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Abstract

This follow-up study presents findings from 11 structured interviews that were conducted with principals engaged in a conversion from a large comprehensive high school to six small schools. Key findings are (a) the greatest barrier to improvement was entrenched instructional patterns and (b) goals of college readiness and social/emotional development, espoused by principals, only partially aligned with system-wide student assessments and school programs. The authors suggest that current accountability mechanisms fail to assess both college readiness and social/emotional development. For either goal to become more than a slogan, assessment of student learning must be substantially reinvented.

Keywords

educational change, high schools, leadership, small schools, urban education

This article reports findings from a follow-up study of the experiences of 11 school principals who are leading the conversion of a large, comprehensive, urban high school into six autonomous small schools. Specifically, this study answers the question, What do high school principals identify as the leadership challenges and opportunities embedded in the process of conversion of a large comprehensive, urban high school into several autonomous small schools? This study follows up a former study by interviewing principals of the same schools 2 years further into the conversion process.

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Introduction

High school continues to be the locus of major whole-school reform initiatives. Nationwide, the conversion of large comprehensive high schools into either partly autonomous smaller learning communities or fully autonomous small schools is widely embraced as a school reform strategy (Shaw, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2007). The school conversion trend has been led by several prominent funders and technical assistance organizations. Major funders have included The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education Smaller Learning Communities Program. Together, these two entities have provided more than \$2 billion to the development of small schools or small learning communities (Shaw, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Though the Gates Foundation has, since 2008, shifted its focus from small schools (Ravitch, 2008) to classroom instruction and common state and national standards (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010), support for conversion to small schools continues. For example, in 2008, Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm proposed the establishment of a \$300 million "Twenty-First Century Schools Fund," for the creation of small high schools (Shakrani, 2008). For fiscal 2010, the U.S. Department of Education (2010a) anticipated \$47.2 million of grant funding for the Smaller Learning Communities Program. In addition, the Federal Department of Education Race to the Top Fund application prioritizes interventions for low-performing schools, including "turnaround" and "transformation," processes, which according to the funding proposal could include conversion of a large school to small schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2010b). Prominent technical assistance organizations driving the small schools phenomenon include The Center for Collaborative Education (<http://www.cce.org>), The Coalition of Essential Schools (<http://www.essentialschools.org>), The School Redesign Network (<http://www.srnleads.org>), and The Small Schools Workshop (<http://www.smallschools.com>).

Much has been learned about the process of school conversion (DiMartino, Clark, & Wolk, 2002; Feldman, Lopez, & Simon, 2005; Wagner, 2001) and findings are emerging about the effectiveness of small school conversion as a school reform strategy, for example, higher achievement and lower dropout rates, positive impact of personalization (Darling-Hammond, Ross, & Milliken, 2007; Wallach & Lear, 2005), enhanced social capital for students (Ancess, 2003), narrowing of the achievement gap (Cotton, 2001), and the importance of coupling smaller school size with other strategies such as capacity building and data-informed instruction (Ramsey, 2009).

As researchers refine their understanding of the barriers to and opportunities for conversion, it is important to consider multiple sources of data. The perspective of high school principals who stand at the nexus of the conversion directing the flow of work is one very important source of insight into the school conversion process. Research of the past 20-plus years consistently shows the principal to be a central force in school efficacy (Grace, Buser, & Stuck, 1987; Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Russell, White, & Maurer, 1984; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). Because of their roles, principals are well situated to identify leadership challenges as well as strategic opportunities encountered in the conversion process. This

study seeks to tap the wealth of information about and insight into the conversion process from school principals themselves. What are the leadership opportunities and challenges they face several years into the conversion process? What steps do these principals take that move the work forward? What missteps offer new learning for themselves and for others engaged in similar work?

A former study (Nehring, Lohmeier, & Colombo, 2009), to which this study serves as a follow-up, identified four leadership dilemmas embedded in data from principals' interviews: (a) fidelity to vision versus authentic collaboration, (b) school autonomy versus institutional interdependence, (c) teaching for academic achievement as measured by standardized tests versus teaching for deep understanding, and (d) student engagement through course options versus student engagement through personalization. These dilemmas were not either/or choices, but contrasting institutional demands that require careful management. The authors hypothesized a new modality called "improvisational artistry" as a means to constructively address leadership dilemmas.

Setting

This study and the study it follows up were conducted in an urban school district in the Northeastern United States. In July 2000, the District established a strategic plan to address profound concerns about the future lives of the children it serves: 84.6% are from low-income households (based on free and reduced lunch), and 85.5% are classified Hispanic. In addition, 19.7% of students are classified as limited English proficient. (Statistics are according to School District Report for 2004-2005 school year.) The 85.5% Hispanic student population represents the largest ethnic student group in U.S. schools; statistically, Hispanic students are one of the populations least likely to complete high school (Greene & Winters, 2005) and most underrepresented in institutions of higher education (Reyes, Scribner, & Paredes Scribner, 1999). Relationships with teachers and counselors, which are fostered in small schools, have been shown to increase the rates of high school graduation and college enrollment for students at risk of dropping out (Acess, 2003).

As part of the strategic plan, construction of a new high school campus consisting of six, physically separate, thematic schools began in 2003 to replace the aging, comprehensive high school constructed in 1905. The District's plan to replace the comprehensive high school with six small schools was built on recent research indicating that small schools create opportunities for improved student learning not available in large, comprehensive high schools (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2003; Tung & Ouimette, 2007; Wasley & Lear, 2001). In the spring of 2006, with construction of the new campus well underway, the School District undertook a nationwide search for six principals and six assistant principals to lead the new high schools. The 12 hires, including 2 who were hired from within the District, began working on July 1, 2006. They spent their first year on the job working in the existing high school, leading schools that were programmatically separate but physically overlapping in one building. With student enrollment over 2,500 in a building designed for 1,700, physical conditions during the 2006-2007 transitional school year were challenging to say the

least. In order to accommodate the large number of students, double sessions (7:00 a.m. to 1:45 p.m. and 9:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) were conducted with groups of students arriving and leaving on a staggered basis during the school day. The new principals found themselves simultaneously managing an overcrowded and outdated school and designing new, separate high schools.

