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Building a professional learning community

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BUILDING A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY

By
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Abstract

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Creating a Professional Learning Community
2003
Dr. Robert Kern
Educational Administration

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship of staff morale and student achievement levels through the formation of a professional learning community at the Ann A. Mullen Middle School in Sicklerville, New Jersey.

The project involved an analysis of the current school culture through small group and individual interviews, a survey, and an examination of the most recent standardized test scores. The researcher involved the entire staff in the creation of a shared mission statement as well as a shared vision statement to form the building blocks of a professional learning community. Teacher study groups were formed, staff meetings focused on group activities and professional development opportunities, and department goals were created.

The researcher has concluded in this study, that the development of a professional learning community is critical to the success of school improvement. As staff members collaborate, share a common mission and vision, and develop goals to move toward that vision, staff morale improves and there is a common focus on student and staff learning.

Mini-Abstract

Joanne T. Acerba

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Educational Leadership

In order to impact school change, a professional learning community was developed at the Ann A. Mullen Middle School.

The foundational steps implemented have made a positive impact on staff morale. Impact on student achievement was inconclusive as standardized achievement scores were not available.

Zehner, editors; and Michael Fanelli and Mildred Williams, Assistant Principals, who supported and participated in each step of this process.

In addition, I would like to thank Roland Barth for his communication, feedback and encouragement along the road to school improvement from within, as well as Richard DuFour and Rebecca Burnette DuFour for their outstanding research and work promoting the development of professional learning communities in schools which provided the foundation for this thesis project.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Focus of the Study

The focus of this study is to improve student and teacher learning at the Ann A. Mullen Middle School through the formation of a professional learning community. The foundation of a professional learning community was built through the development of a shared mission, vision, values and goals. From this foundation, teams of teachers began to collaborate by studying best practices to improve student learning while learning themselves. The researcher used interviews and surveys to assess current reality and staff morale and gathered standardized test scores (8th grade GEPA scores) to determine student achievement levels in order to examine a relationship between staff morale and shared mission/vision on student achievement levels. The researcher attempted to show a positive relationship between the development of a professional learning community and improved student achievement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the effectiveness of professional learning communities on staff morale and student achievement using an action research design. The study will result in the development of a professional learning community at the Ann Mullen Middle School. A professional learning community will be defined generally as a group of professionals who share values and vision and who promote collaborative learning which engages members of the community in a process of exploring, experimenting and reflecting on a desired outcome.

Definitions:

The following terms have been defined based on a compilation of the research. Each term will be used throughout this thesis in the context of a professional learning community as described below:

Professional: A person who is recognized as having expertise in a specialized field and who maintains his/her status through lifelong learning in order to remain current in the specialized field of knowledge.

Community: A group of individuals connected together by a shared set of ideals, values, and interests that is characterized by mutual trust, sharing and support.

Professional Learning Community: A school community in which all professionals collaborate to continuously inquire and share information about learning, to experiment with information learned, and to implement new knowledge within the context of their shared vision, in order to increase their effectiveness for all students.

School Culture: Influences derived from a shared set of ideologies and beliefs that bind people together; embodied in their attitudes, values, skills and experiences and reflected in the everyday events in a school.

Reculturing: The shift in a school culture from one that is characterized by teacher isolation and limited attention to assessment and pedagogy, to a culture that is characterized by meaningful collaboration addressing these issues, as well as an increased staff capacity leading to a more productive environment.

Professional Development: The development of teacher expertise and effectiveness that is driven by a compelling vision which focuses on student learning and includes opportunities for practice, research and reflection in a collaborative manner which is sustained over time.

Shared Leadership: Leadership that places the principal in the center collaborating with teachers to question, investigate and seek solutions to promote school improvement, while maintaining the necessary structures and support within this model.

Study Groups: Groups of professionals gathered for a collective learning experience focused on instructional practice.

Action Research: A practice which engages teachers in a cycle of examining current reality in a school, determining what can make it better, implementing change, and assessing results in a cyclical pattern.

Collective Inquiry: Collective inquiry involves public reflection, shared meaning, joint planning and coordinated action to improve student learning.

Experimentation: The process of applying new knowledge to teaching activities followed by reflection and change as needed to improve the teaching strategy.

Shared Vision: The shared vision of a professional learning community forms the foundation for school improvement by describing the school the community of learners is seeking to create; it is a clear image of the school's future that inspires people to action.

Shared Mission: The shared mission defines the commitment of the school community members to guiding principles which define what members of a school community believe and seek to create.

Values: Values define the way members of a school community must act in order to realize their shared vision; they challenge people to specify the attitudes, behaviors and other commitments they must make in order to help the school move toward its vision.

Goals: Goals specify the steps members of a school community will take in order to change their intentions into specific actions to be achieved during the improvement process.

Shared Personal Practice: Teachers work collaboratively to study teaching practices, to experiment with those practices, and to reflect upon results of these new practices.

Instructional Leadership: Principals in a professional learning community serve teachers and students by keeping the school focused on students learning by regularly visiting classrooms, meeting with teachers to discuss learning and teaching, and by shaping the norms to encourage reflection on teaching practices and student achievement.

Supportive Conditions: Structures that support the vision of a school professional learning community that have a direct impact on the effectiveness of classroom teaching such as time for collaboration and reflection, funding to support experimentation, and administrative support and encouragement; conditions are the key to maintaining the growth and development of the learning community.

Organizational Capacity: The ability of a group of professionals to work together to empower an organization toward its vision by utilizing individual skills and abilities to make a positive contribution to the community as a whole.

Collaboration: Groups of professionals working together to achieve a common goal in a continuous cycle of exploring, experimenting, and reflecting.

Celebrations: Professional learning communities make a conscious and consistent effort to recognize and promote those values and goals a school lives by. Celebrations come in the form of rituals and ceremonies that reinforce what a school values; and in a professional learning community that is both achievement and improvement.

Results Orientation: Data from various sources drive decisions in improvement efforts and become the focus when planning for improving student learning.

Limitations of the Study

There are both delimitations and limitations to this study. The delimitations associated with the development of a professional learning community include the fact that this study involves only staff members of the Ann A. Mullen Middle School in the district of Gloucester Township. Therefore, all research cannot be generalized to the greater population of all schools. It is a process that is very individualized to specific schools depending on the make-up of staff and other demographics impacting the school.

The process of creating a professional learning community used in this study was developed as a result of research on exemplary practices and was tailored to meet the specific needs of the Ann A. Mullen Middle School. Change and improvement are both on-going processes, so time constraints will result in limited reporting of the full effects of this study.

<u>Setting of the Study</u>

This study takes place at the Ann A. Mullen Middle School in Sicklerville, New Jersey which is part of the Gloucester Township School District. Gloucester Township is a 24 square-mile suburban community in the county of Camden; located 8 miles east of Philadelphia and 50 miles west of Atlantic City. Gloucester Township is the third largest municipality in Camden County and has a population of 64,000 people. 83% of this population is White, 12% is African-American, 3% is Asian, and 2% is from other cultural backgrounds such as Hispanics and multi-racial people. There are more than 500 businesses in the township. The median home value is $104,300.00.

Gloucester Township is governed by a full-time mayor and a seven-member town council. Three members of the current town council are also employees of the Gloucester Township Board of Education, and must abstain from votes pertaining to school decisions. Politics plays a significant role in the education of the children of Gloucester Township. Community members must vote to pass school budgets and the results are often influenced by political parties. If a school budget is defeated by popular vote, it is reviewed by both the Board of Education and the town council, with final recommendations being made by the town council.

The Gloucester Township School district boasts 10 elementary schools and three middle schools (with a comprehensive K-8 curriculum) with a total enrollment of 8,050 students. There are a total of 1,237 staff members; 591 non-certified and 646 certified. Among the certified staff (including administrators), 399 have a BA degree, and 247 have an MA degree.

Gloucester Township's District Factor Grouping for school funding is DE, with A being the lowest factor rating and IJ being the highest factor rating. The district factor grouping was introduced by the New Jersey Department of Education in 1975 and ranks schools in New Jersey by their socioeconomic status. The Department of Education felt that the effectiveness of schools could not be judged without reference to the socioeconomic statues of their students since research showed that what students bring to school is and important determinant of educational outcomes (NJ Department of Education, 2002). The District Factor Grouping is used only by New Jersey in its reporting of test scores so that comparisons are made between districts with similar SES as opposed to geographic location. The DFG utilizes data from the decennial Census of Population including: percent of population with no high school diploma, percent with some college, occupation, population density, income, unemployment and poverty. Districts are grouped in intervals on one-tenth of the distance between the highest and lowest scores and the DFG is assigned. Gloucester Township's DE rating falls right in the middle of all DFGs (NJ Department of Education, 2002).

Gloucester Township has a comprehensive organizational structure. At the helm of the organization is the Superintendent of Schools, with three Assistant Superintendents under his direction, each in charge of a curriculum area. Other central administrators include curriculum supervisors, one principal for each building, and one or two assistant principals in each building to whom teachers and support staff directly report.

The Ann A. Mullen Middle School is in the heart of Gloucester Township. During the 2001-2002 school year, student enrollment was 922 comprising of 313 students in grade six, 294 students in grade seven, and 295 students in grade eight; 44 of these students received special education services. At the start of the 2002-2003 school year, enrollment has grown to 1,071 students. Language among the students is not diverse, with 100% of the students speaking English as their primary language. Daily student attendance rate is 98%, and the daily faculty attendance rate is 95.2%. There is an average class size of 27.3 students and a student/faculty ratio of 12.3. Student mobility rate is 7.3%. Currently, there are 89 staff members who have a BA/BS degree, 38 staff that have an MA/MS degree, and there are no staff members with an Ed.D/Ph.D.

Significance of the Study

This study was designed to bring about change to improve student learning through the use of a professional learning community. Overcrowded schools, large class sizes, low test scores, a growing minority population, low staff morale, technology, state mandated curriculum standards and a change in demographics are all taking a toll on the level of student achievement at the Ann A. Mullen Middle School. Having confidence in the skill level of the teaching staff, this intern envisions this school to rise above the challenges beyond their control, and to remain focused on meeting the needs of all learners, including the learning needs of staff members. Teachers must continually, in the words of Stephen Covey, "sharpen the saw" to ensure that their students do the same.

