what they're all getting."

Although mobility was the most common reason cited by participants, it was not the only benefit mentioned. Several participants said that using shared resources and curricular guidance allowed for more facile communication across schools in the district. It enabled teachers "to have the same conversation," according to middle-level teacher Martin. An additional benefit was highlighted by Math Coordinator Watson. He expressed, "in terms of a central support model, we can make assumptions because everyone is doing the same thing." Although Watson clarified that "those are assumptions," he also added that "I don't have to learn or support 12 different middle schools using four different programs." Furthermore, Watson shared "it allows us to channel our resources and be efficient" and that taking a uniform approach was "very convenient and helpful."

Sub-Theme: Academic Standards

The degree to which educators in the Haggerty district were on the "same page" was discussed extensively by the study participants. This is the first of four sub-themes organized to consider uniformity within varied dimensions of the curricular culture. In this sub-theme, I considered data regarding the state academic standards in the culture of curriculum leadership. Assistant Superintendent Darnell asserted, "we committed many years ago to being a standards-based district, not a standards-referenced [district]." He elaborated on his beliefs and attitudes regarding being a standards-based district:

> There's been a lot of time spent either at the national level, certainly, or even at the state level of building that articulation of skillsets that build upon each other from year to year with the idea of here's what a graduate from Haggerty should know and be able to do. And so that really guides a curriculum now organizing around topics, picking resources to go with it. And our real fidelity is actually to the standards.

Darnell's philosophy was replicated in Haggerty's *Standards Based Philosophy* document (Haggerty School District, n.d.). This document identified the district's desire to "develop and implement with fidelity and accountability a guaranteed and viable curriculum that is standards-based" (Marzano & ASCD, 2003). The data grouped into this sub-theme indicated a high degree of prescriptiveness regarding the academic standards. My interviews with the five district-level content coordinators provided more evidence of a firm commitment to a "standards-based" approach.

Math Coordinator Watson specified that the standards define "what" should be taught, and he explained that "in our system, we don't add more content to it… we just basically adopt the content standards." Echoing the standards-based emphasis in Haggerty, Elementary ELA

Coordinator Barnes asserted, "We're really, really committed to stressing the importance of standards-based instruction… curriculum leadership is always based on the guidance of the standards." Numerous comments from school principals and teachers mentioned the district's concentration on the state academic standards. I asked elementary Principal Tipton, what values were tightly held in the Haggerty district? She responded, "I think standards-based is tight." Elementary teacher Norton agreed, "all of our focus is based on the state standards."

Sub-Theme: Content

The data showed evidence that use of the state standards in Haggerty was "tight." Beyond Haggerty's commitment to the standards, participants talked extensively about the processes used in the district to provide teachers with curricular guidance that advanced the desire to give students a uniform experience. In this sub-theme, I present data regarding the dimension of content. The term "content" was defined as "topic coverage and sequencing and the amount of time spent on particular topics" (Meyer & Rowan, 2006, p. 97). This section, more specifically, includes data concerning the curricular guidance given to teachers concerning content and the processes used to provide that guidance. Haggerty's *Standards Based Philosophy* document communicated that "a curriculum is guaranteed if it gives clear guidance to teachers" (Haggerty School District, n.d.). Accordingly, the district used a systematic process for adopting curricular resources and constructing "unit plans" (i.e., curriculum maps) to guide instruction across all grade-levels and core content areas. The details of this process were communicated by all five curriculum coordinators, referenced by all three principals and, in some fashion, discussed by all 12 teachers.

Haggerty conducted a curricular adoption process for each core content area every seven years. Their process began by assembling a team of teachers and school administrators (called a

leadership team) that a district-level curriculum coordinator facilitated. The coordinator worked to gain participation from at least one representative from every school. This type of team was what Assistant Superintendent Darnell referred to as the "big we" when he shared that "the curriculum department plans the curriculum in collaboration with our teaching staff." The curriculum adoption process included the leadership team evaluating the existing resource, identifying a preferred resource (through a vote), and then piloting that new resource for an entire year.

Before teaching with the resource, the leadership team collaborated to develop a scope and sequence that included "unit plan" documents to guide the teachers. Science Coordinator Adams referred to the unit plans as "roadmaps," and he explained, "the whole idea is to use this roadmap to sort of stay on pace and on topic with those [adopted] materials." After piloting, experimenting, and revising the unit plans based on the practitioners' input, Adams mentioned the members of the leadership team were "instrumental in designing the PD (professional development) piece to prepare their colleagues to make that transition the following year to those materials." He also pointed out, "the big thing that I stress is that everything that we do is, is made by teachers for teachers."

The leadership teams also met regularly after the resource had been adopted (i.e., periodically throughout each school year) to discuss their experiences with the resources and unit plans. Darnell informed me that those discussions, at times, resulted in system-wide changes. An example he cited was when the kindergarten teachers reported that an adopted resource's phonemic awareness component was not rigorous enough. Darnell admitted, "They were right." He recounted, "We listened to them and [are now] using a program to supplement our program that we use in elementary." The curriculum coordinators and leadership teams also considered

ongoing adjustments or additions to the unit plans. Coordinators Neil and Adams talked specifically about linking newly discovered resources within those plans. Neil noted, "I'm constantly adding." Correspondingly, Adams has now made each unit plan "a living document" by putting those plans on the district's learning management system and encouraging teachers to "add and contribute in real-time." The district curriculum leaders emphasized the collaborative nature of those ongoing processes. A statement made by Elementary Teacher Fanning captured that idea:

> I think the plus is that the curriculums are being chosen by teachers, which is great because they get a voice in that. And I definitely feel like those voices are heard. I trust our literacy program because my teammate helped choose it, and she piloted, and she knows it. If I'm like, I don't get this, what am I supposed to do? She can explain that to me. And since I've done the math, they'll come to me for math.

> Darnell also discussed collaboration alongside his belief about uniformity. He stated,

"we're going to get on the same page, and that's something I don't back away from, but… you can help decide what the page is." Middle-level ELA teacher Olliver reinforced Darnell's attitude by explaining, "that's why we have done the work around the curriculum map so that people could be within those parameters… to get a little more streamlined." Darnell made another connection between uniformity and collaboration in expressing, "If you want teachers to follow the curriculum, to work with it, to make it better as you go on… I want them to be a part of it."

The curricular adoption process and the ongoing work done by the aforementioned "leadership teams" were noted and seemed to be well understood by all the participants. Elementary teacher Tiller highlighted that the outcomes of this approach had improved over his

time in Haggerty. Tiller shared, "they've really improved over the last 15 years as far as putting better tools in the classroom." Although Tiller and other participants mentioned the strengths of this systematic process, two teachers mentioned that the "leadership teams" seemed to lack varied participation. Middle-level teacher Martin wondered if the district was "really getting enough voices" and felt "it tends to be the same teachers that are on those leadership teams." Middle-level ELA teacher Olliver expressed the same feeling. Olliver recounted, "I have served on several leadership teams [both in elementary and middle-level], and it kind of seems to be the same people again and again… and we're not getting as many voices."

The unit plans for each core content area across the elementary, middle, and high school levels were also analyzed. The templates were laid out in similar, though not identical fashion. One similarity was that each grade-level and content area included a planning document for each unit or module (Haggerty School District, 2021b). Another commonality was that the plans had links to additional resources and guidance for assessments. Furthermore, the plans all gave an "estimated time" for the unit or module. Most of the time frames were expressed as a specific number of weeks within identified calendar month(s) (e.g., 7th-grade math unit 3 shows "November - 2 weeks"). In contrast, the unit plan for 2nd-grade language arts identified a number of days (late September – Mid October - 13 days). Other unit plans were less specific. For example, an elementary science plan showed a range of weeks (i.e., 8-12 weeks) and 5th-grade language arts had a unit showing the estimated time as "February." The number of resources linked varied by content and grade, as did the options for assessment. As one illustration, elementary language arts plans linked a single assessment for each domain, whereas math listed unit assessments from the resource (i.e., like language arts) but also linked "additional assessment tasks."

Sub-Theme: Materials

The sections above considered uniformity in the Haggerty culture within the dimensions of academic standards and content. The data in those sections illustrated several ways uniformity was prescribed across the school district. In this sub-theme, I share data regarding uniformity of curricular materials. It should be noted that participants referred to the adopted curricular materials using a variety of seemingly synonymous terms, including "resources," "programs," and "materials." A specific example of the link between materials and the culture's belief in uniformity was provided by Math Coordinator Watson. "We do one size fits all," he noted. Elaborating, he shared, "This is the program we're doing for the wealthiest SES school to the most impacted Title I school we have in the district." Watson continued, "We believe that these materials are good for all students, regardless of what school you attend in our system," and "we believe that every student should have this common experience leaving our system." After making these statements, Watson added, "there's a little bit of a virtue-signaling there, but yet we can communicate that as a message."

Assistant Superintendent Darnell shared his belief regarding the purpose of adopting materials or programs. He explained, "We give teachers tools to work with so that they don't have to spend time always, constantly inventing that." His belief was characterized in more depth by coordinators Watson, Barnes, and Adams. These curriculum coordinators explained that the adopted resources were a focal point in defining teachers' scope and sequence. For example, Math Coordinator Watson explained, "we ended up focusing more on the instructional resources as a way to organize content in curriculum as opposed to kind of designing our own." While Watson noted that other districts might have believed in adjusting the adopted materials, focusing the curriculum on "broad ideas," or doing "some morphing," he asserted, "we don't

necessarily go that route." Watson explained that the "materials are trying to tell a story," and he felt that changing the story could put coherence at risk. Coordinator Barnes expressed a similar focus on using the resource to guide the approach within elementary ELA. She explained that the "scope and sequence for skills across a school year looks like this in whatever program it is" and added that the "lesson level" is also "guided by the instructional resource." Barnes emphasized the programs' research-based nature and referred to the adopted materials as "guaranteed and viable" (Marzano & ASCD, 2003). Furthermore, she noted that they "trust and rely on" those resources "quite heavily."

Using the adopted resources to determine instructional pacing and to set the scope and sequence was not limited to mathematics and elementary ELA. Similar to Barnes and Watson, Science Coordinator Adams shared that the "unit breakdown" and "proposed length of study of each unit" were all "based on those materials we have available to us." This stance aligns with principles outlined in the Haggerty *Standards Based Philosophy* document (Haggerty School District, n.d.). That document defined "fidelity of implementation" as "delivery of curriculum and instruction in the way in which it was designed to be delivered." While that statement alone did not clarify what was meant by the way curriculum and instruction were "designed to be delivered," additional text from the document indicated that the design was from the "program," which may be considered synonymous with the adopted resource. The document stated, "implementing a program with fidelity means that the program is delivered the way it was implemented in the research that provided evidence of effectiveness for that program."

Several school-based participants made comments that reinforced the value placed on the adopted curricular materials and the belief that those materials, resources, or programs were a focal point within Haggerty's culture of curriculum. The attitude depicted by Coordinators

Barnes, Watson, and Adams was evident in comments made by elementary Principal Tipton. "We've really been trying to like to keep people close to what the curricular resources are supposed to be and use it," Tipton stated. This attitude was also evident in a comment made by high school math teacher Arnold:

> We refer to it [the adopted resource] as the primary text. I don't want to say we have to use, but we have to use it. But that's sort of our core content. And then we're allowed to supplement it with pretty much whatever we want.

The data above indicated that the culture of curriculum in Haggerty valued the guidance provided by adopted, research-based resources. A sub-theme presented earlier within this overarching theme of uniformity indicated that Haggerty also placed high value on the guidance provided by the state academic standards. I heard about some tension between these values in the interview with elementary teacher Yarnish. In the quote below, Yarnish used the term "curriculum" to mean the adopted curricular resource:

> The discrepancy is, we'll hear from a [school] administration, we teach standards, we don't teach curriculum, but then the message from the district is no, we're teaching this curriculum to meet the standards. And so, it seems to be more curriculum based than standards-based… It's viable is what they say, a viable curriculum that has been researched and it is what we're using.

Assistant Superintendent Darnell told me he had been working to move the system away from reliance on specific resources. He shared, "We are still somewhat textbook-driven in this district, though we aren't as much as when I first started. It takes a long time to get a system to change around." Although the data still showed a high value placed on curricular resources for mathematics and elementary ELA, Social Studies Coordinator Neil and Secondary ELA

Coordinator Edwards expressed looser connections between the resources and the curricular approach in those domains. Neil shared, "we have our curricular resources that we have adopted, and hopefully those go along nicely with and support the standards that we use as our curriculum." The existing secondary ELA process was not focused on adopting a singular resource or program, a topic that I discuss later in this chapter in theme five.

Sub-Theme: Assessment

The preceding sub-themes described that the culture of curriculum leadership in Haggerty was highly prescriptive regarding the state academic standards, adopted materials, and curricular guidance (e.g., unit plans). The data collected about the approach to assessment, in contrast, indicated a less uniform approach. The prevailing belief about assessment was summarized by Assistant Superintendent Darnell. He explained, "we like to offer our teachers a menu of assessments that they can use." This type of flexible approach was also communicated by Science Coordinator Adams. "There's really no common assessment pieces that everybody does a unit one exam or unit two," he explained. Adams added that the timing and selection of assessments were "up to those teachers in those buildings." The same attitude was shared by Social Studies Coordinator Neil. She mentioned that there were performance assessments on the unit plans, and "some people use them, but they're not there because they're supposed to be used," as we have "no common district assessments for social studies."

Several participants mentioned assessments came primarily from the curricular materials. Coordinator Adams said, "we're very selective when it comes to that selection process of materials to make sure there are really quality assessments." While Adams expressed that assessments came primarily from the resource, he encouraged teachers to be creative in which assessments they used and when those were administered. A more structured approach was

indicated by Coordinator Barnes in elementary ELA. While the assessments were also "from the program," she stated an expectation that teachers administered an assessment "at the end of the unit" and talked about how those assessments "give us really good information." Overall, elementary language arts and mathematics seemed most likely to use shared unit assessments within a grade-level or school.