In the spring of the transitional year (2006-2007) researchers conducted a round of principal interviews on which an initial study (Nehring et al., 2009) was based. In September of 2007, school opened at the new campus location with students enrolled in the six new thematic high schools. Overcrowding was greatly relieved in the new location, and double sessions were eliminated. Part way through the following school year (2008-2009) the superintendent of schools who oversaw the transition to the new campus left unexpectedly. Also, the headmaster of the high school campus retired and was not replaced.

Methods and Data Sources

The experience of school principals engaged in high school conversion work is documented in this study through structured interviews with five of the six high school principals and all six assistant principals employed by an urban public school district in eastern Massachusetts. Interviews were conducted between May and July, 2009, approximately 2 years after the interviews on which the original study is based were conducted and approximately 3 years into the conversion process. Eight of the 12 principals were interviewed for a second time and 4, hired after the original study, were interviewed for the first time. The interviews followed the same protocol and questions as the former interviews, inquiring into the areas of school vision, leadership opportunities, leadership challenges, strategic initiatives undertaken, and progress toward the achievement of school vision. Interviews were conducted by a researcher not personally well acquainted with the interviewees in order to reduce bias. All interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. Appropriate institutional review board approvals were obtained from both the university and the School District stipulating anonymity. Data were coded inductively for themes emerging from the body of data using constant comparison (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The coding was conducted separately and simultaneously by the two authors. The two authors then compared their coding results and formulated an agreed-upon list of themes. The lead author then coded all interviews to the agreed-upon themes, organizing results with NVivo 8 software. The lead author developed a tabular summary of results (see appendixes) and preliminary findings. Both authors met to review and refine the results and preliminary findings together. The lead author began to develop a draft report while the co-author compared 2007 and 2009 interviews by principal for patterns. The two authors met several times to share work-in-progress and produce this report.

Results

Results from this study are presented in tabular form in Appendixes A, B, and C. To identify results, the themes associated with each interview question were ranked for

frequency of response by a principal in an interview. A table was then prepared to display the results associated with each question. Thus, for each question, themes are listed in rank order, and, for each theme, a representative response is provided (see Appendix A).

Results are presented in three parts. The first part, Appendix A, displays results from the 2009 interviews. The second Part, Appendix B, displays a summary of results from the 2007 interviews. The third part, Appendix C, displays a summary of results from the 2007 and 2009 interviews side-by-side for easy visual comparison.

Findings

Findings from this study are organized into two parts. The first part presents findings from data in the 2009 interviews alone. The second part presents findings from a comparison of the 2009 interview data with the 2007 interview data.

Findings, Part I: 2009 Interviews

1. The dominant narrative that emerges from these interviews presents a confident, hopeful outlook with a good degree of internal consistency. The vision is clear and strong, action is linked to perceived challenges, and principals remain optimistic in their view of the future while recognizing much work remains to be done.
2. Principals perceive themselves as instructional leaders and are taking steps to improve instruction. Under Questions 7 and 8 “What steps are you taking . . .,” 10 of 11 principals made an astonishing 49 total references to steps they are taking to improve curriculum and instruction. This high level of activity is consistent with the principals’ collective perception that the greatest challenge to achieving their vision is current instructional practice, the top-ranked theme for Questions 9 and 10 “Challenges faced . . .,” with 11 principals making 29 references to instructional practice.
3. Although personal/social/moral development ranks high as both an element of the initial vision for the school (rank 2, references 6/10) as well as the vision of the school five years in the future (rank 1, reference 7/15) and as a focal point for action (rank 2, 7/12 under “steps you can take”), there is no evidence of assessment of progress toward this goal. Because questions about assessment were not part of the interview protocol, it is possible that there may be systematic measures in place that went unmentioned. However, much *was* said about state tests and Advanced Placement (AP) assessment with respect to academic achievement. If there was some formal effort to assess student growth with respect to personal/social/moral development, it is reasonable to expect that it would have been mentioned, too. Therefore, there appears to be no serious school-wide or district-wide effort to assess the outcome that the principals most value.
4. Though college readiness was mentioned frequently as an element of academic achievement, there is no clear indicator of progress toward that goal.

Presumably, attendance, AP course participation, and high scores on state tests would be partial indicators, but they measure the attributes of college readiness only indirectly, or, in the case of state mandated tests, may themselves erect barriers to college readiness (Conley, 2003, 2007).

5. Uncertainty in the areas of governance, autonomy, and interdependence is deeply felt by many principals. Nine principals mentioned it a total of 27 times. Principals feel ambivalent about the roles of campus and district leaders. On one hand, campus and district leaders are seen as valuable supports and resources providing professional development, advice, direction, and stability. On the other hand, they are disparaged for intrusive mandates and shifting policies.

Findings, Part II: Comparison of 2009 and 2007 Interviews

A comparison of the top-ranked responses by question between the 2007 and 2009 interviews shows a high level of consistency and a logical progression of thought and action. In order to provide a snapshot of the overall perspectives of principals in 2007 and 2009, top themes from each set of interviews were combined to create a single composite principal response. The composite responses for the 2009 and 2007 interviews appear below. *Please note: these are fictional quotations created as composites from actual principal responses.*

Composite response based on 2009 interviews.

My vision initially was for a school where instructional practice is transformed. We are getting there, but we still have a way to go. My vision has not changed. In 5 years, I hope we are a school where students take responsibility for themselves and for each other. We are taking steps to improve curriculum and instruction. The biggest challenge we face is the reluctance of some teachers to change their current instructional practice. Our greatest resource is our staff at both the teacher level and the administrator level. Overall, I feel a sense of hope and optimism for our school.