The process of developing a professional learning community at the Ann A. Mullen Middle School will make a contribution to concerns of practice such as whether or not

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teachers are differentiating instruction to ensure all students meet with success. It will also make a contribution to the needs of the Mullen community as it strives to improve. Success breeds success. The process will require strong leadership capacity on the part of the intern to ensure that baby steps a taken that leave giant footprints. Change is always difficult, but given the right circumstances, it is usually for the better. The development of a professional learning community will be the change agent, and the intern will scrutinize data to compare its value to student achievement levels. A professional learning community provides structure, direction and context to a school so that student achievement becomes the focus for all stakeholders, and so that staff development becomes an on-going collaborative activity, which ensures the focus is achieved.

Organization of the Study

The remainder of this study will be organized as follows:

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Chapter Three: Design of the Study

Chapter Four: Presentation of the Research Findings

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Implications for Further Study

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

Imagine a school where teachers work collaboratively to inquire into student learning through public reflection and coordinated action; where principals serve as instructional leaders and practice supportive and shared leadership with all members of the school community; where a shared mission, vision and set of values are created collaboratively and are implemented daily as the driving force behind all decisions; where visions become reality; where there is a driving need for continuous improvement focusing on "results rather than intentions"(DuFour & Eaker, 1998); and where each success is celebrated and recognized. These characteristics are the driving force behind professional learning communities in schools.

Professional learning communities are proving to be one of the most successful school reforms which have a definite and lasting impact on increased student achievement. In a professional learning community, educators work collaboratively to create a school culture that "fosters mutual cooperation, emotional support, and personal growth as they work together to accomplish what cannot be accomplished alone"(DuFour & Eaker, 1998). According to research conducted by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, "Schools that exhibit a high level of success with students...supply consistent environments conducive to teacher learning" (NWRL, 2002). There is an emphasis on teacher's individual and collective responsibility for the achievement of all students. The work of teachers is organized to reduce teacher isolation and enhance opportunities for collaborative learning based on inquiry into student learning. Schools functioning as

professional learning communities maintain continuous conversation that is focused on students and student learning through reflection, inquiry, assessment and experimentation as they strive to find new ways to teach effectively. According to Roland Barth (1990, p. 9), a community of learners is "a place where students and adults alike are engaged as active learners in matters of special importance to them and where everyone is thereby encouraging everyone else's learning."

A professional learning community should not be thought of as another program or "thing" to be done; rather it is a way of operating as it is infused into the school culture. Staff members who continuously inquire about teaching and learning in order to improve the learning of all students become a state of being in the school. Staff members invest in their own learning and make a commitment to make the changes necessary to increase their effectiveness in order to address the needs of all learners in the quest to achieve high standards of learning (Morrissey, 2000).

A change in thinking requires new learning; however, learning motivates people toward change. Improvement does not occur without a conscious effort to move toward improvement goals. Staff members must understand how to improve; therefore, change will not occur without new learning. A clear vision of why the change is necessary is required to obtain full understanding of the change. Once educators learn all they need to know about the change necessary to improve a school and are guided in the application of that change, they will come to value it as a positive influence on student learning (Morrissey, 2000).

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As members of the school work together and learn together within a professional learning community, continuous improvement expands into an embedded value. What is recognized as important to increasing student learning is valued. When teacher development and improvement are acknowledged as having a critical impact on positive classroom experiences for students, the value is further reinforced. Once educators value change, and change becomes a value, educators seek additional changes that will improve their skills, and a true professional community of learners is born.

According to Shirley Hord (1997), a professional community of learners is defined as a school where teachers and administrators "continuously seek and share learning and act on their learning." She further acknowledges that the goal of educators' actions in a community of continuous improvement and inquiry is "to increase and enhance their effectiveness as professionals for the students' benefits." Peter Senge further supports this notion by stating that a learning organization is a place "where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continuously learning how to learn together." Collective inquiry is essential to this process, and the collective inquiry formed through professional learning communities helps teachers and administrators to overcome barriers caused by grade level and subject matter specialization; it forces dialogue among teachers, administrators and other stakeholders about what is important in a school. In addition, the process of collective inquiry promotes both an understanding and an appreciation for the work of other professionals resulting in the formation of ties that bind them toward a shared vision and set of values (Hord, 1997).

Hord summarizes the outcomes of a professional learning community for both students and staff by stating, "If you can't make a school a great professional place for its staff, it's never going to be a great place for kids."

Research conducted by Darling-Hammond (1995) demonstrates that school improvement efforts which encourage teachers to inquire into teaching and discuss the resulting learning by students shows academic improvement results more quickly than in schools that did not follow this practice. Teachers "need to have opportunities to share what they know, to consult with peers about the problems of teaching and learning, and to observe peers teaching" (Darling-Hammond, 1995) in order to deepen professional understanding of these processes. Ernest Boyer (1995) supports this concept by maintaining that connection is the most essential factor in building a professional learning community and that this connection occurs when teachers collaborate on effective teaching practices. Thomas Sergiovanni (1996) also explored this issue and believes, "If our aim is to help students become lifelong learners by cultivating a spirit of inquiry and the capacity for inquiry, then we must provide the same conditions for teachers." He also believes that teacher development is the most critical element in the move toward school improvement. This concept requires schools not to restructure their environments, but to reculture their environments. According to Michael Fullan (2002), the process of developing a professional learning community involves "going from a situation of limited attention to assessment and pedagogy to a situation in which teachers and others routinely focus on these matters and make associated improvements." School principals become responsible for creating the same context for teachers that they strive to create for the learners in their schools.

Once structures are in place that encourage the development of a professional learning community, educators begin to see themselves as a team of experienced professionals collaborating to apply best practices to problems they confront on a daily basis. These same educators support one another in the search for better ways to teach young people content while at the same time instilling the skills and habits they need to grow as lifelong learners. The cohesiveness developed through this process of professional inquiry will lead to an improvement in student learning. Professional learning communities form systems that empower staff to "define their professional path and grow in ways that are meaningful in their work with students" (Wald & Castleberry, 2002. p. 11).

Although there is no prescriptive program for developing professional learning communities in schools, there are several common characteristics, each of which can be tailored to the needs and vision of individual schools. These dimensions of professional learning communities include: supportive and shared leadership; shared values and vision; collective inquiry; supportive conditions; shared personal practice; collaborative teams; and an orientation toward results. Each dimension is addressed in detail within the context of a professional learning community.

One of the most critical elements of a professional learning community is the prevalence of a shared mission, vision, and set of values. According to Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker (2000), the shared mission and vision must be "realistic, compelling and ambitious. It should articulate goals which are both specific and measurable that allow for short-term successes which are visible, unambiguous, and closely related to the overall change intended." It is important to note that the vision in a professional learning community must have an unwavering focus on student learning, and along with values,

must guide all decisions about teaching and student learning to support norms of behavior. These values are embedded in everyday actions of the staff as members of the learning community engage and develop their commitment toward increased intellectual capacity (Morrissey, 2000). Hord (1997) notes the importance of staff involvement in developing a shared vision, making decisions consistent with the vision and promoting accountability for actions. She also believes that "sharing vision is not just agreeing with a good idea; it is a particular mental model or image of what is important to an individual and an organization." Hord maintains that staff must be encouraged to be involved in the process of developing shared vision as a "guidepost in decision-making about teaching and learning in a school." The undeviating focus on student learning promoted by the vision in a professional learning community is the core characteristic of such an organization. There is a common understanding that students are academically capable and staff members work to achieve the goal of creating learning environments that support the development of each student.

The most important feature of vision in a professional learning community is that the vision is alive and visible in the actions of all members of that community daily. It is embodied as the "commitment to guiding principles that articulate what the people in the school believe and seek to create" (Burnette, 2002).

The mission addresses the purpose of the school; the vision addresses what the school hopes to become; and values guide how members of the community must behave in order to make the shared vision a reality. The values challenge people to specify the attitudes, behaviors and collective commitments staff members will demonstrate to help advance the school toward its vision (Eaker, DuFour, & Burnette, 2002). It is this shift from "belief to

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behavior" that is most critical. Thus, building a solid foundation based on a shared mission, vision and set of values and goals become the critical building block to the creation of a professional learning community.

A second dimension of a professional learning community is supportive and shared leadership. Under this model, administrators, along with teachers, inquire, investigate and seek solutions for improving a school. While all staff members work collaboratively to grow professionally by learning together, administrators provide the necessary organization and structural support needed to promote collaborative work (Morrissey, 2000). The role of the principal in a professional learning community is critical in order to nurture its development by providing the conditions and resources that support staff in their quest for continuous learning (Morrissey, 2000). Educators are regarded as leaders in school improvement efforts as decision-making becomes a shared process based on the advancement of the school vision. Principals must act as instructional leaders in a professional learning community, modeling the performance they expect and by not accepting sub-par performance by any staff member. As instructional leaders and models of the expectations, principals must be a visible presence in their school, constantly interacting with teachers as well as students. This can be accomplished by visiting classrooms, walking the hallways, praising staff frequently, setting a tone of encouragement, and by encouraging written and oral communication. The principal develops the capacity of the staff by providing opportunities for them to learn together, to enjoy each other socially, and to work collaboratively (Morrissey, 2000). Instructional leadership also involves keeping school activities focused on student learning. As the primary culture carriers in a school, principals are responsible for what teachers do in

classrooms (Sparks, 2002). Louis and Kruse describe the importance of leadership in a professional learning community by describing it as "leadership at the center". Principals take advantage of every opportunity to converse about teaching and learning, they provide classroom support, and create a culture of high intellectual quality. They build the capacity of the staff by investing in policies, training, professional development and ongoing support while maintaining purposeful interactions, which mobilize commitments and energies across learning communities (Fullan, 2000). Therefore, it is the challenge of the principal to practice democratic and responsive leadership that addresses how students learn and grow (Purrington, 1996). Principals must create situations that lead people to act so that they experience the benefits of a professional learning community by providing experiences that allow them to function as a professional learning community, and so that those benefits filter to increase student achievement (Burnette, 2002). DuFour, Eaker, and Burnette (2002) maintain that the role of a leader in a professional learning community is to "promote, protect and defend the school's vision and values and to confront behavior that is inconsistent with the school's vision and values." Leaders make a difference through their actions, and according to Roland Barth (2001), the definition of leadership is "making happen what you believe in." What leaders think and do has a profound impact on the performance level of the organization they lead. Thus, the principal becomes the key person in determining whether or not a school succeeds on its quest toward its vision.