Principals and teachers reported the same general tenets as the district-level curriculum leaders regarding assessment. However, some indicated that common assessment might have occurred at the building level. For example, elementary Principal Tipton shared the "assessments within the curriculum that we use" were intended to be given at the end of each unit at the school. However, Tipton noted, "There's not a schedule, but there are certain common assessments that are encouraged that everybody do just so we have common data to look at." When asked whether assessment was decided at the district, building, or teacher level, middle-level teacher Varner responded, "Definitely the building." Elementary Teacher Tiller felt "it's common based on the team and then the building." Adding to the feelings expressed by Varner and Tiller, high school math teacher Arnold shared that the team of teachers that teach the same class at their school "gets together and builds the test," and then each teacher "personalizes it a little bit." Arnold added, "I have no idea what the other high schools in the district are doing with that."

While the examples above showed evidence of assessments coming from curricular resources or being built by teams of teachers, the data also included examples of teachers creating their own assessments. As one illustration, high school ELA teacher Rollings said that beyond the SAT and AP tests, "we all write our own assessments" and "there's no sort of formalized assessment system." In agreement, high school social studies teacher Parker shared

that assessment was "pretty much by the teacher in our department" and noted, "I developed tons of assessments over the years… I just saved and tweaked."

Theme Three: Autonomy and Control

In theme two, I considered beliefs, values, and attitudes about uniformity in Haggerty. District-level leaders and school-based participants in this culture of curriculum expressed high degrees of uniformity in the dimensions of academic standards, content, and instructional materials. In contrast, the participants communicated a less uniform approach to assessment. While theme two illustrated the value placed on uniformity in certain dimensions, I did not specifically include data regarding the leadership approach used to aspire toward uniformity. Was the culture characterized by centralized control? Did teachers feel a sense of autonomy? In theme three, I analyzed the broad topics of control and autonomy and considered various power and authority dynamics in the curricular culture. The theme was divided into three sub-themes to describe the unique dynamics in Haggerty. The first sub-theme was focused on the beliefs and attitudes about the use of mandates. In the second sub-theme, I described how the role of the teacher was conceived in Haggerty. The third sub-theme analyzed several types of system variation in the culture of curriculum.

Sub-Theme: Mandates

During my first interview with Assistant Superintendent Darnell, he was quick to point out his commitment to establishing and maintaining a uniform approach to the enactment of the curriculum in Haggerty. Due to my own biases, I expected the data would indicate a centralized model of instructional leadership accompanied by heavy use of mandates. To the contrary, Darnell and the curriculum coordinators communicated a firm belief in leading without the use of centralized mandates. Assistant Superintendent Darnell stipulated, "we mandate very little in

our district." This belief was reinforced by Science Coordinator Adams who shared, "we're not really the curriculum police," a phrase Darnell also used in explaining the prevailing attitude.

The other curriculum coordinators expressed the same attitude. For example, Social Studies Coordinator Neil talked about "encouraging" teachers to use the unit plan and said that while she worked to "get the best resources" for teachers, "if they choose not to use them, I'm not going to tell them to use them." Neil explained, "a lot of what we do is kind of loose." The term "loose" was also used by Math Coordinator Watson who told me:

> … it is pretty loose, actually. There's a way that we think it should probably happen, but then there's also an alternative reality of here's what happens… We do not script lessons for teachers. We do not say here is the common assessment that you will always take across the district; no matter what, we are not that tight. We give teachers an incredible amount of autonomy. What we ask is that we at least [use] our instructional unit plans.

The school principals and teachers shared a similar view of the culture. As one illustration, Secondary Principal Moore stated, "I don't think at all, any subject area or content area coordinator or leadership is looking for everything to be lockstep." The teacher participants indicated, in almost all cases, that they had a high degree of autonomy. The district leadership was described as "pretty hands-off" by high school social studies teacher Parker. Characterizing that statement, Parker said, "it's professionalism, it's allowing the teacher to be flexible with what they do, how they teach [and] there's no repercussions there." While admitting that autonomy "is nice," Parker also stated that it was "both a blessing and a curse." The comment Watson made about an "alternative reality" was also mentioned by Parker in his statement that, at times, the autonomy "begets some strange outcomes."

Instead of using mandates to control practices, the curriculum leaders discussed building a sense of ownership amongst the teachers. "We do it organically in our district," asserted Assistant Superintendent Darnell. Explaining further, Darnell said, "We like the phrase from the movie *Field of Dreams*, 'build it and they will come.'" Similarly, Social Studies Coordinator Neil described the Haggerty approach as "more grassroots," and Secondary ELA Coordinator Edwards talked about the importance of getting "ownership" as opposed to only "buy-in." Specifically, Edwards explained:

> We didn't want to try to get buy-in. That is what, like a used car salesman tries to get. They try to convince you that this subpar car is the car you want. We wanted to get ownership. We wanted to create teachers who worked in the GM factory who bought the car that they built.

> Haggerty's district-level professional development model was noted as one of a few specific examples of an "organic" or "grassroots" approach. When Darnell brought "blended learning" into the district, the first professional development session included six teachers. "We have not forced it," he recounted. Despite a small start, Darnell shared that more recently "hundreds every year" had been trained to use blended designs. This approach to professional development was referred to as an "opt-in model" by Secondary Principal Moore.

While the data presented a clear pattern regarding the absence of mandates, the elementary language arts coordinator presented a slightly dissimilar attitude regarding autonomy and control. Coordinator Barnes addressed the dynamics she had encountered in shifting elementary literacy teachers toward a more research-based approach. She recalled, "the last two years with language arts have been difficult in that we've challenged previous practices and really gotten teachers into research-based practices." Although she used the word "challenged"

as a descriptor, Barnes also communicated, "I don't want to use the term compliance because compliance doesn't make me feel very good." She explained, "compliance makes it feel a little bit militant, but I would say trust, trust in a program." While Barnes did not talk about making mandates, she asked teachers to implement the program with "fidelity." For example, Barnes noted she had supported teachers to "trust the process, trust the resource, trust the curricular guidance, because it's based on research and experience." She reflected, "I'm not sure that our teachers had 100% trust when we first implemented our program," but indicated a feeling that they had recently come to "a place of trust."

Data regarding autonomy and control was also collected during Coordinator Barnes' discussion of how she handled instances when teachers were drifting from the research or the adopted program's resources. Again, she did not indicate the use of mandates. Instead, Barnes' attitude was to use discourse to enhance fidelity. She gave one example of teachers asking about using text from outside the adopted program. She suggested her course of action was to begin by saying, "let's talk about what is informing that decision." Barnes elaborated:

> We have a guarantee that this text really aligns with the expectations… So, for core instructional purposes, we're going to trust that you're going to leverage this text. We just want to hold tight to what we have in our suite to support instruction… It's not always like a hard-core no. No, it's an invitation to think about, let's talk about what we're basing that decision on…

The scenario mentioned by Barnes added nuance to the "no mandates" attitude. A more distinct exception to the stance regarding mandates was mentioned by two of the coordinators and three teachers. These participants indicated a culture of autonomy, with a caveat. The caveat was that the teacher, or school, needed to be showing positive results. Coordinator Watson

shared that he knew of "a couple of middle schools" that "curate [their] own thing" and did not use the adopted materials. "We don't come down on them heavy-handed," he explained. One of Watson's reasons was, "we just don't want to be the punitive police if they're getting good results." The influence of results on the attitude taken by district-level curriculum leadership was further described by Watson:

> I would say we would start sniffing and looking really hard at how folks are using materials and what instruction looks like if their accreditation rating puts them in a place where they need support… So, the one perception is we think everyone's following the order of unit plans… But we really find out what that looks like if we need to do district walkthrough teams because a school, in terms of performance, is in trouble.

The attitude of "looking really hard" based on results was also mentioned by Science Coordinator Adams when discussing his belief that teachers should be encouraged to make "something your own." While he shared that he was "really open" to teacher ownership, he admitted, "that has its benefits and drawbacks." Specifically, he said that if people "take that to an extreme… then sometimes that's reflected in performance scores." When that happened, Adams said, "We have to go in, are you using these materials and that sort of thing… well, no… and what are you using, and why not?" Several teachers reinforced the statements by Adams and Watson. Elementary teacher Norton reported that "nobody steps in unless you hit a catastrophe or something, you know, you hit bottom." Another elementary educator, teacher Fanning, said that when a teacher was not using the district materials or unit plans, "if their kids are still doing well and meeting the standards, in my building no one's going to put up a stink." As a final illustration, middle-level math teacher Gilmore stated, "as long as that end result shows growth, then it's all good."

Although not a mandate, Darnell and Watson also referenced an expectation that teachers did not supplant the adopted resources. "We allow teachers to supplement, not supplant, but supplement," indicated Darnell. Explaining that distinction, Watson said that a teacher might use "another activity to help meet those standards better than the adopted materials," but the "very, very, fine line is when you get to a replacement." Although Darnell mentioned "allowing" teachers to supplement, the remainder of Watson's explanation summarized the prevailing "no mandates" attitude within the Haggerty culture of curriculum leadership. He stated that if a teacher supplanted the materials "completely on [their] own… we might have a conversation, but we also don't want to be viewed as the curriculum police… we don't want people to feel defensive in that."

Sub-Theme: Role of the Teacher

Although the first sub-theme was focused on beliefs and attitudes about mandates, there were also data referencing perceptions about the role of the teacher in this culture of curriculum. High school teacher Parker indicated he felt a high degree of flexibility and autonomy. Coordinator Barnes suggested less flexibility concerning use of the adopted program in elementary ELA. This sub-theme included data that offered a more thorough description of the beliefs and attitudes about the role of the teacher in Haggerty.

The data suggested the "what" (e.g., standards, scope and sequence) was determined for teachers but "how" it was executed was up to each teacher. Stated in another manner, the teacher had choice and could show personality concerning the art of teaching, but the science had already been determined (i.e., research-based programs, best practices). The feeling expressed by Assistant Superintendent Darnell was that "it's about not having our teachers have to create curriculum or decide what kids need to know and be able to do." Darnell continued, "we have

that guaranteed and viable curriculum, so they don't have to spend their time doing that"

(Marzano & ASCD, 2003). When it came to decisions at the lesson level, he emphasized that's

"what we hire our teachers to do, they're professionals."

Specific to mathematics, Coordinator Watson restated that teachers were asked to keep

the "story" (i.e., the sequence in the resource) tight, but "in terms of how teachers to plan their

lessons, how they use their materials, we actually leave that up to them." The art and science of

teaching were mentioned when Elementary ELA Coordinator Barnes discussed the role of the

teacher. For instance, she stated, "there's an actual science behind how we teach students to learn

how to read." In describing the science, Barnes talked about teachers "leveraging the

instructional resource" and relying "heavily on the research to guide our decision-making around

what are the sound practices that we need to see happening in all of our classrooms for both

teachers and students." The "looseness," she explained, "would come in the art of teaching" and

can be in making "decisions about where I'm going to linger" or employing various "strategies

and structures for student engagement."

The curriculum leaders' values and attitudes were reinforced by the comments from

school leaders and teachers. Elementary Principal Tipton made one such statement:

> There's always there's room for the delivery. The delivery is up to the teacher; like how
>
> that comes across in your classroom is your craft. That's what you do in the classroom,
>
> but the basis of where we're all going, and what we all need to know is well established
>
> and understood.

The statement from Tipton about the direction being "well established" was echoed by high

school science teacher Baldridge. She said there was "teacher clarity about what it is we're trying

to teach and how are we going to measure that we're doing it, but in between, it's kind of up to us."

A benefit of the Haggerty approach was shared by middle-level ELA teacher Olliver who said, "We have lots of people who've spent time on creating tools for us or resources for us, so you don't feel like you're starting over every time, but again, you still have that freedom." While each of the teachers expressed that they had the type of "freedom" noted by Olliver, high school math teacher Arnold summarized the overarching belief about the role of the teacher in the existing culture of curriculum leadership:

> There's a lot of autonomy, like I said, in terms of how, but very little autonomy in terms of what… I don't have a prescribed, here's a script for chapter two, section one, solving quadratic equations or whatever it is. It's just, hey, you should be covering solving quadratics somewhere in the beginning of September.

The autonomy referenced by Arnold was also mentioned by elementary teacher Norton who asserted the standards and the goals for students and where they needed to be were firm, but "the how and what it looks like at each individual school or each individual classroom is a bit looser." This statement leads into the next sub-theme, within which I focused on variations within the Haggerty district.

**Sub-Theme: Variation
in the System**

Theme two showed Haggerty's commitment to a uniform curricular approach. While uniformity was expressed as the aim, the curriculum leaders communicated an understanding that their ideals were not always translated into action across the entire system. In this sub-theme, I considered the degree of uniformity or variation across the Haggerty district. The assistant superintendent addressed the "weakness" of being a "big system" was "trying to get

everybody on the same page and making sure that they are, and that we don't have pockets that are absolutely subverting the process." Darnell shared, "we do know we need to supplement in some cases while we also don't want people going completely off track and doing something that could be hurtful to student achievement." He told me the "biggest challenge" they had was that the "things that we've developed together with schools, principals, teachers" and the instructional materials were not always used.

While Darnell referred to teachers not using the guidance and materials as a place where the system "breaks down," he also noted that sometimes those breakdowns were "for the good." For example, "a teacher will say, I can do this better, I know a lesson that will do this better." Darnell said, "they have that absolute permission," but he wanted "to know that so that we can get that out there to everybody if it's that good." Situations that he cited as undesirable breakdowns were when a teacher was "not standards-based" or "they're not using good materials, they're using what they like." He summarized, "our teaching staff is amazing, but that's where it breaks down."

Each of the curriculum coordinators expressed an awareness of the types of variation mentioned by Darnell. For example, the idea of a good breakdown was detailed by Math Coordinator Watson. He mentioned that when he heard about changes being made to the "mathematical story," he began "hitting the pavement." In one instance, he found out that "regardless of what's posted in terms of our instructional unit plans," most of the seventh-grade teachers had flip-flopped two units. He said his response was to say, "I can't tell you that you can't do that, especially because you already did, but two, you have good reasoning behind it… maybe there's something to be learned from that." Watson's attitude about this situation illustrated some ambiguity regarding "permission" for teachers to make adjustments to the

"what" (i.e., content or scope and sequence) in the culture of curriculum leadership in the Haggerty district. Watson explained:

> … if there's changes they're making, and they're seeing students successful, they must share out because there's some people that take that upon themselves to make those changes and do those tweaks and say, that is my local control... Others need the permission to do it. And we have that full range of, I don't want to say rebels, but people that are not afraid to do that on their own versus some that say, oh, I didn't think I was allowed to do that. So that's where we have to stay in communication with them.