Composite response based on 2007 interviews.

My vision is of a completely different way of schooling. We're just getting started toward that vision. My vision has not changed. In 5 years, we will be graduating students ready to be leaders in any way they wish. We are trying to get some professional development started to work on curriculum. The biggest challenge is getting the faculty on board and managing the curriculum with a small staff. We enjoy support from the university and from district colleagues—both teachers and administrators. This is going to be hard. I feel anxious.

1. The vision, as expressed by principals in these interviews, has remained remarkably consistent between 2007 and 2009. Also, the same challenges

persist, though they are more defined in 2009, and the effort to address them is focused and underway. For example the general interest in curriculum refinement and professional development expressed in the 2007 interviews has become sharply focused on transformation of instructional practice in the 2009 interviews. Importantly, anxiety has been replaced with hope as the dominant emotion experienced by the principals.

2. The chief finding of the 2007 interviews was the largely unacknowledged challenge of conflicting institutional demands and overwhelming uncertainty by the principals as to how they might successfully navigate them. The conflicting demands identified in the 2007 study were as follows: (a) fidelity to vision versus authentic collaboration, (b) school autonomy versus institutional interdependence, (c) teaching for academic achievement as measured by standardized tests versus teaching for deep understanding, and (d) student engagement through course options versus student engagement through personalization. In what follows, we revisit these themes in light of the 2009 data.

Fidelity to vision versus authentic collaboration. This dilemma appears to have played out in the arena of instructional practice. Principals have largely held fast to a vision of instructional practice that engages student critical thinking against a culture of lecture and worksheets. Where they have successfully managed the conflict, collaborative arrangements, such as a faculty design team and faculty meetings with open dialogue have given teachers room to invent their own means of realizing that vision on a day to day basis.

School autonomy vs. institutional interdependence. This appears to be an area where little progress has been made since 2007. Principals continue to express deep ambivalence over the presence and activity of an organizational superstructure.

Teaching for academic achievement as measured by standardized tests versus teaching for deep understanding. Two years into the work, principals are clearly pressing for both kinds of learning, though system-wide attention in the form of programs and assessments tends to focus on the former. With increased formal attention to and assessment of the latter, a healthy balance may be struck that could help principals achieve progress across both domains.

Student engagement through course options versus student engagement through personalization. A truce seems to have been struck between the offering of advanced placement course options for older students and grade level teams with more personalized attention for younger students. But it appears to be a truce only, a temporary stay against conflicting demands. Are the personal/social/emotional needs of older students being attended to? Are the intellectual potentialities of younger students being fully tapped?

Significance and Recommendations

As the pace of high school conversion as a school reform strategy accelerates nationwide, there is a growing need for reliable insight into and strategic recommendations

for practitioners. As well, school administrator preparation programs and professional development providers need a sound research foundation on which to build curriculum tailored to aspiring school leaders who will be engaged in school conversion work themselves. Findings from this study of the experience of principals engaged in school conversion add to the growing body of research to inform administrative practice, school leader preparation, and ongoing professional development. Data from this study analyzed in comparison with data and findings from the previous study reveal new, long term patterns among leadership challenges and opportunities. Specific recommendations follow:

1. Once committed to a conversion process, communities need to persist and stay the course. Though the early stages of the conversion studied here were fraught with uncertainty, just 3 years into the process, school leaders were already assuming a much more optimistic stance based on early signals of progress. One principal commented, “. . . I think if I introduced you to a cluster of 10 students right now across all class levels, four or five of them are totally on board and the other five or six are still needing a little pushing and prodding . . .” This principal captures accurately the mood of his colleagues who collectively identified signs of progress that gave them confidence while recognizing that they had yet to fully achieve their vision. It is reasonable to anticipate that leaders elsewhere faced initially with uncertainty and resistance will find a similarly gradual transformation of school culture.
2. Communities will do well to surface and discuss those enduring priorities that are simultaneously valued and in conflict or competition with one another. The paired studies here demonstrate that doing so increases the ability of all to thoughtfully manage the inescapable tension and clarify school vision and mission. Likewise, failure to surface and discuss them lands the school in an interminable quagmire.
3. It is reasonable to anticipate that teacher resistance will be a challenge for school leaders attempting similar conversions elsewhere. Along with the rescaling of their school, the principals in this study sought a transformation of instructional practice fostered by a smaller learning community and characterized by the following shifts: isolated practice shifts to shared practice, responsibility to provide instruction shifts to responsibility for student success, coverage of content shifts to promotion of critical thinking skills. Because large school conversions elsewhere are likely to seek similar goals for instructional practice, school leaders elsewhere can anticipate similar teacher resistance. Knowing about the likelihood of teacher resistance in advance, leaders can be better prepared to face it when it surfaces by prioritizing their role as instructional leader and identifying strategies to provide both press and support for instructional change.
4. If communities and their school leaders truly value the social/emotional/moral development of youth and college readiness as more than a slogan,

then they must invent means of assessment. Current externally imposed assessments in the form of state exit exams and AP exams fail to address either of these goals and may even be counterproductive. Though the principals in this study explicitly value these two goals, the goals are in danger of losing ground in the absence of any serious attention to their assessment. Here and elsewhere, leaders must take it on themselves to find or invent appropriate means of assessment because current accountability mechanisms from the state and commercial vendors offer little support and arguably are thwarting progress toward both goals.

Appendix A

Results of 2009 interviews in tabular form, showing responses to questions in order as ranked themes

Table A.1. Question 2: When you were hired, what was your vision for the _____ school?