Another critical dimension of professional learning communities is that of collaborative teamwork and collective inquiry (DuFour, 2002). Collective inquiry and collaborative teamwork both focus on school improvement efforts addressing curriculum, instruction, assessment, and school culture. In professional learning communities, the spirit of

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professional respect and trust motivates teachers to work together on efforts to improve student learning. Teachers support one another to improve professional practice by making informal visits to other classrooms, by engaging in group discussions, by seeking advice and opinions from other professionals, and by sharing instructional materials (Morrissey, 2000). Research has proven that teachers need opportunities to learn how to question, analyze, and change instruction in order to teach more challenging content, to understand the needs of all learners, and to access the resources they need to be successful in increasing student learning. Working as a team enhances this opportunity even further. Collaborative teamwork develops organizational capacity and teachers take responsibility for their own professional development. Educators engage in collective inquiry whereby they question the status quo, seek and test new methods, plan together, coordinate action and reflect upon and revise their work as needed. The culture becomes one of what Roland Barth (1990, p. 31) calls 'collegiality': a place where adults talk about practice; where teachers observe each other while engaged in practice; where teachers work on curriculum planning, design, research and evaluation; and where teachers teach each other what they know about teaching and learning.

In a professional learning community, small, collaborative groups of teachers work together to focus on an issue. They form study groups that enable teachers to keep up with new knowledge that will help to improve their effectiveness to, in turn, improve student learning as related to the shared vision. Members of a study group meet for a minimum of one hour at a regular time each week. They examine data related to the problem they are addressing or school goals, such as test scores, district assessment results, examples of lesson plans and the resulting student work, and climate survey results as they probe for

deeper explanations (Richardson, 2001). Once data is analyzed, the collaborative team develops a study plan, performs the research, reads articles and books, interviews experts and watches tapes related to the topic under investigation, and then they reflect together on the findings. The next step is critical in the study group process, and that is to put into action what they have learned by experimenting with lessons and examining student work. They share their new knowledge periodically with other members of the staff and report on their progress (Richardson, 2001). In essence, teachers in a professional learning community participate in collective inquiry, work towards developing shared meaning, and coordinate efforts into action. This effort reduces teacher isolation and encourages professionals to focus on what really matters – student learning.

Other professional development models that exist within a professional learning community include teacher-as-researcher, action research, staff retreats, student assessment events, professional networking, lesson study, coaching, and mentoring. Teacher-as-researcher asks teachers to become sharp observers of both themselves and others. During the observation/reflection process, teachers gather information, research, analyze their experiences, and write about their findings. Their goal is to see connections between activities, behaviors and outcomes (Billig, 2001). Action research engages teachers in the examination of what is happening in a school, determining if there is a need for change, assessing results, and continuing this cycle until goals are achieved. Staff retreats are uninterrupted blocks of time used to evaluate overall school performance and to create goals based on this analysis. Student Assessment Events bring groups of educators together to examine assessment data, determine implications for practice, experiment, and evaluate the results. In the lesson study model used heavily in Japan, groups of teachers work

collaboratively to identify an instructional problem, plan a lesson to address that issue (after researching), teach the lesson while others observe, evaluate and revise the lesson.

Shared personal practice is also significant to the process of developing and sustaining professional learning communities in schools. Research suggests that teachers who spend more time collectively studying teaching practices are more effective overall at developing higher-order thinking skills and meeting the needs of diverse learners. Shared personal practice suggests that teachers share effective classroom practices. It is seen as a normal condition when teachers visit each others' classrooms to help one another to improve. Teachers routinely observe, script notes, and discuss their observations with one another. No matter what method of professional development is chosen, it is important in a learning community to be certain that the adult learning processes match the intended outcomes for students. The learning activity should cause teachers to collaborate in serious ways, consistently reflecting on their work and the impact it has on student learning (Sparks, 2001).

In order for the professional learning communities to maximize their potential, there needs to be supportive conditions in place. These conditions are structures that support the vision of a school and are critical to pedagogical effectiveness (Morrissey, 2000). Supportive conditions are the key ingredient in the effort to sustain the growth and development of educators. It becomes the job of the school leader, or principal, to determine when, where and how the staff will meet regularly to learn, make decisions and solve problems. Supportive conditions can be divided into two major categories: physical and structural set-up and human qualities/people capacity. Examples of physical conditions include time to meet and plan, school size and the proximity of staff to one another,

communication structures, school autonomy, teacher empowerment, the availability of resources, policies and schedules that reduce teacher isolation (Louis and Kruse, 1995). People capacities include the willingness to accept constructive feedback that is developed through trust and respect among colleagues, supportive leadership from administrators, and collaboration.

The school district also plays a critical role in providing supporting conditions for professional learning communities by providing the pressure necessary to sustain improvement efforts. The district can clearly articulate standards for student learning, teaching, leadership and staff development; can establish accountability for the standards; can monitor progress; and can provide resources to build capacity (Sparks, 2001). Supportive conditions are a necessary ingredient for the success of a professional learning community.

Celebrations are public demonstrations of what educators value in their school. They help a community to recognize that the journey is just as important as the destination. Richard DuFour maintains "using celebrations appropriately is one of the most powerful shapers of culture"; and that "people can't aspire to general terms like 'excellence'. But they can aspire to be like someone. When you are holding up examples of people going above and beyond the call and you are doing this at meeting after meeting, you begin to redefine the norm of what's appropriate behavior in the school." Celebrations contribute to the professional learning community because they encourage trust and respect for one another. Recognition calls attention to behaviors that are in line with the school's vision and improvement plan for achieving that vision (NSDC, 1998). Professional learning communities make a conscious effort to use the power of celebration to promote what is

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valued in a school (Eaker, DuFour & Burnette, 2002). Peter Senge (1990) further supports

the importance of celebration by emphasizing the value in nurturing and celebrating the

work of each individual staff person throughout his work. DuFour and Eaker (1998) site

important benefits resulting from celebrations that reinforce the culture of a professional

learning community. These include: the recipients of the recognition feeling acknowledged

and appreciated; shared values are reinforced; provides living examples of the values of a

school while encouraging others to behave in a similar way; increases momentum toward

the vision; and adds an element of fun to the workplace. They further provide guidelines

for incorporating celebration into a professional learning community by suggesting that the

purpose for the celebration is explicitly stated, that celebration become everyone's

responsibility, that there is a clearly established link between public recognition and the

promotion of the vision, and that opportunities are created to recognize many winners.

Professional learning communities focus on results. Results are assessed through the

regular "collection and analysis of performance data" (Fullan, 1999). Fullan (1999, p.3)

further asserts that results "should be understood as thoughtfully established, desired end-

product, as evidence that something worked (or did not work)." Professional learning

communities take both the good and the bad results and utilize them to provide feedback to

guide further study and decision-making for improvement. It is this continuous and

collaborative inquiry followed by making necessary changes or adjustments that leads to

success in improving student achievement levels.

The process of developing a professional learning community, the focus of this study,

has not been fully researched or recorded. However, Robert Eaker, Richard DuFour, and

Rebecca Burnette (2002) recently published a book entitled Getting Started: Reculturing

Schools to Become Professional Learning Communities, where they address common

questions about the implementation of learning communities and share their success

stories. Because the development of professional learning communities in schools

involves deep reculturing, it is difficult to dictate a prescriptive process. Individual schools

will have to tailor the research and five major dimensions of a professional learning

community to the needs of their schools that tie into their own vision, mission, values and

goals.

In summary, the conceptual framework of a professional learning community involves

three major themes: a solid foundation of shared mission, vision, values and goals;

collaborative teams researching and experimenting to achieve goals in the move toward the

school vision; and an unwavering focus on results evidenced by increases in student

learning (Eaker, DuFour, Burnette, 2002, p. 3). Collaborative teams fuel the culture of a

professional learning community as that culture changes from one of teacher isolation to

one where community is realized. The shared mission of a professional learning

community, no matter how it is stated, is that of learning. This also shifts from the culture

of a traditional school focusing on teaching, to the professional learning communities focus

on student learning. Based on that mission, a professional learning community can create a

vision that is meaningful and used as the foundation for all decisions in the school.

Established values shift a traditional school's beliefs into actions in a professional learning

community. Goals are developed as plans to extend accountability for working toward the

vision. Administrators in a professional learning community are viewed as "leaders of

leaders"(Eaker, DuFour, Burnette, 2002, p. 22) as leadership is shared in the school.

Professional learning communities value celebration as a means to promote the school

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vision. Research on effective schools demonstrates that the most successful schools have teachers and administrators who formed a professional learning community, who focused on student work, and who changed instructional practice to achieve better results (Fullan, 2000). In addition, effective schools take advantage of their internal collaborative strength to create relationships with the community. Professional learning communities seek to develop everyone's leadership capacity in order to help students to achieve their highest potential. Educators who seek to develop a professional learning community should remember the words of Allen Wheelis (1973), "We are what we do. If we want to change what we are, we must begin by changing what we do."

Chapter Three

Design of the Study

General Description of the Research Design

This action research project was conducted at the Ann A. Mullen Middle School in

Gloucester Township, New Jersey. The school is comprised of 1,170 6th, 7th and 8th grade

students. Approximately 78% of the entire student body is White, 21% is African-

American, 3% is Hispanic or from other ethnic backgrounds. The study focused its

attention on the 89 certified staff members as well as the 40 non-certified staff members

who work directly with these students directly or indirectly on a daily basis.

The research conducted in this study was designed to discover the current reality, which

existed in the school culture, and to uncover common goals of school stakeholders in order

to lay the foundation of a professional learning community; thus the study relied heavily

on qualitative data. This data was collected using enquiry techniques in the form of

individual and small group interviews and school climate surveys. The researcher was an

active participant in this study. Detailed field notes on observations and outcomes of

various activities related to the study were recorded. School improvement involves change

over time, and the development of a professional learning community is a process that

could take three to five years to fully develop. This study had to take place within only

seven months; thus, the results recorded do not show the full development of a professional

learning community. It does however; show the process required for laying the foundation

for such a learning environment in a school. At the conclusion of this study, follow-up

interviews were conducted to monitor change in attitude as the school progresses in becoming a professional learning community.

The researcher also attempted to find a correlation between student achievement scores and the process of becoming a professional learning community. Student achievement scores, both standardized and overall average Grade Point Average from the previous two school years (2000-2001 and 2001-2002), were used as quantitative baseline data for this study.

Development and Design of Research Instrumentation

A multi-instrument approach (triangulation) was used in this study. Instruments for data collection included surveys, interviews, field notes, and products produced by staff according to the goals of this project.