Secondary Principal Moore also noted the tension within this type of situation. Despite feeling the "district has a phenomenal scope and sequence," Moore stated it was not "quite as systemic as it could be because there's so many decision points." Talking about setting "systemic expectations," Moore continued:

> … but how do you do it in a way that honors the climate and culture of the building, climate and culture of the town sometimes, right. And how do you honor that and how do you honor the individual teacher choices as professionals. And so, I think that's that balancing act. I do think there's a clear vision for systemic expectation setting. I just don't know, boots on the ground, that it's always easy to navigate.

Many of the teacher participants pointed out a similar difference between Haggerty's ideals and the reality "on the ground." To that point, middle-level ELA teacher Olliver surmised, "this idea that we're all kind of doing the same thing at the same time is not, I would say that's not what you would see from classroom to classroom and building to building." Olliver recalled being a part of the adoption of "lots of curriculums" in Haggerty and mentioned that each time "the fidelity question comes up." The message had been, "if we're going to implement this, it has

to be with fidelity," but Olliver shared, "I feel that is a philosophy and not a fact." As an example, Olliver noted that being a parent of a middle school kid who attended another school in the district, the kid "doesn't do anything that we've done as far as I can see." The sections below consider the degree to which uniformity was playing out in the system.

On the Same Page

While most participants discussed variation in curricular approaches more than uniformity, two principals and three teachers perceived that teachers across the district were "by and large" on the same page. Elementary Principal Tipton felt, "there's more people who use that [unit plan] as a resource and guide than there are people who are kind of off on their own." Similarly, Secondary Principal Moore estimated that 70% of teachers in the building were "teaching to the unit plan or to the curricular guides" and about 30% might have been taking an approach that was "a little more convoluted" or may have been getting there "this backdoor way." Elementary teacher Tiller gave a matter-of-fact account in stating, "The scope and sequence is usually decent, it's fine, so we follow that."

Variation by Level

The data indicated a degree of system variance by the school level (i.e., elementary, middle, high). The district-level coordinators communicated a common understanding of this type of variation. They expressed higher degrees of curricular uniformity across elementary schools than secondary schools. Also, they indicated that high school was the level most likely to have the greatest degrees of variability. Coordinator Watson explained that at the elementary level, "the compliance, for lack of a better word, is really, really high." He noted, "they'll make tweaks, all teachers make tweaks," but he said, "what you put in front of them largely, they will just do it." According to Coordinator Adams, middle-level teachers were "roughly the same [as

elementary], a little bit looser, but pretty strict." Watson added that middle-level teachers needed "a good reason for why" and said they used the materials as long as "they can see themselves in them."

On the other hand, high school teachers were "a hard breed to deal with," shared Watson, a former high school teacher. Watson expressed that the use of unit plans, the degree of focus on standards, and the way materials were used in high school was "very site-based" and that the curriculum leaders "leave that much looser than I think we like." A similar attitude was evident in Coordinator Adams' statement. He said, "in high school, it gets pretty interesting," and shared that "you build these resources and materials and hope they're used, and some of them are used, or some of the teachers choose to sort of go their own path." Social Studies Coordinator Neil was less emphatic in her characterization of variation by level. Neil felt "for the most part, everybody uses them [unit plans] to varying degrees, I think middle school more so than high school."

Variation by Content Area

Principals and teachers indicated the use of the adopted resource and unit plans was most uniform in the content areas of math (across all levels of K-12) and elementary reading and least uniform in secondary language arts. The data was not as clear concerning the degree of variability within K-12 science and social studies. The curriculum coordinators' "different styles of leadership" were noted by Secondary Principal Moore as one factor in variation by content. For example, Moore said that Watson was "linear" and "meticulous," and the math approach "feels really dialed" due to a "concerted effort around the scope and sequence and the pacing" and the "nature of the content." A factor beyond the leadership coordinator's personality was shared by elementary teacher Yarnish who said, "people are scared of the math standards."

Yarnish noted teachers felt that "at least the curriculum has figured it out, so let's just do the curriculum."

In contrast, Principal Moore referred to secondary ELA as "a bit more nebulous" and shared that Coordinator Edwards was "forward-thinking" and asked some "big questions." While pointing out a focus on including more diverse perspectives into the secondary ELA curriculum, Moore shared that beyond some "general guidelines," there was "a lot of wiggle room because he's a leader that appreciates a lot of wiggle room." Similarly, teacher Martin called secondary ELA "loose" beyond a focus on the standards and said the feeling regarding the curricular guidance was "you can do this or do something else that still kind of fits your own style."

A factor in using the curricular guidance and resources within each content area was how teachers felt about the quality of those tools. Elementary teacher Norton said, "We usually start with the unit planner and really focusing on the standards, and if the curriculum is working and it's user-friendly, then that is the primary tool." As an example, Norton noted that the "authentic text collections" were "great" in the current elementary literacy program, but the writing component of that program was "really not effective." Therefore, when it came to writing, "a lot of teachers I've [talked] to in other buildings, they're piecemealing it together."

Variation by School

Participants also pointed out inconsistencies across schools in the district. The district-level coordinators expressed an awareness that there was, indeed, variation across schools within the system. Although Elementary Principal Tipton felt the Haggerty commitment to being a "school district" (as opposed to a "district of schools") had made things "more cohesive," she also admitted that trying to create consistency across the system was "probably like herding cats." Tipton continued, "We get out of line a little bit, but they [district leadership] try."

Specifically, she mentioned that when it came to variability, "I think some of that is culture and maybe some of that is leadership, and then some of it is the community and the students that you have in your building."

The impact of leadership was also referenced by Social Studies Coordinator Neil, who said, "there are some principals I think that are more apt to require that their teachers are using the textbooks." More specifically, she shared, "I can tell you one school who doesn't probably use the curricular resources at all compared to another school." Comments from Secondary Principal Young reinforced Neil's observations. Young shared, "We give our teachers more leeway than probably a lot of schools do." In alignment with the data that I included about the value Haggerty placed on results, his rationale for the leeway was "teachers have proven that they have the ability to get very impressive results without being micromanaged."

A discipline-specific illustration of variation across schools was cited by Science Coordinator Adams. He shared "some differences in beliefs with biology" concerning "how it should be sequenced or taught." These varied beliefs resulted in "a group of three or four schools that teach one way and a group that teaches it the other." Adams also noted a high degree of variability in the "amount of time that's allocated for science instruction" in elementary schools in the district. "It's up to their building principals," and "it's totally building based," he shared. As an example, Adams described, "We have some schools that almost double-dip in science… and you have other schools that 10 or 15 minutes on a Friday is a good week." He lamented, "it's unfortunate that's the case, but it's just how it is."

The idea of varied cultures was mentioned by elementary teacher Norton. While sharing about autonomy, Norton mentioned, "We're not micromanaged, I get to make decisions based on where my students are at" and she explained, "I think there is a culture there, but it looks so

different building to building." This feeling appeared in comments by elementary teacher Yarnish, who worked at two elementary schools in Haggerty in consecutive years and noticed "[one] building definitely used the literacy curriculum with more fidelity than [the other]."

Despite recognizing this same pattern, Secondary Principal Moore felt that "district leadership has been doing a great job of recognizing the places where we need to be unified and we need to be a school district, but also being mindful of the building autonomy." Moore estimated it was "a reasonable balance" and noted the importance of having "autonomy at the building level in a way that honors the community." When I asked whether some schools got more flexibility in terms of that autonomy, Moore's response was, "I really don't feel like anyone gets a blank check," but also, "I don't think there are any schools that are micromanaged at all." Extending that thought, she did state that some schools were more "district hands-on" if there was an issue with "grad rate and assessment rates and achievement rates" or a "lower state accountability rating."

An example of the "hands-on" involvement Moore referenced was shared by middle-level teacher Martin. At Martin's school, which had a lower accountability rating, the degree of uniformity had been influenced by district-level curriculum leaders' involvement. Martin explained:

> We're not going to go rogue and doing our own thing because we have our impact teams where we have district leadership coming in, and they're talking about how are you doing on the curriculum? Our school specifically has even more meetings making sure that everybody is on the same page and everybody is doing the same thing.

The statement by Martin reinforces the comments from an earlier theme regarding the relationship between the level of involvement of the district-level curriculum leaders and the school's "results."

Variation by Department/Team

The section above gave an overview of variation in the system across schools. Participants also communicated that divergence existed within each school. The data below indicated that departments or teacher teams, in some cases, collaboratively altered the district-wide unit plans and developed their own version of curricular guidance. As one example, high school social studies teacher Parker told me, "We've kind of come up with our own plan." Although Parker felt the district's "overarching ideas are good," the implementation in their department was distinct. Continuing, Parker said, "I wouldn't say I see any real unit plans floating around," and what they teach is "the unit plan, but it's sort of adopted by our department." Parker shared a summary of the approach:

> At some point as a department, you just become self-contained and quite autonomous and quite effective and flexible. [added in a joking tone] But they might come tomorrow and say, hey, can we see your unit plan and what you guys are teaching? We'd be like… Oh, we use yours.

The approach in high school ELA teacher Rollings' department mirrored that described by Parker. The guidance given to Rollings when she began at the school was "our own sort of curriculum guide for our department," and Rollings reported having "no idea if it aligns with the district."

Considering the data above about school-level variation, one might have expected Parker and Rollings' comments as they are high school teachers. However, high school science teacher

Baldridge pointed out that departments did not always stray from the district's curricular guidance. Specifically, Baldridge said that in one department at her school, "they're trying to be all in lockstep, and it feels toxic for them, and they don't feel like they have autonomy, self-imposed within their department." In contrast, Baldridge said, "there's a lot more variety in our [science] department." To summarize, Baldridge's opinion was that "it probably depends on the personalities and the administration and the department head."

Variation within workgroups was not only evident in high schools. Teachers at the elementary and middle school level noted making similar, though less dramatic, adjustments in collaboration with their teams. For instance, elementary teacher Fanning said, "We [as a team] use those [unit plans], but we kind of go with our own gut." Adding detail, Fanning shared that when a lesson from the curriculum was not deemed effective, "we might go outside our curriculum resources and look for something." She pointed out that the team kept to the same topic or focus (e.g., narrative writing), but "we will not always use what they're using."

Variation by Teacher

Another type of within-school variability was at the level of the individual teacher. Elementary teacher Norton provided an overview of this type of variability when discussing the experience of being a parent of two kids that attended school in Haggerty:

> … As a parent… it gives me a chance to see what is happening in other classrooms. And some classrooms, you know, it's they're creating everything from scratch and every day is a new adventure, and the teachers pull in amazing things, but it doesn't necessarily follow a structure. I think it really does depend on the teacher.

The perception shared by Norton was also exemplified in comments from elementary Principal Tipton, who had recently worked with a team where the teachers "were all doing

different things." She told me, "they weren't collaborating because they couldn't collaborate because they weren't doing the same thing." I also heard other participants suggest that it was generally up to each teacher to decide the level of commitment to the district resources and curricular guidance. This sentiment was evident in Secondary Principal Young's account:

> There are some teachers that they know what they have to teach, and they kind of want to stay in their lane and just do that. But there are other teachers who are very interested in, you know, talking with the coordinators about trends in their field or textbook adoption. So, it really depends on the teacher to be quite honest with you.

> I heard varied depictions of how it looked when teachers "stay in their lane." When discussing this kind of situation, middle-level teacher Martin said that one teacher in her school would "nod a smile and say yes" and then go "back to the classroom" and do "his own thing." I heard about a similar tactic from elementary teacher Yarnish, who admitted "last year I definitely closed my door and did what I wanted." She told me she opted to isolate "because I had that teammate that was so militaristic and was like, we do day one on day one, and we do day two on day two." In other cases, teachers reported that the team or department's culture was such that each teacher did their own thing. As one example, middle-level math teacher Gilmore told me about wishing the department would "cover the same things" and "try to kind of be on the same page" but explained, 'that's not happening here." The following comment by elementary teacher Norton summarizes her opinion regarding the variability in the Haggerty district:

> In general, at our school, most people are doing what they need to do and are doing the right thing… There's that percentage of teachers that are just kind of going their own way and can do things better than what has been created already. Nobody's talking to them to

say, this is the expectation… They're not getting the message that this is what the expectation is because it's easy to ignore what you don't believe in.

Drift Over Time

I heard from several participants working at the elementary level that there was more uniformity when a new curricular resource was first adopted. The data did not indicate whether this pattern was also evident at the middle and high school levels. Elementary Principal Tipton explained, "when you roll out a curriculum, the first year you want to have people like really stick to it and do it the way it is." However, Tipton continued, "over time they start to recognize the things that are very valuable… there's always way too much in curricular materials."

Comments from elementary teachers Norton and Tiller aligned with Tipton's explanation. Norton said, "they [district leaders] push the tool with fidelity that first year" but "the longer we have the curriculum, the more relaxed things become as you find out how well something is working." Accordingly, Tiller told me "it takes several years to get strong in a new curriculum" and that after becoming "proficient in it," the team begins to "rearrange" their approach based on their experiences.

To summarize, theme three was focused on the manifestation of autonomy and control in the culture of curriculum leadership within the Haggerty district. In the first sub-theme, I presented data related to the district's belief in "no mandates." The next sub-theme used the data to characterize beliefs and attitudes about the teacher's role in Haggerty. The last sub-theme, divided into multiple sections, addressed uniformity and several types of variability across the school district. While the defining characteristics of autonomy and control in Haggerty were complex, a quote from Secondary Principal Moore identified the "overarching belief" within the culture of curriculum leadership:

We should all be unified towards working towards something. And there are places where we want professional judgment, on the daily, to better our students, because that's why we hire good teachers. But we all need to be moving in the same direction to make sure that we're accomplishing that shared goal. And some departments are better than others at that. And some buildings are better than others at that. But that's the overarching belief.