Theme (and Representative Response)	Rank	No. of References ^a
Curriculum and instruction "Changing the way we do business on a day to day instructionally where the comprehensive high school teacher was literally an island and they would shut their door and they would do their work and no one would intrude, and if someone did come into the room, it wasn't a natural event. That limits, I think, collegial sharing of instructional practices and it limits our growth."	1	7/13
Personal/social/moral development "That is one of the things I want them to walk away with, that they feel that they do have a family here. They have people who will give them advice. They have people who will hopefully show them the right way in terms of education and life in general."	2	6/10
Academic achievement "... the primary vision was to get students to graduate from high school and be able to go to college and complete college."	3	5/6
Shared leadership "It is a small school that we are all participating in making the best possible school for the kids. In making it like that, I think teachers feel more ownership. They feel like they can come in here and tell me things that perhaps might not happen in a regular high school."	4	3/4

a. In this table and tables following, "No. of references" means the number of respondents/number of references. For example, 7/13 means 7 respondents mentioned this theme and there were a total of 13 references among them.

Table A.2. Question 3:What is the current status of the school relative to that initial vision for it?

Theme (and Representative Response)	Rank	No. of References
Getting there with philosophy “That is the mission, that is the vision, that is the ultimate goal is that we are a school that when you walk in the door, you are part of this community that is very giving and out there, outwardly giving. I think if I introduced you to a cluster of 10 students right now across all class levels, four or five of them are totally on board and the other five or six are still needing a little pushing and prodding. They will show up for stuff if you put enough pressure on them, but they are not just showing up on their own.”	1	6/6
Getting there with embedded school theme “We are getting there . . . We still haven’t been able to really get that theme imbedded into all the courses like the History and English . . . We really haven’t gotten that far yet so it’s not an overreaching goal at this point. I think we are still struggling with really making sure this is the [school name] high school.”	2	4/6
Kids feel like this is a family “She [a student] said she was so happy because she was experiencing that moment [a special school event] with her family and her family really was the students at [school name] High and the administrators that went with them.”	3	2/2

Table A.3. Questions 4 and 5: Has your vision for the school changed at all since you were hired? If so, how has it changed?

Theme (and Representative Response)	Rank	No. of References
Vision has not changed “No. I would not say that the vision has changed.”	1	7/8
Vision has changed slightly; details or implementation “Interestingly, the philosophical underpinnings never changed . . . what is being targeted. I would say those elements may have changed a bit.”	2	4/7

Table A.4. Question 6: So if everything goes well, in 5 years when you are asked to describe your school, what would you like to be able to say?

Theme (and Representative Response)	Rank	No. of References
Personal/social/moral development "Five years from now I would love to see a school where that mentoring that goes on from our older students to our younger students is taken for granted. You would walk in the door and you would see our ninth graders when they are having an issue and immediately know that they have an ally, a friend in an older grade, that they go to. There is that kind of family atmosphere that they know to do that."	1	7/15
Academic achievement "I would like to see every one of these kids, every one of them, go to college whether it be a 2-year college and then transition into a bigger school or a 4-year college, but I want them to be ready and be able to do college work"	2	5/14
Shared leadership "... the change of our instructional practices really generated from the teachers, that they believe in the changes, why they are making the changes, because I have always thought that when issues come from the top down and are forced upon teachers, human beings, they are going to resist."	3	2/2
Curriculum and instruction ^a		0

a. Listed for comparison purposes only.

Table A.5. Questions 7 and 8: Are there specific actions or steps you think you can take as *principall/assistant principall/campus principal* to move the school toward your current vision of it? Have you been able to start taking any of those actions or steps yet?

Theme (and Representative Response)	Rank	No. of References
Curriculum and instruction "We are doing curriculum work. We are doing the syllabus construction where we are sitting down as departments and talking about what is the secret. If we want kids writing in every course, what is it that in U.S. History I they will be writing and we are not going to be asking them to write the same thing in U.S. History II. They might be starting with a	1	10/49

(continued)

Table A.5. (continued)

Theme (and Representative Response)	Rank	No. of References
five paragraph essay. They might be doing a research paper in U.S. History II. They might be doing this in the next course. That whole sequencing in the departments curriculum-wise we are working on. Plus, we are working on how to be better teachers. What are those instruction strategies that are really working with our kids, with our population and tie it to that? What are the assessment pieces that bring the most out of our kids so that they can really show what they have learned or what they haven't learned in the courses?"		
Personal/social/moral development "The students really have an identity with our school. We are in a good place where kids relate to the arts programs that we offer and are proud of what they do. I think that has been good"	2	7/12
Shared leadership "There are about 13 people on the design team. Starting with them and creating a sense of shared leadership and showing them through our actions that we are not just talking about shared leadership, we are doing it. It is an action. It is one of our core values and so by getting that design team up and running, I have been having them initiate and be the generating force behind collaboration."	3	3/6
Academic achievement ^a		0

a. For comparison purposes only.

Table A.6. Questions 9 and 10: What challenges, if any, have you already faced in moving the school toward your vision of it? What challenges do you anticipate facing?

Theme (and Representative Response)	Rank	No. of References
Teaching practice "That challenge of, I don't want to call it resistant to change because they are not really resistant to it, but they are resistant passively I guess where they will listen and they will participate and they will talk the talk, but when it comes time to walk the walk in their real classrooms, they don't necessarily buy into it so much."	1	11/29
Governance/autonomy/interdependence "One of the challenges that we have is you are an autonomous small school with your own vision. However, there are district initiatives and campus level initiatives particularly with instruction, assessment, attendance, interventions, tardy interventions that are sent down that often overwhelm us ..."	2	9/27

(continued)

Table A.6. (continued)

Theme (and Representative Response)	Rank	No. of References
Students and families "We have a transient community. We have a community of parents who don't understand the system."	3	7/18
Overload/sustainability "Initiative overload, that we are trying to do too much too quickly without enough preparation and without enough input from the staff."	4	6/12
Financial constraints "One of the things we know is in order to be really effective instructionally, we cannot overwhelm teachers with 30 kids in a classroom but if there are layoffs, then the numbers are going to go up and our resources are going to be diminished and in a city like Lawrence, resources are incredibly important thing, after school activities, before school activities, all the resources for safety net programs, athletics."	5	6/11
Personnel changes "... we have a headmaster retiring. We have a superintendent retiring, so there is going to be some leadership changes at the highest of levels and how will that change trickle down to what we are doing here. The superintendent had a clear vision of small schools and autonomy but if the superintendent comes in and does not share that vision, what happens to us, so there is a lot of stuff that might come down."	6	5/9

Table A.7. Questions 11 and 12: Thinking in terms of the flip side of the previous questions, what things (people, resources, anything really), if any, have you discovered in this process that are helping you move your school toward your vision of it? What do you anticipate will help you move toward your vision for your school in the future?