Small group interviews, organized according to core or teaching team, were conducted to determine current reality in the school as well as to gain a general overview of common beliefs/values held by all members of the school staff with the questions as shown in Appendix A. The following three questions were asked to determine current reality in the school as perceived by members of the school staff: What makes our school great? What can we do together to make this an even better school? What should new administrators understand about our school? Four additional questions were asked in the interviews to provide a foundation for gathering shared beliefs to help determine our mission and vision which is the foundation for building this professional learning community: What do we expect our students to learn? How will we know that students have learned? How will we

respond to students who are not learning? How can we recognize and celebrate improvements in student learning? Individual interviews were also conducted using the same questions for staff members who are not assigned to a specific teaching team or core.

A school climate survey was distributed to all staff members to help to determine the level of morale in the building. This survey was adapted from a school climate survey given directly to the researcher by Roland Barth. The survey used a Likert Scale (1-5) to determine the strength of behavioral norms or qualities of the environment teachers experience everyday. 60 surveys were distributed to teachers in the school, and 34 surveys were returned, resulting in a 57% response rate. The survey is shown in Appendix B.

Specific student achievement data was gathered for use as a baseline for measuring improvement in student learning and achievement levels as a result of building the foundation for a professional learning community in the school. Data included scores from the GEPA (NJ Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment) from the 2000-2001 and the 2001-2002 school years. Additionally, scores for the 6th and 7th grade Terranova were examined from both the 200-2001 and 2001-2002 school years. All standardized scores served as a baseline for specific achievement data.

Additionally, because professional development is a key component of building a professional learning community, a questionnaire that is shown in Appendix C was given to all teachers regarding professional development interests, needs and goals. The results of this questionnaire will be the basis for the formation of our initial teacher study groups.

Description of the Data Collection Approach

Teacher interviews were conducted both individually and in small groups. Small group interviews were scheduled during the collaborative planning time of teaching teams. Each small group consisted of six teachers who form a teaching 'core' that shares a group of approximately 175 students. Any staff member who was not assigned to a teaching team was interviewed individually at a pre-scheduled time between that staff member and the researcher. Only 7 out of 89 staff members declined to be interviewed, resulting in a 93% participation rate. The researcher asked each of the seven questions to each group or individual and did not interject any response in the form of dialogue to protect the validity of the answers, keeping them free from researcher bias. This group was targeted for questioning since they are the key members of the school community responsible for the implementation of a professional learning community. One limiting factor includes the fact that the staff is fluid; members can leave or join at any time changing the base of the population. Time is the other limiting factor noting that this study is limited to one year of a multi-year process.

School climate surveys were distributed to each staff member at a faculty meeting and were returned to the researcher as a group to protect the identity of the respondents.

Description of the Data Analysis Plan

In order to analyze the data collected to determine whether or not it has had a direct impact on improving student achievement levels, the following process was used. The researcher interviewed all members of the staff at Ann A. Mullen Middle School. Answers

to the interview questions were recorded and coded to look for patterns and trends in responses. Survey data was tallied, analyzed and then prioritized in relation to the findings from the personal interviews, which was presenting in the form of a list of common responses. This data was coded and transferred to graphic organizers. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze survey responses in terms of central tendencies such as mean responses.

The researcher worked closely with a core committee of teachers, critical friends that were formed to contextualize the research findings by comparing those findings with existing knowledge base in current literature. They worked to use that knowledge to develop a plan for writing a new mission statement for the school based on the data gathered and the fundamentals of a professional learning community.

Next, descriptive statistics were used for the analysis of student achievement data looking for trends and were recorded to provide a baseline for measuring growth in student achievement levels. At the conclusion of this study, all available data from the current school year was examined and compared to data collected from the previous two school years.

The core committee for school improvement used the data to develop a plan for writing a vision statement and for setting SMART goals for the following year.

The results of this study were used to determine whether or not the development of a professional learning community in a school would have a direct impact on improving student achievement levels. Since positive results were obtained during the beginning of this project where the foundation was laid for full implementation of a professional learning community, the staff of the Ann A. Mullen Middle School has committed to

continuing the process which moves them towards the vision of a professional learning

community so that increased student learning is realized.

Chapter Four

Research Findings

Introduction

The process of transforming a school culture into a professional learning community positively impacts staff morale. This chapter will present the research findings gathered at the Ann A. Mullen Middle School during the 2002-2003 school year, where the researcher gathered data and laid the foundation for a professional learning community. Research findings will be presented in chronological order to demonstrate how each step unfolded and how the research findings at each step led to the development of the following step in the process. The researcher hoped to discover a relationship between staff morale, student achievement levels on state mandated tests and the development of a professional learning community. However, achievement scores for the 2002-2003 school year were not available at the conclusion of this paper. The reader should note that even though this research report had to be drawn to a close, the change process is not complete, and will continue until the Ann A. Mullen Middle School becomes a true professional learning community.

Baseline Data Collected

Student success is clearly defined by scores achieved on the state mandated achievement test. For the Ann A. Mullen Middle School community, that success is rated by number of students scoring proficient or advanced proficient on the New Jersey Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment.

The researcher began the process of transforming the Ann A. Mullen Middle School into a true professional learning community by gathering student achievement data from the previous two school years. This data was summarized from the New Jersey State Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA). The researcher chose to use this data to compare student achievement levels in our school, because it is the data the state uses to determine if our school is meeting expected student achievement levels. The GEPA scores for the past two school years are summarized in Table 1 below for General Education students.

Table 1

Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment Percent Passing 2000-2001

Subject Tested	Partially Proficient	Proficient	Advanced Proficient
Math	30.9%	51.1%	17.9%
Language Arts Literacy	24.9%	72.8%	2.3%
Science	21.4%	69.5%	9.2%

Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment Percent Passing 2001-2002

Subject Tested	Partially Proficient	Proficient	Advanced Proficient
Math	37.1%	49.3%	13.7%
Language Arts Literacy	13.7%	79.1%	7.2%
Science	15.5%	68.6%	15.9%

The data in Table 1 showed achievement gains in both Language Arts Literacy and Science, but a decrease in achievement scores in Math. This data was presented to the staff as a whole. Emphasis was placed on the idea that the staff had to collaborate to help all students improve their performance in mathematics and general ideas based on the professional learning community model were presented. Increasing math achievement scores was determined to be the focus of study for the school year.

Next, the researcher wanted to discover the current reality in the school in order to assess the current level of staff morale and find whether the perceptions of staff and administrators were congruent with that of professional learning communities. To obtain this data, the researcher used two primary methods. First, she interviewed staff members in small groups as well as individually. Second, she distributed a staff survey asking questions regarding the school culture. During the interview process, the researcher asked staff members seven specific questions designed to gather data to determine the school's current cultural reality and to determine the core beliefs of the staff as a whole. The questions asked were: What makes our school great? What can we do together to make this an even better school? What should new administrators understand about our school? What do we expect our students to learn? How will we know if they have learned? How will we respond to students who are not learning? How can we recognize and celebrate improvements in students learning? During the interview process, the researcher carefully recorded everyone's response, as shown in Appendix A, so that all points of view were considered as the change process began. Below is the running list of responses. Similar responses were only listed one time.

<u>The Process</u>

At the same time the interviews were being conducted, the researcher formed a school improvement committee which would work together to analyze the data in relation to the formation of a professional learning community. This committee, known as the Committee for Excellence, consisted of the researcher, the school principal, 6 teachers of various experience levels, two parents, the head custodian, and one secretary.

Additional data was gathered prior to the first meeting of the Committee for Excellence so that a clear picture of where we were and where we were headed was presented. That final data was the result of a school culture survey (as seen in Appendix B) distributed to 60 staff members present at a faculty meeting. Of the 60 surveys distributed, 34 were returned representing a 57% return rate. Nineteen areas of school culture were considered. Table 2 below represents the survey results by percentage. The Likert Scale had the following ratings: 1=Almost Never, 2=Less Often Than Not, 3=About Half The Time, 4=More Often Than Not, 5=Almost Always. Respondents rating a feature of our school culture as weak, indicated with a "1", and respondents rating a feature as strong indicated with a "5" on the Likert Scale. Specific number of responses is available in Appendix C.

Comparing only the highest and lowest ratings gave the researcher an idea of both the negative and positive perceptions of the current school culture prior to the start of the change process. All data was presented to the Committee for Excellence who then began to contextualize the findings with those of the research on professional communities.

Table 2

Results of School Culture Survey by Percentage of Responses

Indicator of Culture	Response 1	Response 2	Response 3	Response 4	Response 5
Collegiality	19%	21%	20%	15%	25%
Experimentation	12%	12%	24%	15%	36%
High Expectations	12%	19%	25%	28%	16%
Reaching out to Knowledge	0%	17%	32%	32%	19%
Appreciation/Recognition	25%	22%	31%	16%	6%
Professional Respect	0%	10%	13%	30%	47%
Caring/Celebration/Humor	8%	8%	26%	34%	24%
Protecting What's Important	16%	25%	20%	27%	12%
Tradition	9%	13%	25%	25%	28%
Tangible Support	19%	16%	42%	16%	7%
Decision-Making	13%	15%	30%	33%	9%
Communication	8%	14%	25%	37%	16%
Initiative	0%	13%	47%	25%	15%
Collective Responsibility	3%	23%	21%	32%	21%
Effectiveness	0%	0%	0%	28%	72%
Continuous Improvement	3%	10%	26%	42%	19%
Reflective Environment	13%	15%	22%	34%	16%
Goals	12%	9%	32%	32%	15%
Core Values	2%	9%	34%	39%	16%

Use of Data to Form a Professional Learning Community

Based on the work of Rick DuFour and Becky Burnette DuFour, the Committee for Excellence set forth to analyze the data collected by the researcher to decide how to begin to build the foundation of a professional learning community which consists of a shared mission, vision, values and goals. The need for a lucid, shared mission statement as well as a concise vision was discussed as the building blocks for a professional learning community. The researcher randomly divided the faculty into small groups. Each small group was charged with the task of taking the data presented and writing a creative school mission statement, reflective of both the groups' beliefs as well as the stated beliefs presented to them from the rest of the faculty. After several minutes of resistance to this change in faculty meeting procedure, groups devised plans to work with one another to complete the task at hand. This process resulted in ten original mission statements.