Theme Four: Depth and Breadth

As Principal Moore mentioned above, there were "places where we want professional judgment" to best support students. The data I collected during this study indicated that decisions regarding pacing and coverage of the curriculum were the most commonly cited examples of the need for "professional judgment." Correspondingly, this theme included data relating to the tension that curriculum leaders, principals, and teachers felt on the issue of depth versus breadth within Haggerty's "guaranteed and viable curriculum" (Marzano & ASCD, 2003). The first sub-theme included data regarding how much content and how many standards needed to be covered. The second sub-theme analyzed the value placed on curricular "coverage" in the Haggerty district. The last two sub-themes presented perspectives about the decision-making that came about in dealing with the depth versus breadth conflict and data related to a move toward priority standards during the coronavirus pandemic.

Sub-Theme: Too Much

Assistant Superintendent Darnell talked to me about the conflict between the Haggerty commitment to a viable curriculum and the real challenge of living that ideal. He shared that the curriculum was not, in actuality, viable:

Viable means that teachers have the time to do it. They have the skillset to do it, i.e., professional training to do it, and they have the tools to do it… That's the viable piece, and I worry, I worry greatly now. I don't think we have enough time to get through everything. I really don't. We give our teachers too much to do and our students too much to do.

Mr. Darnell's attitude was not unique. The same conflict was mentioned by coordinators, principals, and teachers.

When I asked Math Coordinator Watson if there was too little, the right amount, or too much content to address, he replied, "There's clearly too much, clearly at every grade level there is too much." The scope of the standards was also deemed problematic by middle-level math teacher Gilmore. "I think the districts do a great job aligning," Gilmore stated. Elaborating, Gilmore said, "I don't think it's necessarily a curriculum issue so much as a state standards issue… we can't possibly do all the things that everybody wants us to do." The same concern was voiced by elementary teacher Fanning who complained, "I can't even remember where they [math unit guides] would have us for the end of the trimester… there's just no way we could have covered that by now." Beyond the reference to academic standards, Coordinator Watson noted that the materials they adopted contributed to that concern as they "are going to be aligned to at T to those standards because that's how you sell product." In agreement, but speaking in general terms rather than specifically about math, elementary Principal Tipton lamented, "there's always way too much in curricular materials… You'd be teaching kids 24-7 and never get through it all."

Although math was most often mentioned, it was not the only content area where participants noted concerns. When I asked Social Studies Coordinator Neil the question about

whether the unit plans included the right amount of content and material to cover, too much, or not enough, she said, "I would say there's more than I would like." That feeling was shared by high school social studies teacher Parker when it came to the world studies class. Parker said, "there's not much depth… there is just not enough time." However, Parker said it "depends on the class," like in U.S. history, "we can go deeper." A more wide-ranging concern was expressed by elementary teacher Tiller who felt that "what we're supposed to cover in a year is too much… whether you look at math, reading, writing, or social studies." Darnell told me he had been trying to "narrow things down and finally get to that viable piece." However, he said he was "struggling with some of our folks on this… boy, some of the things that people think are important…" When telling me about potential changes to the scope of geometry, he noted, "the purists are losing their minds."

Sub-Theme: Coverage as a Value

The previous sub-theme focused on a concern that there was "too much" to cover. In this sub-theme, I considered the value placed on "coverage" in the Haggerty system. The data indicated that coverage was, indeed, valued and suggested there was a belief that coverage correlated directly to student achievement. As one example, Science Coordinator Adams said that he always shared with teachers, "We hope that you're able to introduce your students to everything." He also said that the unit plans "have mapped out this pathway throughout the year that really gives you a really solid foundation and a chance to get everything covered." The desire to cover everything was also expressed by Elementary ELA Coordinator Barnes, along with the belief that pacing was directly proportional to achievement. Barnes explained:

> Beginning of the year you should be teaching unit one, module A, it should take you
> approximately 20 instructional days, then you assess, and then you move on to module B.

So, we do provide that guidance, and there's an element of tightness there because what

we say is that… what we know as an entire system, and then what the research will tell

us, is that student achievement is significantly impacted by pacing.

Barnes emphasized pacing again when she told me that if "students are not as successful as we

would want them to be" on the state assessment, "the first question we ask is how far into your

unit plans did you get… how far into the instructional program did you get?"

Other participants identified a similar attitude about pacing. In the interview with

elementary Principal Tipton, I heard, "We have underlying district level kind of pacing guides so

there's a place to go for, you know, where should I be?" Likewise, middle-level teacher Martin

recalled conversations in the math department at her school. Martin said Coordinator Watson

would ask, "Where are you on your pacing?" According to Martin, the push to "get through all

these topics so that they [students] have the foundation to build on" made teachers "feel that

pressure of, okay, I'm here, I need to get here, but my students don't understand." The pressure

noted by Martin was referenced by middle-level math teacher Gilmore who said, "The emails

come [from Coordinator Watson], not harshly, but very firmly worded that this is what needs to

be done by the end of the year." Despite that imperative, elementary teacher Norton shared, "I've

talked to some schools where they get through half the math curriculum." Regarding this same

topic, Norton's team got "pretty close" to covering everything, and her comment below indicated

a value on covering the full scope and sequence:

Every child learns at their own pace, and they may not be getting it yet, but I can keep

giving them support and keep them moving forward… otherwise, we would never finish

the curriculum. I mean if you had to wait for everybody to get there.

The feeling of continuing to move forward was also shared by secondary Principal Moore. In discussing how teachers managed the pace, Moore told me, "They look at some of them [standards] and say, I'm going to expose the kids to this, I'm not going to do a deep dive… I'm going to be faithful and have fidelity to the guaranteed viable curriculum" (Marzano & ASCD, 2003).

The value on coverage was not expressed identically by leaders of each content area. The secondary ELA coordinator did not allude to coverage as a value. Instead, Coordinator Edwards discussed addressing standards as needed during the units planned around essential questions rather than covering all the discrete skills in a pre-determined scope and sequence. He explained, "We built the assignments at the minimum." The social studies coordinator shared that courses, particularly at the secondary level, often included too much aspirational content. Still, the standards offered the chance for more depth and less focus on coverage. Coordinator Neil told me she placed more value on depth than coverage of content:

I think that depth and breadth conversation was my first hurdle [in this position] especially talking to or working with high school history teachers… everything was a survey course. And I think that that has been a conversation I've had for six years… I think there've been some really good changes… it goes back to the specific high school teachers, you know, they grew up with a survey course, and that was good for them, so they want to continue that.

Coordinator Neil gave me a specific example about shifting teachers' thinking. She recounted a conversation with a high school teacher that asked for her help because "there's just so much" to cover in his history class. She asked questions to gain enough understanding to be able to support this teacher. It turned out that one of his most time-consuming projects was to

have students memorize all the names of the presidents in order and "rattle them off in under two minutes." While this example may have been extreme, Neil shared that she had been "having those kinds of conversations" for the past six years.

Neil's story illustrated that pressure for coverage can come from tensions separate from the district-level curricular guidance. This idea was also shared by secondary Principal Moore, who commented that teachers often pressured themselves to keep pace. In describing this phenomenon, Moore said, "there's a lot of feeling of… self-pressure to pace and follow those unit plans." In those cases, Moore told me about having to "actively remind my teachers… like this is self-imposed, and it's okay to take a beat, and to take a breath and to recognize that maybe it's okay to look at power standards" (i.e., standards prioritized as most important). Moore expressed that "there's a lot of, I don't want to say rule-following, but there's a lot of feeling very married" to the curricular guidance and "I push them to let themselves off the hook." An attitude of self-inflicted pressure was also referenced by high school science teacher Baldridge who noted that her colleagues internalized the stress that they "have to fit into this thing that doesn't fit." That feeling manifested itself, she shared, as "an implosion instead of like, more of a rebellion." Describing what rebellion could mean, Baldridge said it was "like, well screw you guys I'm going to do what I think is right, and I'm going to do it as well as I can."

Sub-Theme: Decision-Making

The data above showed a value placed on coverage of the scope and sequence, particularly in elementary ELA, math, and science. However, the data also indicated there was too much to cover in the allotted time for those content areas. Several participants talked extensively about the tension between coverage and time. Their comments were centered on the decision-making that was inherent in dealing with that tension. The data suggested these

decisions were made at the school level, but the district-level curriculum leaders and school principals asked that these decisions be discussed collaboratively. Math Coordinator Watson gave an overview of how this situation arose and the corresponding decision-making that needed to happen:

> [We have] always said all standards, all students. That, that was the mantra from the department of education and what the law says. So, when we post these documents [unit plans], everything's in there…. whether we know it's doable or not, and that's where there's always this rub. There's the front-facing documents that have everything. And then there's the conversation we're going to have about how you might want to really think about doing this… we make assumptions that those things happen in schools.

According to secondary Principal Moore, those decisions did happen in schools. She told me she tried to "really push on collaboration and team approach to everything so that those teachers are getting input from other educators in that decision-making." Despite that push for collaboration, Moore admitted: "That's where a curriculum becomes really subjective." Adding specificity, Moore noted "that decision-making isn't always coming through systemically… it's disappointing; I think we could do better as a system… I think it's where we're at." Elementary Principal Tipton shared an almost identical perspective. The decision-making, according to Tipton, "can get tricky because you want to make sure you're having really good conversations." For example, she shared that teachers may have wanted to avoid something because "that piece is hard to do," but there was also a danger in spending too long on a topic or concept and getting "stuck." In summary, Tipton said it was challenging to consider "where do you stay with the pacing guide and where do you decide we're going to stick with this and we're going to get it really solid before we move on."

Several teachers discussed this decision-making dilemma. For example, elementary teacher Fanning told me that when it came to pacing in math, "We've always just made that decision" and "we are not going to rush that [pace], because there's no point." Fanning added, "no one's ever said anything, and that's kind of what we do." I heard a more detailed account from high school math teacher Arnold. Arnold explained that Coordinator Watson "puts out a calendar if you will, of here's the things that should be taught in each class." That calendar, Arnold indicated, showed what could be done "in a perfect world." After seeing the calendar, he said teachers at his school "adapt that a little bit because his plan is a little ambitious." His team said, "okay, we're going to cut this a little bit short, we're not going to cover this, we're going to add something here." Although he said, "We can get through most of it," Arnold felt, "There's never been a push for, you have to do all of this, or you're doing it wrong." Elaborating, Arnold said, "it's always been, do what's best for your students, take this as fast as you can, but don't go too fast or too slow."

The explanation given by Arnold seemed to conflict, in some ways, with the data presented above regarding the value placed on coverage. The feeling of a "mixed message" was shared by middle-level math teacher Gilmore who talked specifically about the unit plan documents:

> … by no means do you have to do everything that they're saying. And I think the disconnect is in between people saying that and us actually believing it. You know, you're giving this document, it sure looks like you want me to do everything on this document, but you're telling me it's a tool. You know, it kind of sends a mixed message. Even during a good year, you don't get it all done. So, let's just call it like it is. I can't get all of this taught.

Sub-Theme: Priority Standards

Teacher Gilmore stated it was challenging to cover the full scope and sequence "even during a good year." The 2020-2021 school year would not have been referred to by many as a "good year" in regard to content coverage. Multiple participants mentioned the context created by the coronavirus pandemic had resulted in decreased instructional time. The time limitations faced by the Haggerty district due to the pandemic led the curriculum leaders to put forth priority standards (i.e., standards to emphasize above others) for the first time. Assistant Superintendent Darnell mentioned that he liked identifying priority standards for the "depth piece" and as a means to map out essential outcomes to prepare students to "access the next course or grade-level." However, he also mentioned that the process of narrowing down the targets made some of the curriculum coordinators "very nervous." While he did not point out which coordinators had that feeling, Coordinators Watson and Adams shared concerns, especially with the idea of making decisions to cut out some content. They used the words "dangerous," "resistant," and "nervous" when discussing this idea.

In recounting the process of identifying priority standards, Science Coordinator Adams said he "felt kind of strange doing that because our standards are built where there really aren't priority standards - it's not set up that way." The concern, Adams shared, was, "You lose sight of these things down here that still are important... I'm just not a huge fan of that." A similar fear was evident in Math Coordinator Watson's comments. He told me that using priority standards was "a whole new territory where frankly, I was a little resistant to go." Although Watson and the teachers on the leadership teams did highlight priorities, he noted, "We didn't cross anything off… and that was symbolic because when you cross things off, that means something different

than just highlighting where you want to focus." He continued, "It's not that we're cutting things. It's just, here's where you are going to spend your time."

Although Adams and Watson did identify priority standards for K-12 science and math, respectively, their comments indicated that they maintained their value on coverage during this endeavor. As stated above, Watson made sure "all" the standards were still included in the documents. Similarly, Adams said that he was "encouraged" by teachers asking if they could still cover standards that were not identified as priorities. The elementary and secondary ELA coordinators and the social studies coordinator did not specifically discuss the move toward priority standards. As noted in an earlier section, the secondary ELA coordinator and social studies coordinator were not leaders that communicated coverage as a value.

Discussion of the process of identifying priority standards also provided more data regarding beliefs about the teacher's role in the existing culture of curriculum in the Haggerty district. In theme three, I showed the prevailing belief in this culture of curriculum was that the "what" (e.g., standards, materials, scope and sequence) was given to the teachers and that the teacher role was more centered on "how" to instruct using those guidelines. Math Coordinator Watson addressed this belief concerning decision-making about priority standards:

> This is where I think we get to come in at the central level because, and not because we want to dictate, but this is part of the philosophy in my mind is I would rather make the decision for you, so you can focus on the lesson planning and implementing good quality instruction as opposed to debating, should I cut it or not? … I don't expect a fifth-grade teacher or an eighth-grade teacher to know the full vertical articulation of standards across all grade levels… my job is to have that broader perspective, your job as a teacher is to know your grade level and your standards really, really well.

Theme Five: Evolving as a District

Throughout data collection, there was evidence that the beliefs, values, and attitudes that described the culture of curriculum leadership in Haggerty were dynamic. I asked Assistant Superintendent Darnell whether he felt the culture was static or if a shift had already happened, was coming, or was in process. He responded that the culture had "been shifting," but he also said it was important to "understand when you're in central office, it's tough to change your system overnight." In a separate conversation, Secondary ELA Coordinator Edwards told me that Haggerty was "evolving as a district." Although the leaders alluded to many types of evolution, this theme included data related to six categories that indicated some degree of cultural "shift."