Theme (and Representative Response)	Rank	No. of References
People "There have been also working with colleagues that are extremely knowledgeable and I am talking at the teacher level. At the administrative level, having people around you that are talented, skilled, and knowledgeable and having them available and working collegially to share that knowledge if ever I have questions about stuff like that."	1	9/22
External resources "Outside programs have definitely helped in providing after school support to students, academically. We have a family literacy program that is funded by grant so things like that have definitely helped."	2	5/20

(continued)

Table A.7. (continued)

Theme (and Representative Response)	Rank	No. of References
Instructional leadership initiatives “The district has put a lot of money into the staff in terms of professional development, in terms of getting people certified for AP, in terms of hiring Math and Science certified people, in terms of getting Computer Science people certified.”	3	5/7
Physical/structural “I think the building itself has been a gigantic resource for us and the technology within it.”	4	2/6

Table A.8. Question 13:What other thoughts or comments would you like to share with me regarding your vision for the school, or the process of getting there?

Theme (and Representative Response)	Rank	No. of References
Sense of hope and excitement for future “All in all, it has been really good. It has been a lot of work and there is a lot of work that could be done. It has been a positive experience and that is why I hope it is something that can be sustained over the course of time. I was out there last week and some kids, probably seventh or eighth graders, were driving their bikes out back. They were saying, I’m going to the [name of one high school] School and I’m going to be a [name of another high school]. These were discussions that kids never had 4 or 5 years ago around what school they are going to or being happy about going there. That is interesting. That makes a big difference.”	1	6/9
Change is a process, takes time, this is hard “It’s really working through things and hashing it out, sometimes fighting it out and crying it out, whatever it may be, and doing it over and over until it is what is best for the kids. I think that anybody who came in with the thought, new building and everything is solved is no way near that. I think it is just important to keep that in mind. It is a process. The transformation is a process. Three years we have been in it and we still have a lot of ground to cover because it is culture.”	2	5/7
High school campus and district is at a crossroads “I think [name of city] is really at a place where we are either going to move forward, continue what we are doing, or there is going to be so much change that we are going to revert back to where we were before. I think that is a very, very important thing for us. I also think that money isn’t going to come in like it used to.”	3	2/2

Summary tables showing top-ranked themes by question and top-ranked themes overall

Table A.9. Top-Ranked Theme for Each Question in Order of Questions Asked

Theme	Question	Frequency
Curriculum and Instruction "Changing the way we do business on a day to day instructionally where the comprehensive high school teacher was literally an island and they would shut their door and they would do their work and no one would intrude, and if someone did come into the room, it wasn't a natural event. That limits, I think, collegial sharing of instructional practices and it limits our growth."	Question 2: When you were hired, what was your vision for the _____ school?	7/13
Getting there with philosophy "... I think if I introduced you to a cluster of 10 students right now across all class levels, 4 or 5 of them are totally on board and the other 5 or 6 are still needing a little pushing and prodding ..."	Question 3: What is the current status of the school relative to that initial vision for it?	6/6
Vision has not changed "No. I would not say that the vision has changed."	Questions 4 and 5: Has your vision for the school changed at all since you were hired? If so, how has it changed?	7/8
Personal/social/moral development "Five years from now I would love to see a school where that mentoring that goes on from our older students to our younger students is taken for granted ..."	Question 6: So if everything goes well, in 5 years when you are asked to describe your school, what would you like to be able to say?	7/15
Curriculum and instruction "We are doing curriculum work. Plus, we are working on how to be better teachers. What are those instruction strategies that are really working with our kids, with our population and tie it to that? What are the assessment pieces that bring the most out of our kids so that they can really show what they have learned or what they haven't learned in the courses?"	Questions 7 and 8: Are there specific actions or steps you think you can take? Have you been able to start taking any of those actions or steps yet?	10/49
Teaching practice "That challenge of, I don't want to call it resistant to change because they are not really resistant to it, but they are resistant passively I guess where they will listen and they will participate and they will talk the talk, but when it comes time to walk the walk in their real classrooms, they don't necessarily buy into it so much."	Questions 9 and 10: What challenges, if any, have you already faced in moving the school toward your vision of it? What challenges do you anticipate facing?	11/29

(continued)

Table A.9. (continued)

Theme	Question	Frequency
<p>People</p> <p>“There have been also working with colleagues that are extremely knowledgeable and I am talking at the teacher level. At the administrative level, having people around you that are talented, skilled, and knowledgeable and having them available and working collegially to share that knowledge if ever I have questions about stuff like that.”</p>	<p>Questions 11 and 12: What things . . . have you discovered in this process that are helping you move your school toward your vision of it?</p>	9/22
<p>Sense of hope and excitement for future</p> <p>“All in all, it has been really good. It has been a lot of work and there is a lot of work that could be done. It has been a positive experience and that is why I hope it is something that can be sustained over the course of time. I was out there last week and some kids, probably seventh or eighth graders, were driving their bikes out back. They were saying, I’m going to the [name of one high school] School and I’m going to be a [name of another high school]. These were discussions that kids never had 4 or 5 years ago around what school they are going to or being happy about going there. That is interesting. That makes a big difference.”</p>	<p>Question 13: What other thoughts or comments would you like to share with me regarding your vision for the school, or the process of getting there?</p>	6/9