The Committee for Excellence reconvened with this new data and identified the common and important ideas which may have been eliminated. They then worked together to draft the first mission statement for our school that would guide our school as a professional learning community. After several revisions within the group, the Committee for Excellence presented the draft to the faculty at the next faculty meeting. The faculty was asked to either accept the mission statement in its current form, or to add personal comments to improve the mission statement. Forty-three out of sixty faculty members present, or 72% of the participants at the meeting, accepted the statement. The researcher wanted at least 90% acceptance in order to consider the mission statement, the statement of why we exist, to be a true shared work. The comments made by the

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remaining 28% of the faculty were reviewed by the Committee for Excellence in order to determine their validity and relevance to our goals. The mission statement was then revised, accommodating, to the greatest extent possible, all comments received. A final draft was then presented to the staff. This time, we asked the staff to keep their copies of the mission statement, but if they felt it needed further consideration, to turn in those comments only. No revisions were requested by staff members. In February 2003, the staff of the Ann A. Mullen Middle School adopted the following mission statement: "The Ann A. Mullen Middle School is committed to providing a quality educational program that meets the needs of individual learners in a safe environment where achievement is recognized and celebrated; diversity is valued; staff collaboration is on-going and purposeful; and where a strong home, school and community partnership exists in order to ensure that all students develop into respectful, self-confident and responsible citizens."

The major components of a professional learning community were addressed within the context of the belief statements of the faculty members including: a focus on learning, collaboration, professional development, celebration, results and shared leadership.

Using data previously collected, the Committee for Excellence reconvened to begin to draft the vision statement, visualizing the ideal school to identify where we are headed. At the next faculty meeting, staff members were asked to brainstorm in small groups where they would like to see the school in five years and to identify what they envision as the ideal school. Each group shared their ideas that were recorded for use by the Committee for Excellence. The committee then drafted a vision statement in line with the goals of a professional learning community. This draft was distributed to 100% of the

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staff, with space for comments and concerns. All drafts were returned and accepted by the staff in its original form. Thus, the vision statement of the Ann A. Mullen Middle School reads: "The learning community of the Ann A. Mullen Middle School envisions a school which demonstrates excellence by exceeding the state standards on all achievement tests while meeting the needs of diverse learners through the staff's collaboration and personal commitment to the success of all students."

At this point in the transformation process, the two major foundational statements have been written using the collective expertise of the entire school staff. Even though the Committee for Excellence was studying the concept of a professional learning community and its impact on student achievement levels, the remainder of the staff were not introduced to this concept in its entirety. The researcher chose to first lay the foundation based on the staff's core values and beliefs and to then present the larger vision of a professional learning community in the context of how it fits into the shared mission and vision developed by the school staff. So, at the March 2003 faculty meeting, the researcher presented the research on professional learning communities in the form of a Power Point Presentation. A small group activity was then conducted, asking groups to demonstrate how our shared mission and vision fit into the concept of a professional learning community. The researcher has observed a more positive environment when asked to actively participate in faculty meeting activities than when the process first started. Staff members anxiously attend to the task at hand and produce great results. Once groups shared their responses, they were then asked to demonstrate at least two ways they could actively participate in the environment of a professional learning community while promoting our mission and vision. After each group had an opportunity

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to share their ideas, the researcher explained the process of developing SMART goals (Strategic and specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-oriented, Time-bound). Participants were asked to begin considering these as each department would be working the following month to create two goals to achieve during the following school year that would bring us closer to our mission and vision as well as toward the development of a professional learning community.

The final step in the process of laying the foundation for a professional learning community was to survey the staff on their professional development needs and interests. At the conclusion of this written research report, the results of this questionnaire have not been compiled. Since it was developed in response to the process of laying the foundation for a professional learning community in relation to all data collected, it begins the second phase of this process that cannot be documented in this research project. The survey can, however, be viewed in Appendix D. The results of this survey will be used to develop building-wide professional development activities for the following school year, which promote the development of a professional learning community while moving us closer to our mission and vision.

Chapter Five

Conclusion, Implications, and Further Study

Introduction:

Organizational learning is the capacity of an organization to take effective action. In the business world, as well as in education, the term 'learning organization' is a metaphor for the growth and adaptation an organization must endure if they are to compete globally. Our job as educators is to ensure that our students have the skills necessary to become lifelong learners, so that they may impact the organizations in which they work with their individual capacity embedded into organizational capacity. In order to ensure this occurs, educators must first become lifelong learners so that they can model the continuous process of seeking opportunities to develop themselves, which will therefore, impact the school in which they work. This is the rationale behind schools that function as professional learning communities. Individuals within the organization are lifelong learners who collaborate and share new learning, maintain a solid mission, vision, set of values, and set of goals, focus on learning, share leadership, focus on school improvement, and celebrate the success of all learners within that organization. In professional learning communities, adult learning is valued as much as student learning.

This study began to lay the foundation for changing the culture of the Ann A. Mullen Middle School to one of a professional learning community. During the seven months that this project took place, the researcher assessed the school's current reality, developed a shared mission and vision statement, published a list of belief statements, began two teacher study groups, and began the process for writing SMART goals for the following

school year, which are in line with the shared mission and vision. A major goal of a professional learning organization is to move away from the culture of teacher isolation, and instead build one of teacher collaboration. The researcher also worked closely with the school principal to change schedules, teaching teams, and leadership teams in order to ensure a move toward our vision of a collaborative culture that enhances student achievement. Unfortunately, time constraints prevented the researcher from analyzing a direct impact of this process on student learning through achievement scores, but a lot of positive cultural changes have evolved just from the process used by the researcher to develop a shared mission and vision.

The researcher hoped to discover how the development of a professional learning community within a school could positively impact staff morale, and in turn, increases student achievement levels. The process of developing a professional learning community requires change in beliefs and actions of the people involved. This study attempted to show a relationship between staff collaborating and working as a professional learning organization and student achievement levels. The researcher made many conclusions based on observations that were kept in the form of a running record.

The researcher took data on the best practices on forming professional learning communities in schools and evaluated their value on the current culture of the Ann A. Mullen Middle School. The researcher chose not to send out surveys questioning the school's current reality. She instead met with staff in small groups. She concluded that this was a critical step towards the formation of a professional learning community because building relationships is a key to successful change. Conversations began with a lot of hostile feelings being aired, but by the end of many conversations, the researcher observed

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improved staff morale because people felt as though their ideas were being heard. This reinforced the conclusion that relationship building is critical to any change process. It is human nature to want to feel appreciated, respected and valued, and this step provided these needs to staff members. When buy-in was needed to initiate certain changes throughout the process of becoming a professional learning community, buy-in was fairly easy to attain because everyone played a part in the development of those changes.

Based on the work of Richard DuFour and Rebecca Burnette DuFour, the Committee for Excellence first concluded that our school lacked a clear direction or a common focus. Thus, we began laying the foundation for a professional learning community by first creating a shared mission statement. Because our staff is so large, we had to devise a plan that would involve everyone. The first step in developing our mission statement was implemented through a faculty meeting activity. This activity further supported the collaborative atmosphere promoted by professional learning community theory that when people choose to make some contribution to the team effort, morale is improved because the participants believed that their contribution would be meaningful and would make a difference overall.

Throughout the process, the researcher organized many staff activities where active learning was involved. These activities reinforced the idea of teacher collaboration and were designed to improve staff morale through teamwork as we moved toward the goal of writing a shared mission and vision that would become the building blocks for a professional learning community.

The researcher concluded that adult learners also prefer active learning. Because they experienced this type of meeting during previous faculty meetings, they were more open to

trying something new. Team-building and cooperative group activities addressed staff morale. Teachers were once again asked to participate in the writing of our mission statement through collaboration and discussion. This process was similar to that of Dening's Total Quality management approach whereby workers are equipped with the knowledge and the power to solve problems. In this case, we needed to solve the problem of designing a common focus for our school. The use of shared decision-making, a key element of a professional learning community, became a critical component in this process. Organizational improvement results from the leader's ability to use shared decision-making, learning, and empowerment to transform actions by staff members into performance improvement and the obtainment of a vision. This process also demonstrated the power of taking knowledge and human capital to improve the morale of a staff to participate in a process that moves a school towards improvement. The leader had to have the skill in transforming individual capacity into organizational capacity, and this mission development process did just that.

The process used resulted in a shared mission and vision statement for the Ann A. Mullen Middle School, which would become the driving force behind our work. The mission statement reads, "The Ann A. Mullen Middle School is committed to providing a quality educational program that meets the needs of individual learners in a safe environment where achievement is recognized and celebrated; diversity is valued; staff collaboration is on-going and purposeful; and where a strong home, school, and community partnership exists in order to ensure that all students develop into respectful, self-confident and responsible citizens."

The vision statement was another result of the process used by the researcher and reads, "The learning community of the Ann A. Mullen Middle School envisions a school which demonstrates excellence by exceeding the state standards on all achievement tests while meeting the needs of diverse learners through the staff's collaboration and personal commitment to the success of all students."

At the conclusion of this research project, achievement test results were unavailable for reporting. It should be noted, however, that because of the steps taken to ensure that everyone's voice was heard and considered during the process of writing a shared mission and vision, morale has increased to the extent that all staff members are willingly taking part in this improvement effort. Many staff members are openly discussing ideas to improve, and have begun to share classroom strategies between one another that lead to increased student achievement.

Another key component of professional learning communities is the formation of teacher study groups, which improve both individual and organizational capacity. Lew Platt, CEO of Hewlett Packard, stated the significance of this most precisely when he said, "If HP knew what HP knew, we would be three times more profitable." When teachers improve their own learning, many things begin to happen. First, they model lifelong learning for their students as they, too, partake in the process. Individual capacity is increased, and when shared with others, translates to increased organizational capacity, with the end result in a school being increased student achievement levels. The first study group revolved around the Committee for Excellence, whereby members of this committee explored, researched, and discussed the principles of a professional learning community to ensure that this model was one that could be embedded into the culture of

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the Ann A. Mullen Middle School in such a way that results would develop in the form of increased staff morale and increased student achievement levels. A second study group formed around sixth grade teachers interested in learning how to apply brain research theories into their classrooms, and together they shared the book A Mind at a Time by Dr. Mel Levine and discussed ways in which this information could be useful to classroom teachers as they strive to meet the needs of individual learners in a diverse setting. Once this group has completed their study, they will be compiling a list of classroom strategies to address various individual student needs and will present it to the faculty in May 2003. Data on the effectiveness of this could not be collected due to time constraints of this project. However, the researcher, again, has seen an improvement in staff morale as teachers begin to participate in this process. Collaboration has helped them to feel less isolated and to talk about teaching and learning.