Teacher as Facilitator

Several participants indicated the importance of the teacher acting more as a facilitator than a knowledge provider. While that shift was not presented as new, leaders referenced it as a change and a priority at that time in Haggerty. According to Darnell, "we all have all the knowledge of the world at our fingertips," so the "way in which our teachers present materials" should change. He said teachers needed to be the "facilitator of experiences that cause students to want to dig into things." Despite "talking about this for years," Darnell still felt "it hasn't been coming to fruition." Although the change may not have yet taken hold the way Darnell would have liked, it seemed that the message had been heard in the district. For example, elementary Principal Tipton told me about "a shift from the teacher being the encyclopedia of knowledge and the sage on the stage" to an approach where students were asked to make meaning of knowledge.

Student as Producer

Assistant Superintendent Darnell and Science Coordinator Adams also referenced a movement to change students from being solely consumers to being active producers. Darnell talked about "creating students who have a passion for applying those skills" and creating "curiosity in our students." In science, Adams told me they were working to move students beyond being "consumers" by having them "collect and analyze data, do their own research" and share it with "researchers in the field" so they could be "part of something bigger than themselves."

Authentic Tasks

Three of the curriculum coordinators specifically mentioned authenticity as an aim. Social Studies Coordinator Neil said, "that's something we talk about a lot, about the authenticity of what they're learning and how they're learning in order to be contributing to our community." I also heard Secondary ELA Coordinator Edwards speak about the value of students completing "real and authentic tasks that are discipline-specific." Darnell talked about making the curriculum "relevant instead of drudgery" and mentioned "that's something we've been striving for for years."

Multi-Dimensional Assessment

As referenced in the literature review, a new approach to science assessments has been discussed nationally (Harris et al., 2019). This new generation of assessments asks students to "make sense of phenomena or design solutions to problems using disciplinary core ideas, scientific and engineering practices, and crosscutting concepts" (p. 55). The core ideas, practices, and concepts are referred to as three-dimensional learning. According to Science Coordinator Adams, this shift was taking place at that time in the Haggerty district. He shared, "We're

changing… to the idea of three-dimensional assessments," including the "idea of challenge-based or project-based assessment pieces." He also told me that making this change was "a big lift on teachers trying to find quality examples of this type of assessment."

Flexible Curricular Planning

I reported in an earlier theme that Math Coordinator Watson referred to the district's curricular adoption as "one size fits all." A single adopted resource or program was selected for each core content area for a seven-year period. However, Coordinators Watson, Neil, and Edwards were leading new variations of that process during the time this study was being conducted. These changes indicated a shift in the way a guaranteed and viable curriculum was conceived (Marzano & ASCD, 2003).

As one example, Math Coordinator Watson explained that he was "going to blow up that process" with the new middle school adoption. During that adoption, the team was including one core resource that served as the foundation and then the leadership team spent their "time augmenting this commercially produced resource with that really good stuff that's out there that everyone's supplementing with anyway to make a cohesive whole package." Beyond including a process to augment the selected resource, Watson said they were, for the first time, adopting an "open-source" digital program.

Social Studies Coordinator Neil had also recently led an adjustment to the district's curricular approach in one specific grade-level. She and the team shifted the unit plans to a more focused, thematic approach that also embedded discussion of cultural diversity. She was in the process of making similar adjustments throughout K-12 social studies and mentioned that they were doing the work with an inter-disciplinary approach. Neil assembled a team of professionals that included language arts, math, and science teachers. While Coordinators Neil and Watson

were adjusting their curricular approach and design, Secondary ELA Coordinator Edwards was leading a transformation to the curriculum adoption process. Two years before the year of this study, Edwards and the secondary ELA leadership team began building their own curriculum. He explained how that evolved:

> I went to our secondary ELA leadership team and said to them, we are coming up on an adoption cycle for texts. We can do it the way we've always done it… Or we could say, let's build this ourselves. And then we put it to a vote… And then the vote was unanimous. Let's develop our own. And then from there, we've for the last two years, pandemic or not, we've been building that curriculum.

The team began by identifying essential questions to guide instruction within each quarter in each grade level and designing summative assessments for each of those quarters. Then, the team built out a series of smaller tasks and experiences associated with each essential question. Those tasks and experiences aimed to develop students' learning throughout the quarter to be successful with the summative assessment. Mr. Edwards explained that tightness in the curricular design was around the essential questions, the use of the common quarterly assessments, and the idea that a "floor" of four to six of the smaller tasks and experiences would be completed (i.e., for sufficient practice) by students each quarter. While the leadership team provided teachers with the minimum number (i.e., four) of authentic, discipline-specific tasks, the use of those specific tasks is optional. Mr. Edwards noted that "what those assignments are or what those assignments look like, or the order of those assignments, a classroom teacher knows better than I." As an example, he shared:

If you take a lesson and I take that same lesson, I might say this goes really well at the

beginning of the quarter to get kids interested. You might say, oh man, I got to ramp up

to this with these kids. And I've got to put it kind of more in the middle."

If teachers "want to alter, edit, revise" the assignments, Edwards said, "that's fine, do that as long

as the kind of standards and experiences stay the same."

Edwards and I also discussed the topic of text selection within the context of this new

curricular design. He indicated teachers might have students all read the same shorter text

selection, at times, to support broader conversation in class or other types of objectives.

However, he explained that when it came to selecting extended text, "our bias is toward student

choice." He went on to state, "there's a belief that there is not a single book that everybody in the

world needs to read." Edwards reiterated, "the habit that we're trying to build is when you've

designed an educational task or experience asking, did I give students as much choice, challenge,

cooperation, and control as possible?"

Although the secondary ELA curriculum work began by identifying topics and themes

with essential questions, Coordinator Edwards noted that "key standards" were identified within

each quarter. The design was centered on setting up meaningful experiences that created the need

for more discrete skills (i.e., those included in the standards) that could then be addressed to

serve that need. Edwards explained the team's approach, "all right, if these are themes that are

essential questions, and these are our standards, how do we create learning experiences and tasks

that are complementary and help build toward both of those things?"

The curriculum work being done by Coordinator Edwards and the secondary ELA

leadership team represented a shift from how curricular design had looked in the past in

Haggerty. Edwards pointed out that a lot of work was done prior to the team voting unanimously

to build their own curriculum. In fact, he shared that the same question was asked ten years prior, and "people were like, no, we have no idea how to do that, that sounds terrifying." Edwards emphasized that one cannot overlook that "there were other changes and adjustments that had to happen in the two years preceding that [most recent vote] to get to a place where people felt comfortable."

Despite the leadership team's willingness to take on that design challenge, Edwards also mentioned that work needed to be done to bring school administrators and other teachers on board. For example, he had been meeting with building leaders to "make sure that they have the language to talk about this curriculum and this set of resources in ways they hadn't before." He had also been talking to teachers. He mentioned that a couple of teachers, not a majority, requested "a higher level of design or a specificity at the kind of the lesson plan level." Edwards described this dynamic:

> And so that has been some of the pushback, like what do I do tomorrow? That is part of what we are saying that is part of your job as an educational designer to build those pieces out, to make those decisions for and with your kids… So [a teacher may say] I don't know how to do that. Well, I can work with you to help you figure out how to do that, but you will never learn how to do that if I give you every lesson plan… I'm not going to do it for you because I don't know your students. And I don't know their specific needs.

I asked Coordinator Edwards if the curriculum leadership in secondary ELA seemed to represent a different mindset than work being led by his colleagues in other areas. He talked about shared beliefs across the district-level curriculum leadership team. For example, he said he and his colleagues all believed in "getting kids close to doing the real work to necessitate those

discrete skills" and told me they shared a common aversion to "practices that might get kids stuck in worksheet and discrete skill land." He elaborated by saying, "In science, we want kids to be doing science. In social studies, we want them to be geographers and social scientists and all of those kinds of pieces. So, I think that there's an alignment there." Beyond that alignment, Edwards noted, "each discipline… necessarily has to approach it differently," but we are still "trying to get to the real work of solving the real problems of those fields."

Returning to my initial question about his approach and that of his colleagues, Mr. Edwards shared:

> Do I think I probably embrace [this type of approach] more completely and wholeheartedly than many other folks… probably. But do I think that we are evolving as a district in our thinking about that? Yes, certainly. We are doing a much better job of asking what is necessary and what is optional, and where do we continue to give teachers the discretion to make those choices?

A Bigger Job

The shifts mentioned above could result in a changed conception of a curriculum coordinator's role in the Haggerty district. Social Studies Coordinator Neil outlined the potential for an expanded role when she explained that an "area for improvement" was that "we can't just say the resources are there and available." She continued, "we need to do a better job of working with teachers about how to best deliver this instruction." As a specific example, Neil shared:

> A big conversation we're having right now with the diversity and inclusion work that we're doing is, you know if it's expected that a teacher is going to be teaching about LGBTQ history in the state and they are uncomfortable with it, well, the resources are there, and they're linked to the unit plan, but that's not going to help them in the

classroom. So really, if we want to broaden that idea of systemic pieces that we have in place already that I think are working well, we need to do that where it involves critical discussions about it, professional development about it.

The idea of the unit plans and the resources, alone, being insufficient was also communicated by middle-level teacher Olliver who told me:

I feel like the district has chosen materials, curriculum that looks and feels actually very rigorous. And I feel like that has been an overlying theme… I also feel like the philosophy is giving us a lot of tools and a lot of resources, and they feel like that is enough.

Coordinator Neil stated that addressing this "area for improvement" would mean "all of a sudden, my curriculum development job becomes a bigger job because it's not just giving you resources." She continued in detailing that her job would then be "how do we teach it and how do we teach it for this population of students compared to this population of students?" Although Neil said, "I'm… not worried," she did remark that she is "passionate to try to work to make that better."

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the data as five themes. The themes were aligned to conditions identified from the literature as supporting deeper learning, the theoretical proposition of the study. Each theme indicated some degree of tension in the Haggerty culture of curriculum leadership. There was a belief in a balanced purpose of education, yet the value placed on producing positive results on standardized assessments challenged that belief. There was a belief that the curriculum should be guaranteed and viable (Marzano & ASCD, 2003). Yet, the leadership expressed an attitude of supporting teacher autonomy and acknowledged that there

were too many standards and too much packed into the curriculum maps for the curriculum to be viable.

Amid these tensions, the culture of curriculum leadership in the Haggerty district appeared to be shifting. The role of the teacher was being reimagined as that of a facilitator of experiences, students were being viewed as producers rather than only consumers, tasks were being framed as more authentic and less discrete, and curricular planning was shifting from a "one size fits all" approach to a more dynamic process within which teachers could be designers rather than solely implementers. The data indicated similar findings to those presented in several studies from the literature review. Specifically, a dichotomous view did not adequately characterize this culture of leadership in relation to autonomy and control, conflict and collaboration, or other dualistic explanations. The next chapter discusses how these findings relate, more directly, to the conditions that scholars identified as supportive of deeper learning.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Reviewing the Context

The purpose of this investigation was to describe the beliefs, values, and attitudes that characterized the culture of district-level curriculum leadership in one large public school district. In a study conducted by Mehta and Fine (2019), deeper learning was not observed at the school-wide level. These researchers contended that various attributes of typical district-level cultures of curriculum leadership were an important barrier to proliferation of deeper learning. However, studies describing such district-level cultures have been limited in scope and quantity. In this study, I described one large school district's culture and considered how that culture corresponds to or conflicts with the beliefs, values, and attitudes identified in the literature as supportive of deeper learning.

Discussion of Findings

In the previous chapter, I presented the data by organizing it into five themes. This chapter discusses how findings within each of those themes related to the literature reviewed and the conditions that support deeper learning. After discussing each theme in relation to the literature and deeper learning conditions, I consider implications of the findings from this study for practice and policy. I conclude by making recommendations for further research.

Theme 1: Purpose of Education

The data in theme one showed that the Haggerty culture of curriculum leadership valued multiple purposes of education. The curriculum leaders discussed preparing students for the

workforce, post-secondary education, and active citizenship in our society. Also, participants indicated that the culture placed value on mastery of content and development of transferable skills like curiosity, communication, and critical thinking. Each of these purposes was also discussed in the literature review. The review showed that there had been discussions regarding which purposes should be emphasized throughout public schooling history in the United States. For example, I noted that "administrative progressives" and "pedagogical progressives" of the early 20th century debated whether education should place more value on preparing students for the workforce or for participation in a democratic way of life (Tyack, 1974). Adjacent to that dispute, reformers considered whether all students should be prepared specifically for post-secondary education or whether schools should place added emphasis on a more "practical" education (Callahan, 1962). More recently, scholars and practitioners have questioned how to balance an education focused on mastery of specific content with one that develops "soft" skills such as creativity and collaboration (Fullan et al., 2018).

Culture of And

This study's data showed the Haggerty district culture placed value on each of the aims referenced in the literature. Regarding the distinct and varied purposes of education, Haggerty's prevailing culture of curriculum leadership was a culture of *and.* The curriculum leaders believed in a democratic purpose *and* preparation of students for the workforce. They believed in mastery of the content standards *and* development of non-cognitive skills. They believed in offering technical training *and* were focused on preparing all students for college. As one example, when Math Coordinator Watson discussed a conflict between building a pre-defined set of skills and teaching skills as they are needed for problem-solving and application, he expressed that Haggerty had a "foot" in *both* camps. Also, when talking to me about whether the curriculum

should focus on ensuring success on the state test or emphasize transferable skills and real-world problem-solving, Assistant Superintendent Darnell said, "We can do *both*."

A Vast Array

Haggerty's belief in advancing a multitude of purposes aligned well with descriptions of deeper learning put forth in the report from the National Research Council (NRC) (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012). The report suggested value for numerous skills and competencies to support students in accomplishing varied goals. As one example, the report referenced "society's desire that all students attain levels of mastery — across multiple areas of skill and knowledge — that were previously unnecessary for individual success in education and the workplace" (p. 3). The report cited dozens of skills across three domains: interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive. The data from this study of the Haggerty district indicated value for a similarly vast array of skills and competencies across these same domains.