Table A.10. Top-Ranked Themes Overall by Frequency of Response

Theme	Question	Rank	Frequency
<p>Curriculum and instruction</p> <p>“We are doing curriculum work . . . Plus, we are working on how to be better teachers.”</p>	<p>Are there specific actions or steps you think you can take . . . ?</p>	1	10/49
<p>Teaching practice</p> <p>“That challenge of, I don’t want to call it resistant to change because they are not really resistant to it, but they are resistant passively I guess where they will listen and they will participate and they will talk the talk, but when it comes time to walk the walk in their real classrooms, they don’t necessarily buy into it so much.”</p>	<p>Questions 9 and 10: What challenges, if any, have you already faced . . . ?</p>	2	11/29

(continued)

Table A.10. (continued)

Theme	Question	Rank	Frequency
Governance/autonomy/interdependence "One of the challenges that we have is you are an autonomous small school with your own vision. However, there are district initiatives and campus level initiatives ..."	Questions 9 and 10: What challenges, if any, have you already faced ...?	3	9/27
People "There have been also working with colleagues that are extremely knowledgeable and I am talking at the teacher level. At the administrative level, having people around you that are talented, skilled, and knowledgeable and having them available and working collegially to share that knowledge if ever I have questions about stuff like that."	Questions 11 and 12: . . . What things . . . are helping you move your school toward your vision of it?	4	9/22
External resources "Outside programs have definitely helped in providing after school support to students, academically. We have a family literacy program that is funded by grant so things like that have definitely helped."	Questions 11 and 12: . . . what things . . . are helping you move your school toward your vision of it?	5	5/20
Students and families "We have a transient community. We have a community of parents who don't understand the system."	Questions 9 and 10: What challenges, if any, have you already faced ...?	6	7/18
Personal/social/moral development "Five years from now I would love to see a school where that mentoring that goes on from our older students to our younger students is taken for granted . . . There is that kind of family atmosphere that they know to do that."	Question 6: . . . in 5 years, what would you like to be able to say?	7	7/15
Academic achievement "I would like to see every one of these kids, every one of them, go to college whether it be a 2-year college and then transition into a bigger school or a 4-year college, but I want them to be ready and be able to do college work."	Question 6: . . . in 5 years, what would you like to be able to say?	8	5/14

Appendix B

Results From 2007 Interviews

The two tables below show results from the 2007 interviews. They display, respectively, top-ranked themes by question in order of questions asked and top ranked themes overall. These tables are presented for comparison purposes with the two 2009 summary tables above.

Table B.1. Top-Ranked Themes by Question in Order of Questions Asked: Results of 2007 Interviews

Theme	Question	Frequency
It's a special place, feels different from old school, a different climate, different thinking " . . . a very different way of schooling, um, different structure, different class, not just instruction, but how kids were placed, how they were viewed."	Question 2: When you were hired, what was your vision for the _____ school?	6/8
Some progress has been made "I guess the best way to put it is we are sort of chipping away at stuff to get there."	Question 3: What is the current status of the school relative to that initial vision for it?	6/7
My vision has not changed "So it hasn't really changed but it is just scary at times because it is like 'wow' what is going to happen when we get there." " . . . no, because I already know that a smaller unit works." "No, not at all."	Questions 4 and 5: Has your vision for the school changed at all since you were hired? If so, how has it changed?	7/12
Preparing students who will go into the world to make a difference, cultivating student agency " . . . graduating young people who want to be leaders in any way, shape or form they believe."	Question 6: So if everything goes well, in five years when you are asked to describe your school, what would you like to be able to say?	5/8
Plan curriculum " . . . just assisting them [teachers] in continuing to develop their programs."	Questions 7 and 8: Are there specific actions or steps you think you can take as <i>principal/assistant principal/campus principal</i> to move the school toward your current vision of it? Have you been able to start taking any of those actions or steps yet?	5/5 6/9
Focusing on professional development "We are trying to advocate a full professional development, but it didn't happen, and we couldn't get it in so, finding creative ways now to try to get at least pieces of faculty together to move forward."		

(continued)

Table B.1. (continued)

Theme	Question	Frequency
Faculty buy-in	Questions 9 and 10: What challenges, if any, have you already faced in moving the school toward your vision of it? What challenges do you anticipate facing?	7/8
"I think the challenge is to, um, bring the faculty on board and to help them to push past some of the resistance that you know is going to be there."		7/14
How to manage curriculum and scheduling with a small staff		
"To be able to provide that array of curriculum and instruction within our own resource with our budget, with our staff limitations, it is going to be a challenge."		
[University] partnership	Questions 11 and 12: ... what things ... have you discovered in this process that are helping you move your school toward your vision of it?	6/11
"[The University] has been beneficial in many ways."		5/11
Support from district and colleagues		
"But as far as other resources, I think the central office is available or the assistant superintendent or superintendent."		
Anxiety, sense of difficulty of transition	Question 13: What other thoughts or comments would you like to share with me regarding your vision for the school, or the process of getting there?	6/12
"I think the first year is going to be hard for everybody ... because we are going to be under a microscope."		

Table B.2. Results Overall From 2007 Interviews

Theme (and Representative Response)	Question	Rank	Frequency
How to manage curriculum and scheduling with a small staff	Question 10: What kinds of challenges do you anticipate facing, that maybe you haven't already faced but you think may be coming?	1	7/14
"To be able to provide that array of curriculum and instruction within our own resource with our budget, with our staff limitations, it is going to be a challenge."			
My vision has not changed	Questions 4 and 5: Has your vision for the school changed since you were hired? If so, how?	2	7/12
"So it hasn't really changed but it is just scary at times because it is like 'wow' what is going to happen when we get there."			