The direct impact of the development of a professional learning community on student achievement scores could not be determined because scores were not available at the conclusion of this study. A positive relationship between the activities of this process and improved staff morale was evident and people are hopeful that we are headed in the right direction.

Implications of Study on Leadership Skills

Leadership is the key to implementing change that leads to school improvement. Change brings about fear and anxiety in people as well as energy and excitement in people. In order to manage both sides of the emotional dilemma, leaders must be prepared to first examine their leadership style in relation to the culture of the school in

which the change will be implemented, as well as be prepared to participate in what Fullan (2001) refers to as moral leadership. Moral leaders act with a sense of moral purpose whereby they act with the aim of making a definite difference in others lives. Research has proven that workers want to believe that there is a 'higher calling' or significant purpose for their work. Moral leaders understand this concept in relation to understanding the change process.

This researcher acted as a moral leader. She considered everyone's feelings and voice as she attempted to build consensus among the staff as steps were taken to move toward the intended change. She also understood the need for teachers and other staff members to feel that their efforts were worthwhile, and that students would indeed learn from their experiences, and that those students would then extend that learning into the larger society. A sense of fairness pervaded the processes used so that all staff members were empowered by participation in the project of laying the foundation for a professional learning community.

The leader also had to understand change and the change process. Many different theories exist on the change process, and there is not one simple solution. It is evident, however, that change can be led, and leadership style plays a significant role in that change. Change involves more than implementation of a new program or idea; it involves reculturing, changing an existing belief system. The entire essence of this project was to reculture our school by developing a collaborative work culture that understands change and becomes flexible enough to analyze itself and adapt as necessary. Leaders of change have an understanding that change is a process rather than a one-time event that will have both its ups and downs as people experience new knowledge. They use resistance to their

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advantage by listening and acting upon the voice of all stakeholders. This leader had to

remain open-minded enough to learn from even the most resistant voices, understanding

that the experience of others often opens up alternatives to problems may have been

otherwise not seen. Change is an emotional process and leaders need to coach and

encourage participants at each stage of that process. The researcher demonstrated the

ability to do this as she made a conscious effort to take everyone's opinions into

consideration as the foundation for a professional learning community was designed.

This, once again, reiterates the importance of building relationships with all stakeholders

that in turn builds organizational capacity. The leader in this case, must, however, keep

the end in mind, and be strong enough to maintain the sensitivity to acknowledge fears at

every step of the way, but must remain authoritative enough to not waiver on the original

outcome predicted.

The ISSLC Standards (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, 1996)

were consulted throughout the implementation of this project so that the researcher could

analyze her leadership skill expectations as she worked toward becoming a school leader.

ISSLC Standard #1 expects a school leader to "promote the success of all learners by

facilitating the development, articulation, implementation and stewardship of a vision of

learning that is shared and supported by the school community." The successful

development of a school mission and vision resulted in the researcher's leadership skills

in this area. She had to first develop a strategic plan for the process, analyze current data,

communicate effectively, and then build consensus for the shared mission and vision.

Throughout the process, she had to maintain high standards, work to promote continuous

school improvement so that the project did not take second stage to other activities, and reflect on her own beliefs and practices.

According to ISSLC Standard #2, educational leaders promote the success of all learners "by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth." Much of this standard falls directly in line with the key concepts of a professional learning community. The researcher had to have a strong understanding for learning theories, curriculum, effective instruction, assessment, adult learning, the change process, and school cultures. Each of these knowledge areas directly impacted the way in which the researcher chose to implement the foundation process for a professional learning community, and each knowledge area is a key component of a professional learning community, the end product of the school improvement effort. A professional learning community keeps student learning as the fundamental purpose of a school. The development of our mission and vision, as led by the researcher promoted these related dispositions in ISSLC Standard #2. All of the activities related to this change process demonstrated the leaders ability to treat everyone with respect, to promote professional development in line with the school vision (as demonstrated through staff activities which related to this process) acknowledged the contributions of everyone by taking all voices into account, even adversarial ones, encouraged life-long learning through group activities and the promotion of teacher study groups, and recognized the accomplishments of both students and staff readily through the Renaissance program.

ISSLC Standard #3 states that educational leaders should ensure "management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient and effective learning

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environment." At this point, much of this standard was related to this project indirectly. In order for the researcher to implement change, she had to demonstrate a working knowledge of organizational theory. The decision to proceed with the transformation of this school into a professional learning community was a management decision that is directly related to the enhancement of teaching and learning. It was most definitely a plunge into taking a risk to improve our school. The researcher/leader had to pool all her experiences in both the fields of education and business to be able to follow through with this project so that it was not a disaster and did not end up destroying relationships instead of building relationships. She had to trust the judgment of others as well as gain the trust of all stakeholders that this project was worthwhile and would produced results in improved staff morale and student achievement in the long run. In addition, she had to accept responsibility for things that went well and for things that needed to be reorganized to advance the project.

"Collaborating with families, and community members, responding to diverse community interest and needs, and mobilizing community resources" is what is expected of educational learners as they promote the success of all learners in ISSLC Standard #4. As the leader in this school improvement effort, the researcher had to demonstrate an understanding of emerging issues and trends that would impact the school community. She had to consider the role of all stakeholders in this process as well.

Moral leadership is a recurring theme in ISSLC Standard #5, as educational leaders are called upon to act with "integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner." Relationships could not be built and this project would not have been successful if this leader acted in any other manner. She maintained both a professional and personal code of ethics and

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sense of moral purpose. She attempted, daily, to serve as a role model for others by her words and actions, and by her belief that this process would make us a stronger and more successful school community.

Finally, ISSLC Standard #6 expects educational leaders to "understand, respond to, and influence the larger political, social, economic, legal and cultural context." The leader had to consider new legislation as proposed by the "No Child Left Behind" Act to ensure that the change process we were undergoing was in line with expectations in a larger societal context. The concept of a professional learning community promotes all of the issues addressed by this piece of legislation, so the timing of this project, in laying the foundation of a professional learning community, could not have been better. It promotes accountability for the success of all learners.

The researcher also examined her leadership style during this project against that of the National Association of Elementary School Principals publication entitled Leading Learning Communities: What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do (2001). Six standards were identified as the behaviors principals of learning communities should be able to do. The first standard expects school leaders to lead in a way that "places student and adult learning at the center." Although at this point in the project, some of this was beyond the realm of control of the researcher as an administrative intern, she has done much to promote this ideal through the formation of teacher study groups, sharing leadership, and maintaining a focus on improved student learning. The second standard asks school leaders to "set high expectations and standards for the academic and social development of all students and the performance of adults." She proved the ability to clearly communicate her vision for the school, and in turn, rally the support of the staff in

developing the foundations for that vision to become a reality. She implemented many student support programs allowing students multiple opportunities to meet with success, some directly related, and some indirectly related to the development of a professional learning community. For example, a high school tutoring/mentoring program was established, an after school homework club was created, motivational speakers were hired, a peer mentoring program was established, and a teacher mentoring program was implemented. Each of these activities promotes the goals of a professional learning community, to promote and improve student learning. Standard three expects leaders to "demand content and instruction that ensure student achievement of agreed-upon academic standards." The leader did not have an opportunity to demonstrate this skill during this first year of the development of a professional learning community. By having each department begin to develop SMART goals for the following school year, she was establishing a sense of accountability towards this end. The fourth standard requires school leaders to "create a culture of continuous learning for adults tied to student learning and other school goals." The leader also laid the groundwork for the demonstration of this ability in that the first two teacher study groups were formed and school faculty meetings were transformed from a lecture style by the school principal to opportunities for active professional development and teacher collaboration. Standard five asks school leaders to "use multiple sources of data as diagnostic tools to assess, identify and apply instructional improvement". Since this project was limited to laying the foundation for a professional learning community, we did not reach this stage as of yet. The researcher, however, used a variety of tools and data to design this school improvement effort. The sixth and final expectation of school leaders by the NAESP is to

"actively engage the community to create shared responsibility for student and school success." By creating a shared mission and vision, the foundation was laid for this to occur. Everyone now has a common focus and course of direction. Decision-making was shared as we drafted the mission and vision statement, and everyone was encouraged to participate so that they could share ownership in the final product. The researcher is confident that she has addressed all leadership requirements of ISSLC and NAESP through the planning and implementation of this project.

Implications of Study on Organizational Change

The process of creating a shared mission, vision, values and goals, along with the formation of teacher study groups as the building blocks to a professional learning community have impacted organizational change at the Ann A. Mullen Middle School. Throughout the process, teachers were empowered through shared decision-making and through a process that valued their beliefs as important to that of the organization. At the outset of this project, staff morale was low. People felt overworked and under appreciated. Because the leader chose to use a process that emphasized change based on building relationships, morale improved. People have been more willing to voice their opinions in a professional manner as well as to participate in activities that would move us toward our mission and vision. The researcher believed that without the trust of the majority of staff members, this project would never have reached the level of success that it did. People are the most valuable resource an organization has, and unless they feel valued and appreciated, no positive change can occur.

Another positive change resulting from the implementation of a professional learning community, even at the foundational level, is that it renewed the school's focus on student learning and achievement. As a staff, the Ann A. Mullen Middle School adopted the new mission and vision as hope for our future. The school collectively agreed upon a common direction as well as a daily mission to help us to reach the challenge set forth by our vision. This change gave staff members a sense of direction and purpose that was previously lacking.

At this point in time, because we only laid the foundation of a professional learning community, changes were few. However, the few positive changes which were made has helped our organization to become united in purpose, improving staff morale and thus renewing the commitment to our students' success. Much of the change associated with a professional learning community will not be seen or felt until it is fully implemented for at least a year. But the baby steps we took this year in laying the foundation for a professional learning community are already leaving giant footprints.

Further Study

There is a definite need to continue to study the process of developing a professional learning community in schools as a means of raising both staff morale and student achievement levels. The researcher witnessed many small changes associated with the process of laying the foundation for a professional learning community, mostly associated with change in individuals' attitude and commitment. But since people are the most valuable resource in any improvement effort, the relationships that were built and

the changes that people made will positively impact the remainder of the evolution into a full-fledged professional learning community.

The next steps in the process of becoming a professional learning community at the Ann A. Mullen Middle School involve: changing staff assignments, increasing common planning time, having team goals and an accountability system for meeting those goals, examining student work, developing common assessments, increasing teacher study groups, increasing staff development, reducing teacher isolation, and focusing on results. In addition, a definite written procedure and support system must be carried out for all students not achieving at our level of expectation. The researcher will continue to document this process and its impact on student achievement levels. Current research in both the education world and the business world support the fact the organizations that function, as professional learning communities, without a doubt, are the most successful organizations.