Results Matter

While the district-level leaders espoused a belief in balancing varied purposes of education, several teacher and principal participants reported a disproportionate emphasis on "results" in the Haggerty culture of curriculum leadership. Results included metrics such as graduation rate, SAT scores, and proficiency levels on the state assessment. An example of the focus on test results was pointed out by elementary teacher Yarnish. She said when her teammates "were realizing that they weren't keeping up, they would think about what shows up on the standardized test." Although Assistant Superintendent Darnell suggested the culture was more balanced, he acknowledged that "results matter, and you do need to stop and look at your results." Mehta and Fine (2019) reported that pressure to achieve on tests was one of three most prominent barriers to deeper learning according to teachers in their study. Accordingly, this

value within the curricular culture in Haggerty may have hindered the advancement of deeper learning.

Theme 2: Uniformity

While theme one considered data regarding the purpose of education in Haggerty, theme two focused on how that education was administered. Specifically, theme two gave a detailed overview of the district's commitment to uniformity. An external review in 2008 put forth recommendations that the district become more standards-based and convert from a "district of schools" to a "school district" (Haggerty School District, 2008). Those recommendations resulted in leaders advancing a guaranteed and viable curriculum to provide students with the "same experiences" across the district (Marzano & ASCD, 2003). The findings concerning Haggerty's approach to uniformity were organized into four categories: standards, content, materials, and assessment. I discuss the data from this theme by referencing studies by Floden et al. (1988) and Meyer and Rowan (2006) that were included in the literature review.

Prescriptiveness

Floden et al. (1988) developed and employed a framework to characterize district-level instructional leadership. Their framework includes four different policy attributes: consistency, prescriptiveness, power, and authority. An example of prescriptiveness, they shared, would be a policy advising "teachers to follow the textbook closely, so that students across the district study a common curriculum" (p. 103). According to that definition, the culture of curriculum leadership in Haggerty could be described as having a high degree of prescriptiveness. Specifically, Haggerty's curriculum leaders emphasized a guaranteed and viable curriculum, valued the use of adopted textbooks or materials, and defined equity as students having common experiences across the district (Marzano & ASCD, 2003). Although the Floden et al. definition

of prescriptiveness matched well with those attributes, the degree of prescriptiveness in Haggerty varied across different dimensions of the curricular culture.

Coupling Across Varied Dimensions

Meyer and Rowan (2006) identified specific dimensions within which a curricular culture could be described as "tightly coupled" or "loosely coupled" with policy and administration. Among the dimensions they identified were content, instructional materials, and teaching strategies. This study's data indicated the Haggerty culture was tightly coupled concerning content and instructional materials and loosely coupled concerning the dimension of teaching strategies. As mentioned in the previous chapter, "content" was defined by Meyer and Rowan as "topic coverage and sequencing and the amount of time spent on particular topics" (p. 97). Haggerty's focus on the state academic standards, use of system-wide unit plans, and the value placed on coverage were all attributes that suggested tight coupling within the content dimension. Also, the process for adopting what Coordinator Watson referred to as "one size fits all" resources indicated that instructional materials were tightly coupled with policy and administration in the district. I found it interesting, however, that assessment was loosely coupled with policy in Haggerty. Despite the cultural belief in uniformity, district-wide common assessments were not administered in math, science, social studies, and elementary language arts.

To further characterize Haggerty's culture, I referenced Meyer and Rowan's contention that coupling varies "by curricular domain" (i.e., subject area). They claimed that coupling is typically tighter in math and language arts due to the accountability-focused "policy environment" (p. 99). My finding in the Haggerty district was similar. The culture was identified as being tightly coupled with policy in math and elementary language arts. However, the data indicated looser coupling in secondary language arts.

Compliance

The data indicated that Haggerty's belief in a uniform approach was accompanied by at least some value being placed on teacher compliance in the culture of curriculum leadership. Specifically, the prescriptions regarding the use of adopted materials, fidelity to the unit plans, and coverage of the full scope and sequence were alluded to as the *right way* for teachers to approach their work. In certain areas, district leaders' attitudes somewhat reflected the early-20th century Taylorist aim for the one best method (Callahan, 1962). For example, when Math Coordinator Watson discussed the curricular guidance given to teachers, he said: "We've laid this out for you, here it is. There's no guesswork. You just might not be choosing to pay attention to it." A similar attitude was espoused by elementary ELA Coordinator Barnes when she talked about the adopted program. In her comments, Barnes said that teachers should have "trust in a program," meaning they should "trust the resource" and "trust the curricular guidance because it's based on research and experience." Like those from scientific management, this statement indicated that the instructions were clear and the worker's (i.e., teacher's) role was to execute those instructions (Callahan, 1962).

Although I assert that the data showed compliance as a value, the curriculum leaders did not state that explicitly. The word "compliance" was only mentioned two times in seven interviews with curriculum leaders. One of those was when Coordinator Barnes was talking about trusting the literacy program. In that instance, she said, "I don't want to use the term compliance because compliance doesn't make me feel very good. Compliance makes it feel a little bit militant…"

Mehta and Fine (2019) contended that districts were created in "a command and control, compliance-oriented model" that is not well suited to support deeper learning (p. 393). The data

in theme two indicated that the culture of curriculum leadership in Haggerty was prescriptive and, at least in certain domains, compliance oriented. The culture placed value on teachers adhering to the prescribed content and materials to provide a uniform experience to students, regardless of their school of attendance. However, I was surprised to find that the Haggerty culture did not enact their belief in uniformity through a "command and control" approach. In fact, the findings in theme three showed that the culture intentionally avoided use of control to influence teachers. The discussion of the findings from theme three explains that leadership approach in more detail.

Theme 3: Autonomy and Control

Floden et al. (1988) suggested that characterizing leadership as being focused on either "centralized control" or "teacher autonomy" is to propose a "false dichotomy" (p. 98). The culture of curriculum leadership in Haggerty reinforced that conclusion. It was not accurate to describe the culture as one of centralized control, nor was it appropriate to describe it as being defined by teacher autonomy. While the dichotomous labels of control and autonomy did not adequately characterize the Haggerty culture, the Floden et al. framework includes two attributes that more accurately define the prevailing leadership approach. Those attributes are labeled as power and authority.

Authority

Floden et al. (1988) suggested that district leaders may influence teachers by power or authority or some combination of the two. A district that influences through power, they explained, uses mandates to "back policies with power to reward or penalize" (p. 103). In contrast, a district may persuade teachers through authority acquired through rules, social norms, and referencing expert knowledge. Those descriptions indicate that the Haggerty culture was

characterized by use of authority, not power. In contrast to the penalties and sanctions that characterize the use of power, Assistant Superintendent Darnell and the curriculum coordinators were clear in their stance against "policing" teachers.

None of the school-based participants in this study referred to any rewards or penalties associated with the district's curriculum leadership. Instead, the leaders and participants referred to precisely those characteristics used when influencing by authority, including rules, social norms, and expert knowledge. One rule cited in the findings was that teachers could supplement the adopted resource but were not to supplant it. The use of the unit plans for curricular guidance was an example of a social norm. Also, expert knowledge was cited multiple times as a tool to gain support from teachers. As one example, Coordinator Adams stated that a "group of expert teachers" mapped out curricular guidance. Authority was described by Floden et al. as a mechanism that "affects choices through actors' acceptance of trust in those who advocate the policy" (p. 103). Trust was mentioned numerous times in the data set and supported the idea that Haggerty led through authority. As one piece of evidence, Darnell said, "We value the collaboration of our teachers, and that took us a while to gain their trust because it wasn't that way before."

In the findings from theme two, I mentioned that some curriculum leaders' attitudes concerning a right way to enact the curriculum were like the ideas put forth in scientific management (Callahan, 1962). However, as opposed to scientific management's dictatorial nature, the leaders in Haggerty's culture did not give mandates to the teachers. In alignment with the use of authority as opposed to power, they encouraged or asked teachers to follow the guidance and then hoped that the trust, expertise, and social norms influenced them to do so. For example, Science Coordinator Adams said:

> We don't sit there and say, no, you have to do this at that time. We sure hope you do
>
> because you know, you have a collective group of really experienced knowledgeable
>
> teachers that have put these materials and resources together.

Adams' comment references the attitude of asking for (i.e., rather than demanding) compliance alongside the notion that there is a *right way*.

These findings did not correspond with those from the other studies I included in the literature review's district leadership section. In the Newberg-Long (2010) investigation, teachers felt pressure to obey district-level requirements and voiced a lack of trust from district leadership, which were not themes in Haggerty. Furthermore, while Haggerty used authority to influence teachers, studies by Ylimaki (2012) and Firestone and Martinez (2007) found that power was used as the means for carrying out district initiatives. Haggerty's culture was defined by a similar degree of prescriptiveness to the districts included in each of those studies. However, instead of influencing teachers to comply with the prescribed content and materials through power or control, authority was the definitive mechanism used to advance Haggerty's leadership agenda.

Performance Accountability and New Public Management

The data from this theme regarding autonomy and control also showed a relationship to the ideas of Performance Accountability (PA) and New Public Management (NPM) that were included in the literature review. Haggerty's focus on test scores and other metrics was consistent with the attitudes described as expected in a Performance Accountability (PA) environment (Cibulka & Derlin, 1998). However, as noted in the literature review, PA is often accompanied by district leaders employing New Public Management (NPM) approaches or tactics referred to

as being from a traditional management paradigm (Henderson et al., 2000; Maxcy, 2009). Those approaches were not evident under typical circumstances in the Haggerty district.

Two cornerstones of an NPM approach are explicit standards and a centrally prescribed curriculum. Although these cornerstones were evident in Haggerty, the school principals and teachers did not report feeling controlled by the leadership, an outcome typically associated with NPM (Hood, 1991). Also, Hood stipulated that NPM values results over procedures and processes. In Haggerty, the culture of *and* valued results *and* procedures and processes. For example, Principal Tipton shared, "I feel like we've really come to a place where we focus a lot more on process… that more metacognitive approach to it versus just separate skill levels." Another characteristic of NPM is that power resides at the top of the organization (Anderson & Cohen, 2018; Hood, 1991). This characteristic would not have adequately described the culture within Haggerty. The power in Haggerty was distributed, to at least some degree, through the "leadership team" processes.

Although I concluded that a NPM approach did not accompany Haggerty's value on results, the data revealed that the approach taken by district-level curriculum leaders was different when working with schools with a low state accountability rating (i.e., within the state's bottom two tiers). The data did not indicate a comprehensive shift toward NPM, but some principles from NPM were applied in those contexts. District-level curriculum leaders noted that they visited more frequently with such schools. In those visits, the leaders asked about the pace of curricular coverage, checked on the use of adopted curricular materials, and visited classrooms to observe instruction. Moves towards tighter coupling with pacing expectations and the use of prescribed materials are common attributes of an NPM approach (Maxcy, 2009). Also,

while typically the culture was loosely coupled with policy concerning teaching strategies, the data indicated a move toward tighter coupling in those contexts.

While one teacher participant described district-level leaders as being "hands-off," that phrase was not used by the participant who worked at a school that was operating under a low rating. Instead, she told me that each teaching team met weekly or bi-weekly to stay "on the same page," and district-level curriculum coordinators often attended those meetings. The increase in curriculum coordinators' school-based participation represented a shift toward denser network ties between district leaders and teachers as a mechanism of support. This finding contradicts observations in the Daly and Finnigan (2011) study. In that investigation, the context of high-stakes accountability manifested itself as a highly centralized network with dense ties amongst central office leaders but weak ties between those leaders and educators at the schools.

Although the ties between district-level curriculum leaders and school-based personnel became denser in low-performing schools, the relationship was still noted as collaborative. The tighter coupling and denser network ties may have decreased autonomy, but the culture did not shift toward the use of power through reward and punishment. Assistant Superintendent Darnell explained, "You need to be data-driven, but it should be data that informs instruction, not data that should punish people." In the culture of curriculum leadership within the Haggerty school district, lower results translated to decreased autonomy but did not represent an outright shift toward approaches that denoted centralized control.

Bureaucratic or Professional

Haggerty's aversion to the use of power and control aligned with one condition recommended by Mehta and Fine (2019) as supportive of deeper learning. Mehta and Fine also suggested that districts need to shift their leadership of teachers from a bureaucratic approach to

a more professional one. This concept from the literature supports interpretation of the findings from the section in theme three regarding the teacher's role in the Haggerty district. Mehta and Fine characterized a bureaucratic approach to leading teachers as one within which "'the many' implement the ideas of 'the few'" (p 393). Alternatively, they suggested that a professional approach recognizes the work of teaching as too complex to be standardized from above. Noguera (2017) also advised that decreasing reliance on "prepackaged curricula" in favor of developing the professional capacity of teachers was one example of a more professional approach (p. 26).

This study's findings indicated that the approach to leading teachers in Haggerty was neither purely bureaucratic nor wholly professional. On the one hand, the "many" (i.e., all teachers) in Haggerty were expected to implement the ideas of the "few" (i.e., the small number participating on leadership teams). On the other hand, Mehta and Fine (2019) defined "the few" as a "small administrative class" (p. 393). The collaborative teams used to put forth curricular guidance and the ongoing revisions processes in Haggerty were disparate from that description. There was less nuance to consider regarding the reliance on "prepackaged curricula" in the Haggerty culture. The data indicated a firm reliance on curricular programs in elementary language arts, math, and to some degree, science.

Mehta and Fine (2019) also suggested that a professional approach emphasizes teacher control and choice regarding the curriculum. For example, they stated that teachers need the flexibility to adapt based on student interests and needs. In Haggerty, that flexibility was limited. Teachers had control and choice regarding instructional strategies (i.e., the "how"), but not regarding content (i.e., the "what"). Teachers were asked to use the adopted resource, follow the

scope and sequence, and avoid supplanting. Math teacher Arnold seemed to desire a more "professional approach" when he described the prevailing attitude:

> He [Coordinator Watson] lines up our curriculum to check all the boxes and puts it in a nice little package and sends it to us and says, do what you can with this. So, it really is done, I think, as effectively as it can be, which is a compliment to the coordinator, he really does do a good job. But it does kind of suck to not have a foot in that pool as well. Like, I wish I could go and say, you know what, screw the SAT and let's teach them something useful. Like let's teach students how to calculate their income tax. Like that's not part of the curriculum we have. They're checking all the boxes, which is delightful, but I personally feel some of those boxes don't really need to be checked. And I would rather add a couple of supplements to something more practical.