(continued)

Table B.2. (continued)

Theme (and Representative Response)	Question	Rank	Frequency
<p>“... no, because I already know that a smaller unit works.” “No, not at all.”</p>			
<p>Anxiety, sense of difficulty of transition “I think the first year is going to be hard for everybody ... because we are going to be under a microscope.”</p>	Question 13: Do you have any other thoughts or comments that you want to share about your vision or the transition process or anything else?	3	6/12
<p>[University] partnership “[The University] has been beneficial in many ways.”^a</p>	Question 11: What things, and it can be people or resources or anything really, have you discovered in this process that has really helped you or is helping you move your school toward your vision for it?	4	6/11
<p>Hope and excitement about transition. Uniqueness of this project “I’m excited about the job, I really am, I’m, I’m passionate about it.”</p>	Question 13: Do you have any other thoughts or comments that you want to share about your vision or the transition process or anything else?	5	5/12
<p>Faculty buy-in “I think the challenge is to, um, bring the faculty on board and to help them to push past some of the resistance that you know is going to be there.”</p>	Question 9: What challenges, if any, have you already faced in moving the school toward your vision?	6	7/8
<p>Support from district and colleagues “But as far as other resources, I think the central office is available or the assistant superintendent or superintendent.”</p>	Question 12: Are there other things that you anticipate that in the future will help move your school toward your vision for it?	7	5/11
<p>Focusing on professional development “We are trying to advocate a full professional development, but it didn’t happen, and we couldn’t get it in so, finding creative ways now to try to get at least pieces of faculty together to move forward.”</p>	Question 8: Have you been able to start taking any of those steps [toward your vision of the school]?	8	6/9

(continued)

Table B.2. (continued)

Theme (and Representative Response)	Question	Rank	Frequency
It's a special place, feels different from old school, a different climate, different thinking “... a very different way of schooling, um, different structure, different class, not just instruction, but how kids were placed, how they were viewed.”	Question 2: When you were hired, what was your vision for The [X] School?	9	6/8
Becoming an autonomous school “For example, with a 500 and 550 student population and 28 teachers, we might not be able to offer AP classes for all students. Unless we partner up with our main [school] ... how are we going to do it and still have the autonomy that we seek?”	Question 10: What kinds of challenges do you anticipate facing, that maybe you haven't already faced but you think may be coming?	10	5/9

a. This may be an inflated response since interviewees were aware that University personnel were conducting this research.

Appendix C

Side by Side Comparison of 2007 and 2009 Themes in Summary Tables

The two tables below show results from the 2007 and 2009 interviews side-by-side. They display, respectively, top-ranked themes by question in order of questions asked and top-ranked themes overall. These tables are presented for easy visual comparison of the 2007 and 2009 results.

Table C.1. Top-Ranked Themes by Question in Order of Questions Asked: Results of 2007 and 2009 Interviews

2007 Theme	Question	2009 Theme
It's a special place, feels different from old school, a different climate, different thinking “... a very different way of schooling, um, different	Question 2: When you were hired, what was your vision for the _____ school?	Curriculum and instruction “Changing the way we do business on a day to day instructionally where the comprehensive high school teacher was literally an island and they would shut their

(continued)

Table C.1. (continued)

2007 Theme	Question	2009 Theme
structure, different class, not just instruction, but how kids were placed, how they were viewed.”	Question 3: What is the current status of the school relative to that initial vision for it?	door and they would do their work and no one would intrude, and if someone did come into the room, it wasn't a natural event. That limits, I think, collegial sharing of instructional practices and it limits our growth.”
Some progress has been made “I guess the best way to put it is we are sort of chipping away at stuff to get there.”	Questions 4 and 5: Has your vision for the school changed at all since you were hired? If so, how has it changed?	Getting there with philosophy “... I think if I introduced you to a cluster of 10 students right now across all class levels, 4 or 5 of them are totally on board and the other 5 or 6 are still needing a little pushing and prodding ...” Vision has not changed “No. I would not say that the vision has changed.”
My vision has not changed. “So it hasn't really changed but it is just scary at times because it is like 'wow' what is going to happen when we get there.” “... no, because I already know that a smaller unit works.” “No, not at all.”	Question 6: So if everything goes well, in 5 years when you are asked to describe your school, what would you like to be able to say?	Personal/social/moral development “Five years from now I would love to see a school where that mentoring that goes on from our older students to our younger students is taken for granted ...”
Preparing students who will go into the world to make a difference, cultivating student agency “... graduating young people who want to be leaders in any way, shape or form they believe.” Plan curriculum “... just assisting them [teachers] in continuing to develop their programs.” Focusing on professional development	Questions 7 and 8: Are there specific actions or steps you think you can take as <i>principal/assistant principal/campus principal</i>	Curriculum and instruction “We are doing curriculum work ... Plus, we are working on how to be better teachers. What are those instruction strategies that are really working with our kids, with our population and tie it to that?”

(continued)

Table C.1. (continued)

2007 Theme	Question	2009 Theme
<p>“We are trying to advocate a full professional development, but it didn’t happen, and we couldn’t get it in so, finding creative ways now to try to get at least pieces of faculty together to move forward.”</p>	<p>to move the school toward your current vision of it? Have you been able to start taking any of those actions or steps yet?</p>	<p>What are the assessment pieces that bring the most out of our kids so that they can really show what they have learned or what they haven’t learned in the courses?”</p>
<p>Faculty buy-in “I think the challenge is to, um, bring the faculty on board and to help them to push past some of the resistance that you know is going to be there.”</p>	<p>Questions 9 and 10: What challenges, if any, have you already faced in moving the school toward your vision of it? What challenges do you anticipate facing?</p>	<p>Teaching practice “That challenge of, I don’t want to call it resistant to change because they are not really resistant to it, but they are resistant passively I guess where they will listen and they will participate and they will talk the talk, but when it comes time to walk the walk in their real classrooms, they don’t necessarily buy into it so much.”</p>
<p>How to manage curriculum and scheduling with a small staff “To be able to provide that array of curriculum and instruction within our own resource with our budget, with our staff limitations, it is going to be a challenge.”</p>	<p>Questions 11 and 12: . . . what things . . . have you discovered in this process that are helping you move your school toward your vision of it?</p>	<p>People “There have been also working with colleagues that are extremely knowledgeable and I am talking at the teacher level. At the administrative level, having people around you that are talented, skilled, and knowledgeable and having them available and working collegially to share that knowledge if ever I have questions about stuff like that.”</p>
<p>[University] partnership “[The University] has been beneficial in many ways.” Support from district and colleagues “But as far as other resources, I think the central office is available or the assistant superintendent or superintendent.”</p>	<p>Question 13: What other thoughts or</p>	<p>Sense of hope and excitement for future</p>