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Appendix A

Questions and Results of Small Group Interviews
Regarding Current Reality

1. *What makes our school great?*
   Faculty
   Facilities
   Approachable administration
   Renaissance…we reward kids for what they do well
   Support Staff
   Teachers are allowed flexibility in approach to curriculum
       Freedom to experiment with curriculum/educational philosophies
   No pressure from administration – you can do your own thing/no one checks up on
       you
   Variety of resources & supplies available to teachers
   Most kids seem enthusiastic
   After school programs – clubs and homework help
   Money allocated to teachers for supplies
   Core set-up
   Staff cares about individual students
   Collaboration with teachers
   Some parental support
   Teachers are viewed as professionals /respected as knowing what is good for kids
   Great Home & School Council
   Large % of teachers really care about the kids
   Opportunities for community service school-wide
   Kevin- does a lot for the school
   Broad make-up of staff
   Most kids do what they are expected to do/follow the rules
   Positive student/teacher interactions

2. *What should newcomers (administrators/teachers) understand about our school?*
   Administrators should remember to ask rather than tell
       Ex. Here's the idea…what do you think?
   Respect the teachers' opinions; they know the kids the best
   Treat parents careful because there is little administrative back-up when parents are
       involved
   Expectations
   We like to work as a team
   Lack of supportive administration; however, the staff is very supportive of one
       another
   Teachers are expected to not fail kids even if they are not learning…what do our
       grades mean???
   It's okay to take needed time for family/personal issues
   No accountability
   New ideas are fluffed off; no support for teachers wanting to make changes or add
       programs
   Teachers tend to feel alone because no one knows what is going on in the classroom
       on a daily basis
   There are no clearly defined expectations for what teachers can and cannot do;
       causes problems for new teachers…then, if teacher makes a mistake,
       administration does not back that teacher up

Listen to your staff; they know what is really going on

Improve discipline by strictly enforcing it across the board

Dress code is unclear for teachers and students; enforced haphazardly

Technology is poor; not enough computers in lab or times to use labs; classroom computers are poor and outdated

Staff is always open for improvement

Staff can provide a lot of help/support if asked

We do a lot of celebrating

There is no pressure to say yes to everything you are asked to do; you will still be Respected

Staff supports each other and expects administration to do the same.

Autonomous faculty – administrators are not on patrol & we don't need it

Staff members need more praise

Curriculum supervisors and administrators in charge should be more involved, interested & excited about their departments

Need greater administrative support/backing involving parents…support – don't leave us out hanging

We are a caring & considerate staff

No matter what happens, we are there for one another

We are here for the kids first

3. What steps can we take together to make this an even better school?

Consistent grading system within core/school
  Ex. Homework %
Need greater teacher back-up with parental issues
Need a stronger administrative presence
Have teacher sharing dinner workshops
Accountability
Consult teachers before making schedule for students
  Ex. Level III math class is the largest class and is split
Follow the rules as spelled out consistently
Need to improve staff morale…bring back Mullen wear days or dress down days/ Battle of the Teachers, etc.
Need to get back the Mullen spirit & staff needs to bond
Fix the technology problems before kids are subject to frustrations
Hook up the cable TV
Remodel planning center….update computers…teachers get the bottom of the barrel to use…add cooking area
Improve copy procedure/review/track teachers who always copy and back up those that need something once in a while
Fix the running water in girls' bathroom by the cafeteria
Have monthly meeting with principal…at least with assistant principals and talk about student learning and teacher needs
Increase math class time if we want scores to improve
Change to a block schedule so teachers can focus on learning
Stop scheduling observation; administration should just go when they want and see the real action
Improve articulation with the high school
More counselors/social workers to address student needs such as anger Management
Involve parents more…have them volunteer

Need to innovate to address individual student needs
Appreciate and recognize teachers more
Boost morale
Make things equitable for all teachers
Increase support for teachers by administrators
Improve the schedule and use input from teachers
Administrators in hallways and classrooms
Improve or eliminate Renaissance
Stop using BSIP placement as a step down or punishment
Fortify the areas kids need the most support with the best teachers (BSIP)
Focus on learning rather than test scores
    Make sure kids are getting the best possible education
School-wide organization program/coordinate supplies
Improve the inequity in what we teach
Use teacher time more wisely...let teachers focus on improving teaching and
    learning rather than giving us busy work such as duties that aides can do
Rotate teachers for a better balance
Looping
  Add 6th grade AIM class
  Utilize reading specialist services better than in-class support to address real
     reading issues
  Have more parental training programs
  Smaller class sizes
  Add a building computer technician
  Better feedback from assessments on student needs
  Improve personal connections to learning for students so they enjoy learning
     rather than focusing on teaching to the test
  Improve parent conferences...5 minutes is not sufficient time
  Administration must stop shooting down teacher ideas; and if they do, make a
     personal contact to explain why the idea was turned down rather than just
     ignoring them, leaving them to wonder, and leaving them feeling "why
     bother?"
  Arm teachers with more teaching strategies; especially concerning character
     Development, tolerance, etc.
  Greater support in discipline matters
  Improve professional development opportunities/workshops
  Improve technology/labs/have enough computers that are up-dated
  Need a bigger presence of administration for kids and staff
  Core meetings with principals on a regular basis
  Counselors need to be more involved with kids/staff needs to know the issues
  Secretaries know too much confidential info about staff matters...reduce this.
  Stop administration from handling confidential phone call from parents
     without consulting the teacher until the end of the year.
  Staff needs to bond more...be tighter
  School is dull – need more assemblies/motivational speakers
  Overall greater accountability needed
  Reduce teacher isolation
  More after-school activities for staff to participate in – get to know each other
     Better
  Anything that promotes self-esteem and positive attitude
  Coffee club in the teachers lounge
  More professional development opportunities...especially for new teachers in

things like behavior management and expectations
Consistent expectations on lesson plans...ie: behavioral objectives

Core Mission Questions

1. What do we expect our students to learn?
Respect
Responsibility
Listen
Organization
Be prepared for high school
Self-respect
Self-esteem
That they can learn
Self-motivation
Hard work pays off
Academic confidence
Accountability
Tolerance
Lifelong learners
Think before you speak/act
Work ethic
Social skills
Compassion
Study skills
Citizenship
Solid academic foundation
Social skills/graces
Safety
Be kind to others
Values
Accept & Respect diversity
Work ethic as an end & as part of a cooperative group

2. How will we know that students have learned?
Manner in which they conduct themselves
Condition of building
Listen to what they are saying
Test scores
Observation of attitude based on behavior records
Less discipline issues
Increased peer mediation
Better attitude from high school teachers
Observe how students are treating one another
What field did they choose to pursue?

3. How will we respond to students who are not learning?
    PAC
    CST
    Increase parent contact
    Add smaller classes
    Homogeneous grouping for LAL and math
    Hard Work Café good idea for Renaissance
    Add counselors that can counsel
    6th grade AIM
      Corrective reading pull-out
      Breakfast program
      Support groups for students
      Remove behavior problems from the classroom (12 day cycle)
      Nurse issues addressed
      Activities to break down student barriers/facades and that get to the core of the
         Kids
      Service-learning
      Let new staff know they are EXPECTED to participate/get involved

4. How can we recognize and celebrate improvements in student learning?
    Keep Renaissance…focus more on improving kids than always top kids
    Utilize post cards more
    Administrators make positive phone calls
    Teachers make positive phone calls

Additional Question:
    What do we believe about teaching and learning?
      Students are responsible for their education and are accountable for their
        actions and decisions.
      Students need challenging and inspiring instruction.
    What do we believe about students' ability and learning?
      Students learn in a safe and supportive environment.
      High ability students should be able to excel in all situations.
    What do we believe/stand for?
      To provide public education so all can benefit regardless of SES.

Appendix B

School Culture Survey

School Culture Survey

{Behavioral Norms...Qualities of the environment teachers experience}

Please rate each item 1-5
1=Almost Never
2=Less often than not
3=About half of the time
4=More often than not
5=Almost always

NORMS

Collegiality:

1. We talk in concrete and precise terms about things   1 2 3 4 5
   we are trying in our teaching.

2. We have productive observations of one another.   1 2 3 4 5

3. We plan lessons and make materials together.   1 2 3 4 5

4. We teach each other things we know about teaching.   1 2 3 4 5

5. We teach each other things we know about learning.   1 2 3 4 5

6. We all recognize that teaching is inherently difficult   1 2 3 4 5
   and ask for and give assistance for problems with
   students and teaching issues. Knowing we can do so
   without being judged.

Experimentation:

6. Teachers and administrators encourage me and back   1 2 3 4 5
   me up when I try new things.

High Expectations:

7. Good teaching is taken seriously here. This shows up   1 2 3 4 5
   in serious attention to teacher evaluation and letting
   me know clearly how I stand in relation to the expectations
   of the district.

8. I get prompt and useful feedback.   1 2 3 4 5

Reaching out to Knowledge:

9. This is a curious school. We are always searching for   1 2 3 4 5
   new and improved ways to teach to improve students
   learning.

Appreciation & Recognition:

33. There is a close relationship between job performance   1 2 3 4 5
    and recognition of that performance.

Professional Respect:

11. I feel trusted and encouraged to make instructional   1 2 3 4 5
    decisions on my own...and my boss backs me up
    when I do.

Caring, Celebration & Humor:

12. We enjoy being with and around one another. We   1 2 3 4 5
    offer comfort and help when needed and join in
    celebration together.

13. We celebrate all success in the school equally.   1 2 3 4 5

Protecting What's Important:

33. We are protected from unreasonable demands on our   1 2 3 4 5
    time and energy that interfere with contact time with
    students and instructional planning.

15. Meetings are worthwhile and productive.   1 2 3 4 5

Traditions:

16. We have annual events and ceremonies we look   1 2 3 4 5
    forward to as a staff each year.

Tangible Support:

17. Priorities for use of money and time show me that   1 2 3 4 5
    the development of staff is a top priority.

Decision-Making:

18. I feel our decision-making processes are fair.   1 2 3 4 5

19. I feel I am consulted about decisions to be made   1 2 3 4 5
    and that I am listened to and can influence policy.

Honest, Open Communication:

20. People speak honestly but respectfully to one another. 1 2 3 4 5

21. We are not afraid to disagree and can do so without   1 2 3 4 5
    jeopardizing our relationships.

22. Conflicts between individuals are resolved quickly.   1 2 3 4 5

23. The information flow keeps me informed about what   1 2 3 4 5
    is going on in the school.

Initiative:

24. Staff members show initiative in developing new ideas 1 2 3 4 5
    For the school and seeing them come to life.

BELIEFS
{Shared beliefs about how we should operate as a school}

Collective Responsibility:

25. We work together in this school as a team and feel   1 2 3 4 5
    responsible collectively for our students and how they
    are doing.