Although teachers could supplement the curricular guidance, the pressure to fit in the prescribed content made it difficult to add or adjust based on student interests or needs outside the delineated scope and sequence. An exception was the new curricular design in secondary language arts. That approach emphasized choice and control for teachers and students. Teachers could select which assignments to use, decide the order of those assignments, and could opt to replace assignments with their own designs. Also, teachers were encouraged to choose which text selections to offer students. The design was not standardized from above, nor did it use "prepackaged curricula." The curriculum design for secondary language arts in Haggerty appeared to be an example of the type of professional approach described by Mehta and Fine (2019).

Theme 4: Depth and Breadth

The data from theme four was centered on the topic of curricular coverage. I presented data suggesting that the culture of curriculum leadership placed value on coverage of content, most notably in math, science, and elementary language arts. The data also indicated that there was "too much" to cover. The participants talked about the tension between the value of coverage and the feasibility of fitting it all in. I shared data regarding the decision-making that resulted from that challenge and used the priority standards to illustrate tensions related to depth and breadth in the Haggerty culture.

Curriculum Narrowing

The data from this theme relates to the literature regarding curriculum narrowing. As mentioned in the review, curriculum narrowing is often traced back to the results-oriented climate created by Performance Accountability (PA) (Cuban, 2004; Joseph, 2011). Findings were mixed about curriculum narrowing in Haggerty. Some participants indicated the PA-influenced value on high achievement on standardized tests has narrowed the curriculum. Middle-level science teacher Varner shared, "My current principal always says, don't teach the test, but if our numbers drop low, guess what? We're re-evaluating the data to teach to the test." Similarly, Principal Tipton stated, "We're looking at more than just test scores, and yet we also have test scores."

While data such as the comments by Varner and Tipton indicated a concern regarding narrowing of the curriculum, the curriculum leaders and school-based participants also emphasized the importance of authentic, problem-based learning. District-level leaders expressed support for teachers taking time to build curiosity, apply student learning to new contexts, and develop transferrable (non-tested) skills. In the spirit of the culture of *and*, it seems that

Haggerty's leaders asked for the results-based alignment that is symbolic of a narrowed curriculum *and* the authentic tasks that develop curiosity, creativity, and innovation.

Breadth Versus Depth

As discussed in theme two, compliance was valued in some domains within the culture of curriculum leadership in Haggerty. Perhaps the most prominent example was within the dimension of content, specifically regarding the attribute of pacing. Mehta and Fine (2019) reported, "Teachers consistently told us that their biggest obstacles to 'deeper' learning were the pacing guides developed by districts that dictated the rate at which students were supposed to learn" (p. 388). Similarly, the findings in this case study indicated pacing as an obstacle to what Mehta and Fine called a "new balance between depth and breadth" (p. 388).

Assistant Superintendent Darnell himself voiced that there was "too much" to cover and told me he had been working to enact a more viable approach in the Haggerty district. Interestingly, he shared that he was "struggling with some of our folks" as he sought that new balance. Mehta and Fine point primarily toward district-level leadership as the problem when it comes to the obstacle of pacing. The data from this case found that to hold true in math, science, and elementary ELA. However, Darnell suggested that educators at all levels of the system had trouble reducing the number of learning objectives to establish a more viable curriculum. As one specific example, Science Coordinator Adams told me that multiple teachers complained when he and the leadership team identified priority standards. The teachers were frustrated that some content they "love" teaching was not prioritized. For deeper learning to flourish in Haggerty, the attitude regarding pacing and coverage of the curriculum would need to shift in the domains mentioned.

Theme 5: Evolving as a District

The data in theme five showed findings related to an ongoing shift in Haggerty's culture of curriculum. The theme included sections concerning the teacher's evolution as a facilitator instead of a purveyor of knowledge, students as producers rather than mere consumers, application of learning in more authentic discipline-specific tasks, use of multidimensional assessments to measure more than discrete skills, and a more flexible approach to curricular design. Each of these areas represented a slight shift toward dimensions suggested by Mehta and Fine (2019) as transformed when "reimagining the grammar of schooling" (p. 378). While these evolutions did not disrupt what Tyack and Tobin (1994) called the core "organizational framework" of schools (i.e., grade-based classrooms and boundaries between disciplines), these evolutions did represent moves away from the "teacher-centered and textbook-centered" approaches (p. 455).

New Grammar of Schooling

One specific aspect of the new grammar of schooling presented by Mehta and Fine (2019) was that students shift from being consumers to producers when engaging in deeper learning. This shift was mentioned by Science Coordinator Adams and referenced by all the curriculum leaders in some manner. Haggerty's culture showed value for students as producers and was working to move away from teachers as purveyors of knowledge and students acting solely as consumers of that knowledge. For example, rather than completing a preconceived laboratory exercise in science, students were engaging in original research within which they designed an investigation, collected data, and drew conclusions. At the time of this study in Haggerty, Assistant Superintendent Darnell suggested that students were both consumers and producers. He noted that this change would take time.

The literature also indicated that deeper learning includes emphasis on real-world application and authentic, relevant tasks that move beyond a focus on instructing discrete skills (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012). The curriculum leaders voiced an explicit value for authentic and relevant tasks. However, other participants indicated the time to enact this type of learning was a limitation. The desire to redefine academic tasks was evident in the Haggerty culture of curriculum leadership.

Shifting toward deeper learning also makes it necessary to rethink assessments (Fullan et al., 2018; Mehta & Fine, 2019). Specifically, scholars have called for a "new generation" of assessments that are more authentic and performance-based and include problem-solving, communication, and collaboration (Harris et al., 2019, p. 53). The data from Haggerty indicated an emphasis on this form of assessment in secondary language arts and science. The new secondary language arts design included quarterly performance-based assessments focused on the authentic application of ideas and concepts. In science, Coordinator Adams explained that Haggerty was in the process of using three-dimensional assessments. These assessments, promoted as part of the Next Generation Science Standards, were focused on applying learning in problem-solving contexts (Harris et al., 2019). The data indicated the use of performance-based assessments in elementary language arts, social studies, and mathematics. However, these assessments were not analyzed regarding the degree of problem-solving, communication, or collaboration required. The literature suggested that measurement of deeper learning is complex, and mechanisms for such measurement are only recently evolving (Rickles et al., 2019). However, Haggerty's culture was actively working to rethink assessment and shows readiness to employ new forms of assessment as they are created.

Curriculum Design

Beyond viewing students as producers and rethinking assessment, Mehta and Fine (2019) advised that deeper learning "demands a different approach to curriculum design" (p. 392). It seems the new approach being used in secondary ELA in Haggerty had the potential to answer that call. The new process, described in chapter four, had been discussed at length between Coordinator Edwards and Assistant Superintendent Darnell as it involved a few shifts from how design had been done in the past. One shift was that the approach called for the teacher to be an active designer of content (i.e., the "what") rather than being asked to focus only on the "how." A second change was that the learning tasks were designed at the "minimum" as opposed to laying out a scope and sequence that included "too much."

The new design indicated a different attitude regarding the role of the teacher in the culture of curriculum. In the design process, teachers could choose to use the tasks provided in the curricular guidance or make their own. While the minimum number of tasks was "tight" (i.e., four per quarter) and the types of experiences within those tasks was to remain unified, the teacher could add, change, or reorder those tasks. Edwards said, "if you look at those four assignments and say I am not down with this, then it is all right, what can you create that better fits the needs while maintaining the goals?"

Beyond shifting to the teacher acting as a designer, the new process did not rely on prepackaged curricula. The process did not involve adopting a published curriculum and invited teachers to take a role in choosing resources. Choice was emphasized for both teachers and students in this new design. When discussing text selections for student reading, Coordinator Edwards expressed that "our bias is toward student choice." Also, he stated that the design had "turned the dial way up on choice and control" for teachers. This adjustment aligned to Mehta

and Fine's (2019) call for an adult culture that includes "control and choice" (p. 393). Shifting the teacher's role and branching away from prepackaged curricula are two moves that were suggested as indicative of the aforementioned "professional approach" to teaching that was suggested as supportive of deeper learning (Noguera, 2017).

<center>**Implications for Practice**</center>

The sections above compared Haggerty's culture to the literature and conditions recommended to support deeper learning. The culture in Haggerty was aligned with some of those conditions, while it was incongruent with others. In this section, I reflect on the findings to suggest implications of the beliefs, values, and attitudes that characterize the culture of curriculum leadership in Haggerty.

And Versus Or

One of the key findings in this study was that the viable curriculum in Haggerty was, in practice, not always viable. I also noted that teachers needed more flexibility to supplant or supplement academic tasks based on student needs or interests for deeper learning to occur. As there were already questions regarding the viability of the prescribed content, there was often not time to fit student-centric tasks into the curriculum. In those cases, a teacher needed to decide what to supplant or remove. The culture in Haggerty valued the types of student experiences described as deeper learning *and* valued the guaranteed and viable curriculum (Marzano & ASCD, 2003). However, for deeper learning experiences to occur in the classroom, teachers may need to decide whether to follow the prescribed content *or* adjust to serve students' unique and varied interests.

High school math teacher Arnold explained one example of this conflict. He told me there were about 10 required topics in algebra two class, and he would have liked fewer requirements to leave space to make the learning more meaningful:

I wish there was a way to sort of trim all the fat and just give everybody a muscly skeleton and then just say do what you want. So, we still have that core structure, like you have to do these seven things and then three of your choice. Like a little bit more freedom in what to teach because there's some parts of algebra two that I think students would really benefit from and enjoy that aren't part of the curriculum, and there's parts of the curriculum that are part of the curriculum because they're on the SAT and for no other purpose.

The prevailing culture in Haggerty would have told Arnold that he was welcome to supplement the prescribed content. Arnold lamented that there was not enough time for supplementation. Because Arnold was a teacher who remained faithful to the prescribed curricular guidance, he did not make those changes. Middle-level teacher Martin shared a similar sentiment. She said that in her school, which was operating under a lower accountability rating, the students' needs were such that the prescribed content filled all the time, and then some. Martin felt the students missed out because of this:

We don't have half a day to mess around with doing the same type of problem in different situations… we are still running all the time to get to this finish line. They never feel like there's enough time to just get some of that cool stuff, which then makes those lifelong memories and like learning is awesome. And so, I feel like we just lose that opportunity to really make those lifelong learners because there's not enough time.

Martin's comment indicated the conflict between enacting approaches that support deeper learning and remaining faithful to Haggerty's value of coverage. Martin, like Arnold, did not suggest that Haggerty was against the types of experiences she mentioned. Haggerty supported the engaging and rich academic tasks that the two discussed. However, these two teachers shared that, in practice, a culture of *and* was not pragmatic. A practical implication for curriculum leaders and teachers is to further consider how a culture of *and* might be impacting their decisions. The comprehensiveness of the academic standards and continued advancement of new programs, initiatives, and practices across K-12 education make it important for practitioners to engage in discussions where decisions are made in a more discriminating manner. Rather than continuing to approach decisions with an attitude of *and*, it is time to consider shifting to an attitude of *or*.

Autonomy?

The data indicated that Haggerty's curriculum leaders were not making the types of discriminating (this or that) decisions discussed above. However, as shown in this study's data, discriminating decisions were made in the classrooms across the Haggerty district regularly. This implication is focused on the tension within the prevailing culture regarding those decisions. The findings from this case study showed that Haggerty's culture used authority to enact the curriculum rather than power. This approach resulted in a culture within which some teachers complied with the district's curricular guidance and others accepted freedom from control as a license for autonomy.

Although there was a degree of uniformity in Haggerty, variations were evident at the school, team, and teacher levels of the system. In many instances, school-based educators adjusted the prescribed content or used materials other than the adopted resources. However, as

the curriculum leaders were focused on the prescribed approach, these educators were making such adaptations independently. Floden et al. (1988) described this phenomenon: "Making individual instructional choices without adequate knowledge and understanding to support those choices is being arbitrary, not being autonomous" (p. 100). Participants throughout the sample (i.e., curriculum leaders, principals, and teachers) indicated a concern for such arbitrary decision-making. To address those concerns, curriculum leaders and principals talked about the need for a collaborative approach to such decision-making.

I found this notion conflicting. The culture touted the importance of a guaranteed and viable curriculum, prescribed the content and materials, and expressed that the teacher's role was to enact that prescription (i.e., the "what") without supplanting (Marzano & ASCD, 2003). In other words, teachers were asked to stay within specific parameters (e.g., focus on the "how"). At the same time, the teachers were being encouraged to discuss with school or district-level leaders when they were going to step outside of their conceived role. Instances of teachers having these discussions with principals and curriculum leaders were noted in the data. However, it seemed unlikely that a discussion could be held each time a change to content or materials was deemed necessary by a teacher. Furthermore, it seemed likely that the most compliant teachers were choosing to enact content that did not match students' needs or interests to stay within their defined role in the culture. This perspective was illustrated in the quote from high school math teacher Arnold in the previous section when he wished for "a little bit more freedom." The conflict, it seemed, was regarding the conception of the teacher's role.

Elementary teacher Fanning summarized this conflict by stating, "It's almost something that you kind of wished it was one way or the other. Like, you have to teach this, or we're going to trust you to do your best. And sometimes it's somewhere in between." The challenge was

framed around decision-making by secondary Principal Moore who said, "I don't know that that is quite as systemic as it could be because there's so many decision points." Moore also indicated "that's where a curriculum becomes really subjective."