(continued)

Table C.1. (continued)

2007 Theme	Question	2009 Theme
<p>“I think the first year is going to be hard for everybody . . . because we are going to be under a microscope.”</p>	<p>comments would you like to share with me regarding your vision for the school, or the process of getting there?</p>	<p>“All in all, it has been really good. It has been a lot of work and there is a lot of work that could be done. It has been a positive experience and that is why I hope it is something that can be sustained over the course of time. I was out there last week and some kids, probably seventh or eighth graders, were driving their bikes out back. They were saying, I’m going to the [name of one high school] School and I’m going to be a [name of another high school]. These were discussions that kids never had 4 or 5 years ago around what school they are going to or being happy about going there. That is interesting. That makes a big difference.”</p>

Table C.2. Results Overall From 2007 and 2009 Interviews as Side-by-Side Comparison

2007 Theme (and Representative Response)	Question	Rank	2009 Theme (and Representative Response)
<p>How to manage curriculum and scheduling with a small staff</p> <p>“To be able to provide that array of curriculum and instruction within our own resource with our budget, with our staff limitations, it is going to be a challenge.”</p>	<p>Question 10: What kinds of challenges do you anticipate facing, that maybe you haven’t already faced but you think may be coming?</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>Curriculum and instruction</p> <p>“We are doing curriculum work . . . Plus, we are working on how to be better teachers.”</p>
<p>My vision has not changed</p> <p>“So it hasn’t really changed but it is just scary at times because it is like ‘wow’ what is going to happen when we get there.”</p> <p>“ . . . no, because I already know that a smaller unit works.”</p>	<p>Questions 4 and 5: Has your vision for the school changed since you were hired? If so, how?</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>Teaching practice</p> <p>“That challenge of, I don’t want to call it resistant to change because they are not really resistant to it, but they are resistant passively I guess where they will listen and they will participate and they will talk the talk, but when it</p>

(continued)

Table C.2. (continued)

2007 Theme (and Representative Response)	Question	Rank	2009 Theme (and Representative Response)
"No, not at all."			comes time to walk the walk in their real classrooms, they don't necessarily buy into it so much."
Anxiety, sense of difficulty of transition "I think the first year is going to be hard for everybody ... because we are going to be under a microscope."	Question 13: Do you have any other thoughts or comments that you want to share about your vision or the transition process or anything else?	3	Governance/autonomy/interdependence "One of the challenges that we have is you are an autonomous small school with your own vision. However, there are district initiatives and campus level initiatives ..."
[University] partnership "[The University] has been beneficial in many ways." ^a	Question 11: What things, and it can be people or resources or anything really, have you discovered in this process that has really helped you or is helping you move your school toward your vision for it?	4	People "There have been also working with colleagues that are extremely knowledgeable and I am talking at the teacher level. At the administrative level, having people around you that are talented, skilled, and knowledgeable and having them available and working collegially to share that knowledge if ever I have questions about stuff like that?"
Hope and excitement about transition. Uniqueness of this project "I'm excited about the job, I really am, I'm, I'm passionate about it."	Question 13: Do you have any other thoughts or comments that you want to share about your vision or the transition process or anything else?	5	External resources "Outside programs have definitely helped in providing after school support to students, academically. We have a family literacy program that is funded by grant so things like that have definitely helped."
Faculty buy-in "I think the challenge is to, um, bring the faculty on board and to help them to push past some of the resistance that you know is going to be there."	Question 9: What challenges, if any, have you already faced in moving the school toward your vision?	6	Students and families "We have a transient community. We have a community of parents who don't understand the system."

(continued)

Table C.2. (continued)

2007 Theme (and Representative Response)	Question	Rank	2009 Theme (and Representative Response)
<p>Support from district and colleagues “But as far as other resources, I think the central office is available or the assistant superintendent or superintendent.”</p>	<p>Question 12: Are there other things that you anticipate that in the future will help move your school toward your vision for it?</p>	7	<p>Personal/social/moral development “Five years from now I would love to see a school where that mentoring that goes on from our older students to our younger students is taken for granted ... There is that kind of family atmosphere that they know to do that.”</p>
<p>Focusing on professional development “We are trying to advocate a full professional development, but it didn’t happen, and we couldn’t get it in so, finding creative ways now to try to get at least pieces of faculty together to move forward.”</p>	<p>Question 8: Have you been able to start taking any of those steps [toward your vision of the school]?</p>	8	<p>Academic achievement “I would like to see every one of these kids, every one of them, go to college whether it be a 2-year college and then transition into a bigger school or a 4-year college, but I want them to be ready and be able to do college work.”</p>
<p>It’s a special place, feels different from old school, a different climate, different thinking “... a very different way of schooling, um, different structure, different class, not just instruction, but how kids were placed, how they were viewed.”</p>	<p>Question 2: When you were hired, what was your vision for The [X] School?</p>	9	
<p>Becoming an autonomous school “For example, with a 500 and 550 student population and 28 teachers, we might not be able to offer AP classes for all students. Unless we partner up with our main [school] ... how are we going to do it and still have the autonomy that we seek?”</p>	<p>Question 10: What kinds of challenges do you anticipate facing, that maybe you haven’t already faced but you think may be coming?</p>	10	

a. This may be an inflated response since interviewees were aware that University personnel were conducting this research.

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