Effectiveness:

26. I believe I as a teacher and we as a school can make   1 2 3 4 5
    a difference for kids.

Continuous Improvement & Non-Defensiveness:

27. We acknowledge our imperfections readily. No matter   1 2 3 4 5
    How good we perceive ourselves to be, we are always
    striving to get better. We constantly solicit input and
    feedback.

Reflective Environment:

28. We have an environment that encourages thoughtful   1 2 3 4 5
    stepping back to analyze out teaching and curriculum
    decisions.

CORE VALUES
{What we want for our students}

Goals:

29. Enough time is spent clarifying and understanding   1 2 3 4 5
    the goals of our school each year.

Core Values:

30. Overall, we know what we stand for as a school.   1 2 3 4 5

31. As a school, we can say what we want the big-picture 1 2 3 4 5
    to be for our students after their years with us.

32. Anyone visiting us could tell what we stand for by   1 2 3 4 5
    looking at our school and watching our actions.

33. Our programs support our core values.   1 2 3 4 5

Name (optional): _____

Additional Comments:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Appendix C

Results of School Culture Survey

School Culture Survey - Results
{Behavioral Norms...Qualities of the environment teachers experience}

Please rate each item 1-5
1=Almost Never
2=Less often than not
3=About half of the time
4=More often than not
5=Almost always

NORMS

Collegiality:

1. We talk in concrete and precise terms about things we are trying in our teaching.

1	2	3	4	5
2	7	6	7	9

2. We have productive observations of one another.   1 2 3 4 5

1	2	3	4	5
15	4	4	4	5

3. We plan lessons and make materials together.   1 2 3 4 5

1	2	3	4	5
9	6	10	1	6

4. We teach each other things we know about teaching.   1 2 3 4 5

1	2	3	4	5
4	9	6	4	9

5. We teach each other things we know about learning.   1 2 3 4 5

1	2	3	4	5
4	9	5	4	10

6. We all recognize that teaching is inherently difficult   1 2 3 4 5
   and ask for and give assistance for problems with
   students and teaching issues. Knowing we can do so
   without being judged.

1	2	3	4	5
4	4	8	5	12

Experimentation:

7. Teachers and administrators encourage me and back   1 2 3 4 5
   me up when I try new things.

1	2	3	4	5
3	3	8	6	11

High Expectations:

8. Good teaching is taken seriously here. This shows up   1 2 3 4 5
   in serious attention to teacher evaluation and letting
   me know clearly how I stand in relation to the expectations
   of the district.

1	2	3	4	5
5	5	6	9	7

9. I get prompt and useful feedback.   1 2 3 4 5

1	2	3	4	5
2	7	10	9	3

Reaching out to Knowledge:

10. This is a curious school. We are always searching for   1 2 3 4 5
    new and improved ways to teach to improve students
    learning.

1	2	3	4	5
0	5	10	10	6

Appreciation & Recognition:

11. There is a close relationship between job performance 1 2 3 4 5
and recognition of that performance.

1	2	3	4	5
8	7	10	5	2

Professional Respect:

12. I feel trusted and encouraged to make instructional   1 2 3 4 5
decisions on my own...and my boss backs me up
when I do.

1	2	3	4	5
0	3	4	9	14

Caring, Celebration & Humor:

13. We enjoy being with and around one another. We   1 2 3 4 5
offer comfort and help when needed and join in
celebration together.

1	2	3	4	5
0	3	3	13	12

14. We celebrate all success in the school equally.   1 2 3 4 5

1	2	3	4	5
5	2	13	8	3

Protecting What's Important:

15. We are protected from unreasonable demands on our 1 2 3 4 5
time and energy that interfere with contact time with
students and instructional planning.

1	2	3	4	5
4	9	4	9	4

16. Meetings are worthwhile and productive.   1 2 3 4 5

1	2	3	4	5
5	6	8	7	3

Traditions:

17. We have annual events and ceremonies we look   1 2 3 4 5
forward to as a staff each year.

1	2	3	4	5
3	4	8	8	9

Tangible Support:

18. Priorities for use of money and time show me that   1 2 3 4 5
the development of staff is a top priority.

1	2	3	4	5
6	5	13	5	2

Decision-Making:

19. I feel our decision-making processes are fair.   1 2 3 4 5

1	2	3	4	5
2	3	14	10	3

20. I feel I am consulted about decisions to be made   1 2 3 4 5
and that I am listened to and can influence policy.

1	2	3	4	5
6	7	5	11	3

Honest, Open Communication:

21. People speak honestly but respectfully to one another. 1 2 3 4 5

1	2	3	4	5
1	3	10	12	7

22. We are not afraid to disagree and can do so without   1 2 3 4 5
    jeopardizing our relationships.

1	2	3	4	5
2	5	7	13	5

23. Conflicts between individuals are resolved quickly.   1 2 3 4 5

1	2	3	4	5
3	6	9	10	4

24. The information flow keeps me informed about what   1 2 3 4 5
    is going on in the school.

1	2	3	4	5
5	4	5	12	5

Initiative:

25. Staff members show initiative in developing new ideas 1 2 3 4 5
    For the school and seeing them come to life.

1	2	3	4	5
0	4	15	8	5

BELIEFS
{Shared beliefs about how we should operate as a school}

Collective Responsibility:

26. We work together in this school as a team and feel   1 2 3 4 5
    responsible collectively for our students and how they
    are doing.

1	2	3	4	5
1	8	7	10	7

Effectiveness:

27. I believe I as a teacher and we as a school can make   1 2 3 4 5
    a difference for kids.

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
0	0	0	9	23

Continuous Improvement & Non-Defensiveness:

28. We acknowledge our imperfections readily. No matter 1 2 3 4 5
    How good we perceive ourselves to be, we are always
    striving to get better. We constantly solicit input and
    feedback.

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1	3	8	13	6

Reflective Environment:

29. We have an environment that encourages thoughtful   1 2 3 4 5
    stepping back to analyze out teaching and curriculum
    decisions.

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
4	5	7	11	5

CORE VALUES
{What we want for our students}

Goals:

30. Enough time is spent clarifying and understanding   1 2 3 4 5
    the goals of our school each year.

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
4	3	10	10	5

31. Overall, we know what we stand for as a school.　　1 2 3 4 5

1	2	3	4	5
2	4	11	12	4

32. As a school, we can say what we want the big-picture 1 2 3 4 5
to be for our students after their years with us.

1	2	3	4	5
0	3	10	12	5

33. Anyone visiting us could tell what we stand for by　　1 2 3 4 5
looking at our school and watching our actions.

1	2	3	4	5
0	2	12	12	5

34. Our programs support our core values.　　1 2 3 4 5

1	2	3	4	5
0	2	10	13	6

Name (optional): _____

Additional Comments:

Recorded below are additional comments made to the survey.

Question #7: "Administrators never ask."

Question #8: "No correlation."

Question #9: "Not prompt in observations."

Question #11: "They don't visit the classrooms – I feel it really doesn't
apply."

Question #12: "...and my boss backs me up????"

Question #13: "Definitely."

Question #14: "Definitely within cores."

Question #18: "Money should be provided for professional development
workshops."
"No money for continuing education...it would take me 10
years to make up the money in my salary I have spent
on a master's Degree."

Question #20: "I don't hang around the office enough."

Question #21: "It's about one another that's the problem."

Question #26: "I feel there's a lot of backstabbing and a pecking order
Exists; however, in a time of crisis we do come together."
"Renaissance Committee works very hard and well
together."

Question #30: "An in-service to work with just your core would be
beneficial."

Additional comments:

"Student respect for teachers, school, etc. needs to be more strictly
enforced especially by administration."

"Respect for authority is poor; self-pride and self-respect is lacking. It is a
big problem controlling/parenting, etc. We could make a difference with
a big thrust on character education."

"I found this difficult because I don't like speaking for the whole group.
'We...' I spend 99.9% of my time in 6th grade and those are the only
people I vaguely know. The answers above reflect my perceptions of the
school staff as a whole as limited as that is."

"I can control my teaching, but not the environment of the
administration."

"I love the mission statement. It is great."

Results of School Culture Survey
Adjectives that best describe the current culture of our school
{Ranked in order form most chosen adjective to least chosen adjective}

ADJECTIVE	NUMBER
Numbers	15
Children	13
Change	10
Encouragement	7
Recognition	7
Roadblocks	7
Rewards	6
Problem-solving	6
Growth	5
Responsibility	5
Teamwork	5
Involvement	5
Improvement	5
Vision	4
Service	4
Creativity	4
Goal-setting	4
Learning	4
Survival	4
Reactiveness	3
People	3
Profit	3
Praise	2
Tension	2
Respect	2
Equipment	2
Policies	2
Opportunity	1
Proactiveness	1
Productivity	1
Health	1
Happiness	1
Rules	1
Data	1
Communication	1

Suppress	1
Collaboration	1
Quality	1
Supervision	1
Prevention	1
Technology	1
Innovation	1
Leadership	1
Safety	1
Reprimands	1
Customers	1
Fear	1
Paperwork	1
Paper Trails	1

Appendix D

Professional Development Questionaire

Professional Development Questionnaire

Please respond to each question as completely as possible so that we can plan professional development activities in our building that will help us to move toward our goal of becoming a professional learning community.

1. Are you satisfied with the current level of professional development activities within our building?_____

_____

_____

2. If you had the opportunity to participate in a teacher study group during one planning period each week, would you be willing to devote this time to professional growth? Explain. _____

_____

_____

_____

3. What topics would interest you to study with your colleagues? _____

_____

_____

_____

4. What additional forms of professional development would you like to see happen within our building? _____

_____

_____

_____

5. Would you be willing to return to school for an evening speaker or workshop? _____

_____

_____

6. General comments/concerns/suggestions regarding professional development. _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Name: _____(optional)

Biographical Data

Name	Joanne T. Acerba
High School	Washington Township High School Sewell, NJ
Undergraduate	Associate of Arts American Sign Language Studies Camden County College Blackwood, NJ Bachelor of Arts Special Education Rowan University Glassboro, NJ
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