For deeper learning to increase in a culture like Haggerty's, teachers would need to be equipped with the "knowledge and understanding" to make decisions regarding "what" is taught, rather than only "how" it is instructed. Along with that, the curriculum leaders' role would have to shift to what Neil described as a "bigger job." These leaders need to build knowledge and understanding for how to enact the curriculum in a redefined role beyond only the domain of instructional strategies and into the domains of content and materials. As one example, Coordinator Watson mentioned that it was his job to know the standards across all grade levels and the teacher's job to understand their grade thoroughly. A shift in the teacher's role would need to be accompanied by a shift in that attitude. Instead, teachers would be developed with knowledge and understanding of standards in grades above and below the grade they instruct. That way, when a decision needs to be made, it can be made with "adequate knowledge and understanding."

Interestingly, the new curriculum design approach being used for secondary ELA in the district involved rethinking roles. The role of the teacher was in the what and the how. The curriculum design approach for secondary ELA may be considered a reculturing. Along with shifts in curriculum leadership, school principals and teachers needed to adjust to new roles. Accordingly, Coordinator Edwards shared that some teachers were hesitant about the change. The literature noted that teachers in controlling cultures are anxious for the freedom to take on an enhanced role in curricular design. However, this new process showed that some teachers also feel anxiety with increased responsibility. As Edwards noted, the system took a long time to be

ready for this change. He talked about many steps being taken to give professional development to the school leaders and the teachers to take on their adapted roles in this approach to curriculum design. Assistant Superintendent Darnell said with a district the size of Haggerty, "It takes a long time to get a system to change."

Implications for Policy

One implication of this study for policymakers is to consider the data regarding curricular coverage and depth versus breadth. The findings indicated that the state academic standards represented too much to cover in an academic year. The standards for math were most consistently cited as a concern. For example, Math Coordinator Edwards stated that despite the work done when making the Common Core Standards, "We still have way too much at every grade level." Teacher Gilmore expressed the same concern, "I don't think it's necessarily a curriculum issue so much as a state standards issue… We can't possibly do all the things that everybody wants us to do." Although the math standards' breadth was most often discussed as being problematic, concerns were not limited to math. Assistant Superintendent Darnell, speaking more generally, said, "We give our teachers too much to do and our students too much to do." Policymakers will need to reduce the number of standards delineated for each grade-level for deeper learning to be feasible. Teachers need flexibility to serve the unique and varied needs and interests of students. The time needed to thoroughly address all the current academic standards prevents teachers from having that type of flexibility.

An additional implication for policymakers is to consider the impact of standardized state assessments and accountability systems on district-level curriculum leaders. Pressure from these tests and systems can influence leaders to adopt NPM approaches that may result in a narrowed curriculum and restrictions of deeper learning experiences for students. Assistant Superintendent

Darnell noted he had been working for years to "get into that depth piece so we can explore things more, unfortunately also what comes into this is state testing." Haggerty was an example of a district that valued purposes beyond the assessment (e.g., developing curiosity in students), but they also served as an example that there was little choice about where to emphasize when sanctions came down for poor performance on the tests. While Haggerty leaders did not shift to control as a mechanism for influencing teachers, the degree of autonomy in those contexts was reduced. As noted in the literature, that restricts deeper learning. Furthermore, when those leaders interacted with a lower performing school, they did not ask about enactment of deeper learning, but instead about pacing and use of the adopted materials. The climate of PA, even in Haggerty, seemed to be a barrier to deeper learning.

Recommendations for Further Research

In this study, the culture of curriculum leadership in one large public school district was thoroughly described. By characterizing that culture, I concluded which shifts supported or may better support deeper learning for students in Haggerty School District. More studies would be necessary to generalize the findings from this single case beyond the theoretical proposition I considered. I recommend that the culture of district-level curriculum leadership be studied in more school districts and different types (i.e., enrollment, demographics) of districts. Is it common for districts to lead through prescriptiveness and authority? Is a high value placed on curricular coverage and use of specific materials in other district cultures? These questions, and others, could be considered through further study.

Beyond recommending additional, similar case studies, a few of the implications I outlined for practice and policy show a need for further study. One of the key findings from this investigation was that teachers in classrooms were making daily decisions within the dimensions

of content, materials, and instructional strategies. Those decisions, I suggested, may have been more arbitrary than autonomous depending on the level of the individual's knowledge and understanding regarding how to make those decisions. While I advanced that idea, further research should be done to thoroughly analyze how teachers are currently making those daily decisions in various contexts and what knowledge and understanding would be most critical to support them in making those decisions. I also recommend that a framework be generated to support teachers in thinking through decisions concerning content (including topics, sequencing, and pacing) and materials.

Another key finding in this study was that the state academic standards were too much to cover in an academic year, especially if practices associated with deeper learning are employed. However, this study did not attempt to determine what quantity of standards could be more appropriately addressed. There is a need for research investigating the time needed to develop mastery and provide students with deeper learning experiences in various subject areas and within various contexts. Such research could guide the number of standards and learning objectives that can "fit" across an academic year while still allowing for deeper learning experiences for students. This type of research could lead policymakers to place a more realistic and pragmatic ceiling on the amount included in the standards for each subject area.

One final recommendation is that further research be conducted to characterize the type of district-level leadership needed to enact what Mehta and Fine (2019) referred to as a "different approach to curriculum design" (p. 392). Many studies have addressed concerns related to district-level policies that are prescriptive or controlling in the dimensions of content, materials, and instructional strategies. However, it is difficult to find research that guides curriculum leaders on how to enact specific curricular designs that align well with the conditions for deeper

learning. Freedom from compliance-oriented structures or controlling practices alone will not be sufficient to enhance deeper learning across schools in a district.

Chapter Summary

My research purpose was to characterize the culture of curriculum leadership in the Haggerty School District and then compare that culture to the conditions that scholars have suggested as supportive for the proliferation of deeper learning. The findings did provide a rich description of the beliefs, values, and attitudes in the Haggerty culture. The culture believed in a multitude of purposes of education while also placing high value on results from standardized assessments and metrics like graduation rate. In terms of the curriculum, the culture was highly prescriptive concerning content (i.e., topics, sequence, and pacing) and instructional materials in most domains. Teachers were given flexibility to select instructional strategies while being asked to comply with the predetermined content and materials. The leadership approach taken to enact that prescriptiveness was authority rather than power. No explicit mandates were given in the Haggerty culture. Many teachers adhered to the prescribed curricular guidance, while others took the freedom from punitive measures as an opportunity to expand their autonomy across the dimensions of content and materials. This resulted in variability across classrooms, departments, and schools in the system.

While the curriculum leaders were aware of variations across the system, the leaders did not "police" those variations unless substandard results were achieved. Instead, the leaders continued forward with a grass-roots approach toward generating greater ownership from teachers. The prevailing culture in Haggerty aligned well with the conditions for deeper learning regarding the value placed on multiple purposes of education and the belief that teachers should not be controlled. There was less alignment when it came to the value Haggerty placed on

curricular coverage and the narrowed definition of the role of the teacher. A culture aligned to conditions for deeper learning calls for the teachers to make regular decisions regarding content and materials to serve unique and varied (i.e., non-uniform) student needs and interests. While teachers were making those decisions individually, the culture of curriculum leadership would need to enhance teachers' capacity for that kind of decision-making.

The characterization above described the prevailing culture of curriculum leadership in the Haggerty district at the time of this study. However, the culture was more complex than I communicated in this summary. Also, the culture was in the process of evolving. For example, Assistant Superintendent Darnell was pushing against the prevailing value on coverage and leaders and teachers across the district were engaging in new approaches to curriculum design that transformed the existing definition of the teacher's role in Haggerty. This study began with a proposition that district-level curriculum leadership was a barrier to the proliferation of deeper learning. While this proposition was not proven false, I would neither assert that it was entirely true. In alignment with the conclusions of multiple studies from the literature review, the proposition could not be viewed dichotomously.

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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN COLORADO

Institutional Review Board

Date: 12/09/2020
Principal Investigator: Jonathan Cooney

Committee Action: **IRB EXEMPT DETERMINATION – New Protocol**

Action Date: 12/09/2020

Protocol Number: 2011015221
Protocol Title: Deeper Learning and District-Level Curriculum Leadership: Doctoral Study

Expiration Date:

The University of Northern Colorado Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol and determined your project to be exempt under 45 CFR 46.104(d)(701) (702) for research involving

Category 1 (2018): RESEARCH CONDUCTED IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS. Research, conducted
in established or commonly accepted educational settings, that specifically involves normal educational practices that are not likely to adversely impact students' opportunity to learn required educational content or the assessment of educators who provide instruction. This includes most research on regular and special education instructional strategies, and research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

Category 2 (2018): EDUCATIONAL TESTS, SURVEYS, INTERVIEWS, OR OBSERVATIONS OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR. Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met: (i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; (ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or (iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by 45 CFR 46.111(a)(7).
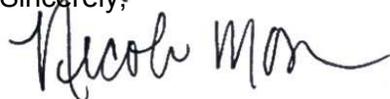
Institutional Review Board

You may begin conducting your research as outlined in your protocol. Your study does not require further review from the IRB, unless changes need to be made to your approved protocol.

As the Principal Investigator (PI), you are still responsible for contacting the UNC IRB office if and when:

- You wish to deviate from the described protocol and would like to formally submit a modification request. Prior IRB approval must be obtained before any changes can be implemented (except to eliminate an immediate hazard to research participants).

- You make changes to the research personnel working on this study (add or drop research staff on this protocol).

- At the end of the study or before you leave The University of Northern Colorado and are no longer a student or employee, to request your protocol be closed. *You cannot continue to reference UNC on any documents (including the informed consent form) or conduct the study under the auspices of UNC if you are no longer a student/employee of this university.

- You have received or have been made aware of any complaints, problems, or adverse events that are related or possibly related to participation in the research.

If you have any questions, please contact the Research Compliance Manager, Nicole Morse, at 970-351-1910 or via e-mail at nicole.morse@unco.edu. Additional information concerning the requirements for the protection of human subjects may be found at the Office of Human Research Protection website - http://hhs.gov/ohrp/ and https://www.unco.edu/research/research-integrity-andcompliance/institutional-review-board/.

Sincerely,

Nicole Morse
Research Compliance Manager

University of Northern Colorado: FWA00000784

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE (Joseph, 2017)

Interview Guide (Joseph, 2017)

Teacher

- What are the teacher's beliefs about his/her role as an educator?

- What are his/her beliefs on how teachers should facilitate learning?

- How does the teacher characterize his/her role (including metaphors of self and of teaching)?

- What are his/her beliefs about the purpose of education?

- What values does the teacher believe should be conveyed to students?

- In what ways might the teacher be a curriculum leader (creating innovative curriculum, mentoring new teachers, involvement in school or district curriculum work, involvement in state-wide or professional organizations?

Learners

- What are the teacher's beliefs about what (content and skills) students' need to learn?

- What are his/her assumptions about interests of learners (e.g., what would students like to learn?)

- What are his/her assumptions about how students learn? (Include what images or metaphors of learners reveal the teacher's beliefs about learners and learning?)

Content

- What is the curricular content and what is emphasized (or deemphasized)?

- What content does the teacher believe is crucial for students to know or master? (and what is not?)

- How is the curricular content planned and organized? (For example, chronological, thematic, sequential by concepts, etc.)

Assessment

- How are students assessed?

- Are plans for assessment built into curriculum planning?

- Is there a process for evaluating the worth or success of the curriculum? If so, what it is?

Context

- How does he/she organize instruction – e.g., lecture, small groups, etc.)?

- How does the teacher describe the environment of the classroom?

- Why are his/her reasons for structuring the classroom as it is?

- What educational values are expressed explicitly (e.g., course guides, posters, showcases, class rules, goals statements) in educators' classrooms or schools?

- In what ways might the culture of the school and/or community influence the classroom?

Curriculum Planning

- Who plans the curriculum?

- Who has the power to make decisions about what will be taught in his/her classroom?

- Who, besides the teacher, influences what will be taught?

- What is the process for planning the curriculum?

- What supports and sustains the teacher's innovative curriculum work?

- What dilemmas and challenges do the teacher face when creating, planning, or implementing curriculum?

- Does the teacher think there is a difference between his/her "ideal" and "real" curriculum work?

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

1. What is your current role, and how long have you held this role? What roles did you have in education before this?

2. What are your beliefs about your role as an educator in your current position (i.e., how would you characterize your role)? In what ways do your beliefs compare with the beliefs, values, and attitudes prevalent in the school district?

3. What are your beliefs about the purpose of education? What values do you believe should be conveyed to students?

4. What are your beliefs about what (content and skills) students need to learn? What is the curricular content, and what is emphasized (or deemphasized)? What content do you believe is crucial (and what is not vital) for students to know or master?

5. How is the curricular content planned and organized? (for example: chronological, thematic, sequential by concepts, etc.)

    a. Who plans the curriculum?

    b. Who has the power to make decisions about what will be taught in the classroom?

    c. Who, besides the teacher, influences what will be taught?

    d. What is the process of planning the curriculum?

6. What are some benefits or advantages of this approach to planning and implementing the curriculum? What problems, dilemmas, or challenges do teachers face when they work within this approach to planning and implementing the curriculum?

7. How are students assessed? Are plans for assessment built into curriculum planning?

8. Is there a process for evaluating the success of the curriculum? If so, please describe it.

9. How should instruction be organized? (e.g., lecture, small groups, etc.) Who decides how instruction is organized?

10. Is there is a difference between your "ideal" and the "real" curriculum work?

11. What statement(s) would you make to synthesize major beliefs held in this school district regarding curriculum? Is there a set of "district beliefs" (i.e., or is there variation by school, team, or individual)?

12. What assumptions or themes do you think make up the district's beliefs, values, and attitudes about curriculum?

13. What forces or events have influenced the current district-level beliefs, values, and attitudes about curriculum? (history)

14. Are there blind spots not perceived by advocates of this set of beliefs, values, and attitudes? If so, describe.

15. If each identifier below is placed on an opposite end of a continuum, please discuss where you perceive the school district values, beliefs, or attitudes to reside along that continuum (i.e., consider each pair separately).

    a. fidelity and flexibility

    b. teacher autonomy and centralized authority

    c.   depth and breadth (related to coverage of content)

16. Are you willing to share some documents that may show themes, examples, or topics you discussed?   For example, course syllabi, documents showing the scope and sequence of various courses, lesson plans, or project plans. If yes, could I get copies of those? (pose this question when documents are referenced within other lines of inquiry)